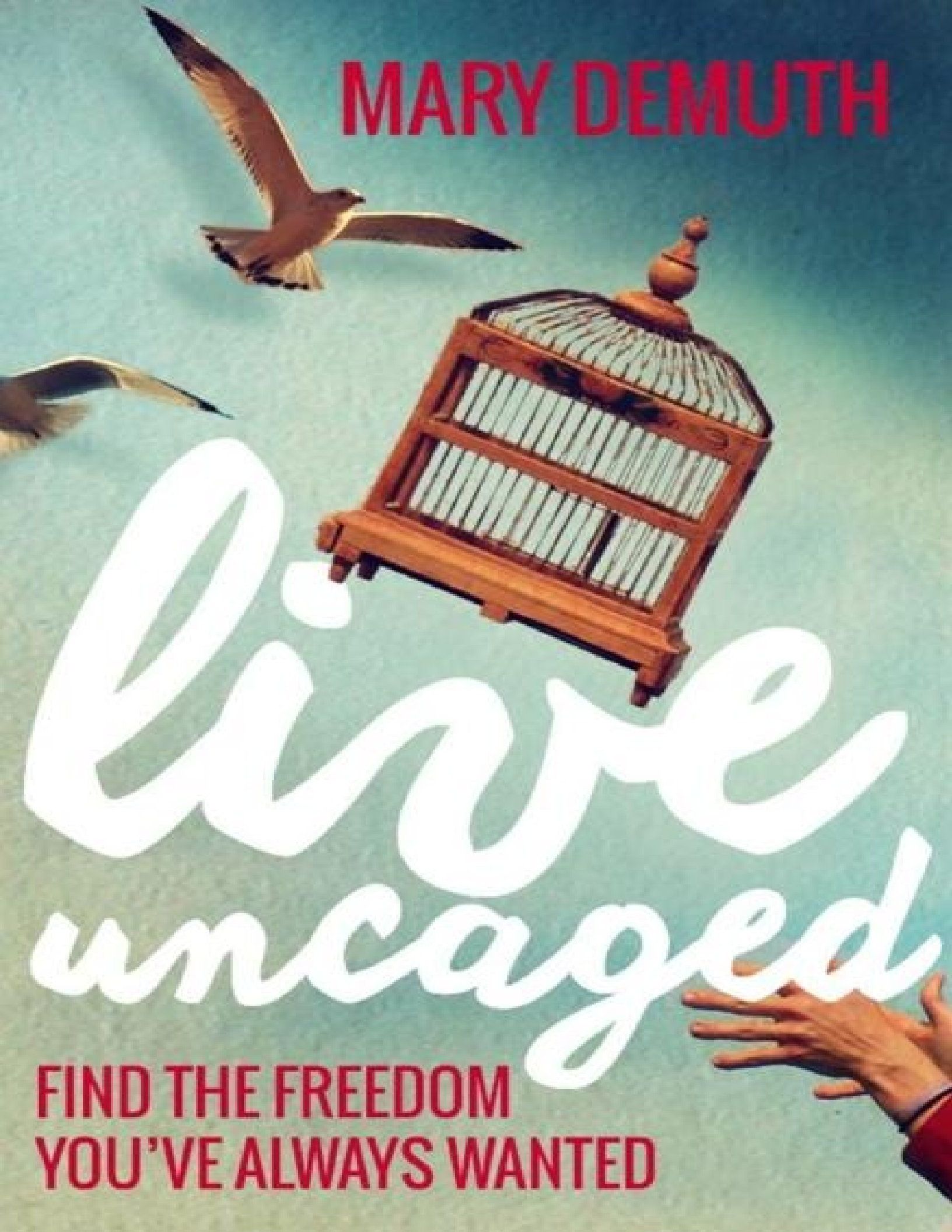
MARY DEMUTH



Live uncaged

FIND THE FREEDOM
YOU'VE ALWAYS WANTED

Live Uncaged

By Mary DeMuth

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Mary E. DeMuth, Inc.
P.O. Box 945
Rockwall, TX 75087

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For more information about Mary and living uncaged, visit MaryDeMuth.com or email me at mary@marydemuth.com.

Introduction

I write this book for you. Why? Because I want you to be free from the shackles of the past. I want to see you living beyond it. I want you to fully heal from what happened in your childhood, your teen years, your early adulthood, or even last week so that others would never guess you endured such a mess. I want to free those who have been seemingly irreparably burned by serving Jesus (often by other Christian leaders).

I write this book from a position of weakness, as one who has walked several painful paths, who has learned that if I had to fix myself, I'd end up crazy. I'm just a broken girl who's learned I can't walk the crooked path of this life.

Simply put, I've learned throughout my life that Jesus is available to us all, right now, to hear our painful stories, to bear them, and then heal us. He is the author and finisher of our stories, the Once Upon a Time and the The End. Resting in that, really believing that, will change your life. It's changed mine.

This isn't a typical "booky" format. I don't present the problem, then build a case for the solution. What I've done is culled my blog posts for anything that related to wholeness and abundance and living uncaged, and then organized them into three parts. You'll notice a lot of my nakedness on the page. To be honest, it's a little scary for me to be so raw on the page for you. But I trust you'll be tender with my heart. I'll also tell a lot of stories because I believe stories help us understand God's truth.

I don't apologize for my reliance on Jesus here. My experience in being healed from sexual abuse, neglect, several parental divorces, and so much more came at the beck and call of Jesus. (If you'd like to read the nitty gritty, pick up my book *Thin Places*.) When I met him at fifteen, He began the beautiful and painful process of making me whole. So I speak from experience. If you don't know Jesus, please accept my words as my personal story of restoration and make of it what you will.

This past year, Jesus has moved me to a new phase of life. Where I used to look chronically backwards, rehashing the past and worrying my way through it, I am now, finally, looking forward. I'm relishing the Great Right Now more than I ever have. I'm here to say that it is possible to move beyond your cage, to step outside into freedom, and eventually fly. My heart for you within the pages of

this ebook is that you will fly. I'm reminded of this verse:

"We have escaped like a bird out of the fowler's snare; the snare has been broken, and we have escaped. Our help is in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth" (Psalm 124:7-8, NIV).

The day(s) you read this book, my prayer for you is this: that you will escape the snares of your past and pain, and that you'll understand that the God of the Universe will free you. In fact, He already has!

Mind if I pray for you?

Dear Jesus, I pray for my friends reading this book. I pray You would open their minds to believe how great and capable You are. I stand against those awful lies spoken over them that whisper their unworthiness, un-loveliness. I stand against a core belief that hollers, "You will never be set free." None of that is true. Because of what You have done on the cross, You've already uncaged my friend. I pray You would make them brave and courageous, to move beyond that which was comfortable, to fly. Make them like children skipping rope or swinging high into the treetops. Restore what's been taken. Redeem what's been lost. Replace what's been broken. Only You can do this. We trust and wait for You. Amen.

As I mentioned earlier, I'm organizing this book into three parts. Those sections are based on my favorite Oswald Chambers quote. It's haunted and encouraged me for several years now and so fully fits my "live uncaged" tagline. It's this:

Let the past sleep,
but let it sleep on the bosom of Christ,
and go out into the irresistible future with Him.

So the first section is about the past. We must not ignore it, deny it, or stuff it. What happened must be faced honestly and with courage. But in light of all that, we inevitably come to a place where we put the past to sleep like a father putting his toddler to bed.

The second section is about what Christ can do for you, how He takes the pain of your past and transforms it into something beautiful. If we stay in the past and never let it rest on Jesus' chest, we'll miss the most significant part of our healing.

And last, we'll look at the irresistible future, of what it looks like to live uncaged right now.

I'm so thankful you're on this journey with me. I pray this book blesses the

socks off you! (Maybe you could email me a picture of your bare feet as proof!). Please do let me know what God has done as you've read this book. I love to hear from my readers.

July 2011

Mary DeMuth

1.

Let the past sleep

So much happened back then. And yet the truth remains that the God of the universe was there, just as He is here today. He is able to sift through the overturned dreams, the unseen tears, the unresolved pain. In order to put our past to sleep, we first must face it.

Healing is like a dark tunnel carved into the side of a mountain. It takes some gumption to walk into the tunnel from the ordinary road. And once we're in there, many of us panic, afraid to move deeper in. Here's what happens in that tunnel of our past. Jesus holds our hand, and He shows the movie of our life in there. He weeps with us. He dries our tears. He bears our pain. Eventually, though we've grown accustomed to the dark, He beckons us to move to the other end of the tunnel where we see the light again. Not only that, but the world looks completely different in that new vista.

Most people are afraid of the dark. I once heard novelist Ted Dekker say this: "The beauty of redemption shines brighter on a dark canvas." Isn't that amazing? Our redemption is all the more brighter the darker we've had it. Darker stories make shiny redemptions.

You may be thinking that your story is too awful, too painful to look at. You may be right. Facing it alone would be. But you hold the hand of Jesus. He, of all people, understands darkness. Stripped naked on the cross, humiliated, made a spectacle, He knows what pain is. Surely you can trust Him with your pain. And once you do, the light shines so bright you can hardly see straight.

*

Jesus said, "I tell you the truth," 78 times in Scripture, but we are desperately afraid to utter the same words. Gordon Lish said, "The secret of good writing is telling the truth."

Anne Lamott agrees. "Risk being unliked," she wrote. "Tell the truth as you understand it. If you're a writer, you have a moral obligation to do this. And it is a revolutionary act—truth is always subversive."

We are admonished to speak the truth in a loving manner. We are told that Jesus is the divine mixture of grace and truth. The Bible says that the truth will *make* us free. And yet we shrink from saying it, me included. Why?

Because we are afraid. Afraid of what others might think. Afraid our reputations might get marred. Once the Lord asked me this stinging question: *Are you living for your reputation or for Me?* Ouch. We are afraid of other people.

Because we don't admit the truth to ourselves. If we can't admit the truth about ourselves (I am a sinner in desperate need of grace), how do we expect to be able to articulate truth?

Because we want and love control. If we keep everything hidden, we can present ourselves in the way we want to be perceived. In this way, we control what others see. I would be willing to wager that most Christians live in this realm of control, busily building outer facades while our inner heart is well hidden.

Because we love the applause of man over the applause of heaven. Paul says, "For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? *If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ*" (Galatians 1:10). Wow. We are called to be bond-servants of Jesus Christ, but if we live our lives to please only others, then we miss the mark.

Because we believe hiding works. King David "hid" his sin for a long time. But God sees. Our sin will eventually find us out. Our facades will fall away--if not in this life, then in the other. We cannot maintain fakery for very long.

Because we have a wrong idea of Jesus as Truth and Grace holding hands. Jesus is Love personified--the utter embodiment of beautiful affection, and yet He also told the stinging truth. At times gentle, at other times pointed (brood of vipers and whitewashed tombs are things he called the religious leaders), Jesus told the truth, no lace adorning it. Jesus is love, but He was not always nice. It seems we have "niced" the world to death, afraid of saying truthful things. The truth, Jesus said, will set us free. Perhaps that's why Satan is so into cajoling us into hiding. He knows that if truth is shared, even hard truth, that people will be set free.

As Anne Lamott writes, telling the truth is a subversive act. Will we be willing to be subversive? Do we dare write the truth to those who are longing for an authentic, revived church?

I hope and pray there are many who will take up this cross and endeavor to write with grace and truth holding hands.

*

This came from a reader:

"A thought for your blog sometime... I would be really interested in hearing you talk more about this idea that those who are abused are "marked." I read about this and believe that it's true, but I'd like to hear more of your thoughts on it."

Here's my response:

Lord, as I write this I pray Your words would settle into me and leap onto the page. Heal folks. Expose evil. Help me share Your heart here. Amen.

For those of us who have survived sexual abuse, life twists and turns in alleys of confusion. Thank God He picks us up thousands of times, dusts us off, heals us, and enables us to continue walking.

That's been my story. I was sexually abused by neighborhood boys throughout my kindergarten year. That was nearly forty years ago, but the mark they left on me, though faded, is still there.

Some would argue that once someone comes to Jesus, the mark is beautifully erased. Perhaps for some that is true. But I liken that hellish year to healing and scars. Yes, I've been healed. But the scars remain. I am marked.

I knew this growing up. Other predators had some sort of mark locating devise. They'd find me in horse stalls, in tree houses, on the playground, in homes. They'd try to take away what I already lost. Thank God I had legs that could run. With every advance, I'd take off running.

It baffled me, though, when the mark attracted men when I faced my dating years. And believe me, if anyone tried anything, I broke up or ran. I joked the other day with my kids that when my "boyfriends" tried to kiss me in my early dating years, I did two things: freaked out, then broke up.

Once I was married to the man of my dreams, the antithesis to the predators, I settled into a kind of comfortable safety. No one would see my mark now!

And for many years, that was true. As a stay at home mommy, I didn't see many men, didn't interact much, other than at church.

Enter the Christian writing world. And a little of my own naivety. The mark re-emerged. As if dormant from a long, happy sleep, it awoke with a vengeance. And predators once again saw it, noticed it, and sought to exploit it.

I write this today not to freak you all out, those of you who are entering into the business (or any arena of business or ministry), but to issue a firm caution.

Don’t assume that since we’re in some sort of ministry that everyone in within that sphere is trustworthy. Or the best thing for you. And particularly if you’re a woman wearing this mark, be ultra-cautious of men, particularly those in authority. Don’t seek recognition in your field so much that you turn off your creep-factor measuring device. Keep it on. If you’re married, be sure you meet those industry professionals (if at all possible) with your husband in tow. And don’t let the secret part of your heart thrill at an industry professional’s praise, particularly if it comes off with a hint of sexual innuendo.

In retrospect, I realize six things:

- The mark, faded as it is, can inflame when I’m not building into my own marriage and family or I’m not seeking God. And when I let my neediness for attention trump everything else. Truth? I like attention. I like feeling like I’m pretty. But if I seek after that, rather than seek God’s heart, I become vulnerable to predators again.
- **I wish someone would’ve told me all this way back when**. So I’m telling you. If you have a mark or are prone to be preyed upon, take note. Watch your male/female relationships more closely. Don’t let your ambition taint your predator radar. And yet don’t merely be cautious about opposite sex relationships. I also found myself vulnerable to other women who were predatory (not sexually, but in other soul-demeaning ways. Predators come in every shape and size and sex.)
- Prayer cannot be discounted. Your ability to notice predatory tendencies in someone has everything to do with discernment. And seeking to be very close to God in prayer will keep your discernment on high alert. It’s when you allow the fluff of fame to infiltrate your head that you let down boundaries.
- It is entirely possible to have great relationships with people in our circle. I cherish my friendships, both male and female. Of course, not everyone is a predator. And many folks are dear, dear Jesus-loving friends. Don’t let your mark or fear prevent you from these relationships.
- Nurture yourself. Realize your weak spots. Build into your soul.
- Seek accountability. I have a small group of dear friends who know my journey through predators. And they pray for me, and ask me good questions, and pray some more.

Someday, when the New Earth dawns, I'll be free of this mark forever. And Jesus will use every trauma to beautify me—not with the earthly type of beauty I sometimes long to praised for here on earth, but an ethereal, eternal beauty. I pray the Lord would truly, deeply use my own marked-ness to change the landscape of the Kingdom of God. In this way, I can revel in the mark, be openly cautious about the vulnerability the mark creates, and thank God for His protection and provision along the journey.

*

Have you ever been in a fog?

I've been there, slogging my way through, not sure what I'm thinking, not sure what life's all about. I compare it a bit to stupor. There's this vague sense that something's not quite right, or a memory has more meaning but we can't mine it.

I had one of those benign memories—one I'd repeated to others in detail, thinking it a happy memory. But one day the fog lifted. The sun shone. And I realized that the memory was anything but benign. It was something I'd placed parameters on in my mind, making it palatable to me. When I stopped a moment and thought about it in light of the new realization, I grieved. With the parameters removed, the memory's starkness glared at me.

I can't remember ever crying that hard. A weight shifted onto my chest, burying me in grief. I gulped in sobs. And I prayed. And others prayed.

Then I saw Him. The Light shining after the fog. Jesus entered into the memory, scooped me up, held me to Himself. I forgot the fog in the moment, forgot the weight on my chest, forgot the grief. In a very real way, He re-made the memory, reminding me of His sovereignty over all--even difficult, foggy memories.

I pray the same for you today. That in the midst of a painful memory, you'll be able to see Jesus there, grieving alongside, holding you. May His light burn away the pain. Even today.

*

I startle easily. Everyone in my family knows this. On some level, I knew this was because of the sexual abuse I experienced as a child, but today I'm

connecting the dots further. One of the most sacred parts of me, my sexuality, was stolen. And when it was stolen, it startled me. Took me off guard.

As a child I'd have these terrible chasing dreams where perpetrators would run after me. I'd always end up running on a pier, with nowhere to run but the air and water beyond the pier's end. And when I leaped into the air, a gunshot rang out. I woke with a startle, wondering if I were dying.

And maybe I was. Maybe my soul was dying from the abuse. The dream symbolized how I felt, how helpless I'd become--without rescue. I had nowhere to turn in the dream, and even when I jumped to save myself, someone shot me, and I started the process of death.

Why all this today? I don't know. While I've been deeply healed, I think I'll always startle easily. It's a painful leftover from a traumatic past. How can that be hopeful? Well, maybe you're hollering at yourself for not getting over your own abuse. Maybe you're angry that you still have things you wished you didn't do (that directly relate to the abuse). Maybe you think NO healing has taken place because you still have residual reactions.

Don't believe that lie. You are healing. And someday you'll be fully healed in heaven. The scars and startles are little leftovers to gently remind you that you're human, and that you all-the-more need Jesus.

*

When I started my writing journey toward publication, I thought I'd always be a novelist. My agent at the time suggested I write parenting books, something I balked at for quite some time. I was a storyteller after all. And because of my upbringing, I suffered from deep wells of insecurity in my parenting. And yet, I sold three parenting books. I wrote them from a position of weakness, and I prayed other parents with struggles similar to mine would be encouraged that they're not alone. One facet strung its way through all my books: story.

I can't help but tell stories, whether they be fiction or nonfiction. As I brainstormed with my next agent and my editor about who I wanted to be when I grew up, we all came back to story. I am a storyteller. We decided it would be best for me to place my primary focus on novel writing, but keep the storytelling alive in nonfiction.

Several years ago, I sensed the need, urge, and desire to write a memoir. I'd come a long way in my healing journey, enough that I could write it without bitterness, with a view toward God's intervention. Thankfully, my vision for a

memoir fit well within the story idea, and Zondervan took a risk and bought the book.

I wrote the book much like I'd write a novel, with an inciting incident, some flashbacks, a rising action and a late climax. Of course, as memoirs go, I had more freedom to explore and meander through the story, but I kept the book mostly in scenes, written in first person present tense to create intimacy and immediacy with the reader.

It was difficult to create me as the main character, to place the potential reader into my own head, to play it out in a way that would woo the reader to turn the page. In doing that, I learned even more about myself, how I viewed the world (sometimes in a warped way!), and what possible impact my journey might have on fellow strugglers.

Though I knew well the landscape, setting, and characters of my life, it proved difficult to give myself permission to truly delve in deeper, to re-feel my pain, angst, joy, frustration, anticipation, and worry. Once I let myself go there, the memoir progressed. And my editor helped me shape the book more chronologically, something for which I'm deeply thankful.

The end result is story: mine. It's the story of a little girl who faced sexual abuse, neglect, drug-using parents, fear, death of a parent, and a host of other malevolence. And yet it's a hope-filled story, where the bright light of God's climactic redemption outshines the dark places. It's a story of God's nearness when I thought I'd nearly lose my mind and will to live. How grateful I am for the beautiful love of Jesus, how dearly He chose frail me to shame the wise. It's really His story after all.

When I meet potential writers, many of them tell me they'd like to write their memoir. My advice is always to write it. But then I caution my zealous memoir-writing friend. Most memoirs are never published. The cool truth is that sometimes God calls us to write down our stories for the sake of healing us. Not to share with others, but to shape us.

I offer a challenge to you right now. Would you dare write your memoir with the sole purpose of letting Jesus heal you? I can honestly attest that my process of writing Thin Places brought an amazing amount of healing in my life. I want that for you, too.

*

At the She Speaks conference a little bit ago, the weekend culminated with a

time where you could write something on a card and place it before the cross. Something you wanted to let go of. Give up. Turn away from.

It took me a little time, pen in hand, to write the words. They flamed inside me, burning to get out. But putting them on the page like that, so stark and real, gave me pause. Would I dare let go of this?

I hesitated a bit, then scrawled the words across the page.

What did I write?

"My need for male attention."

Ouch.

But true.

It's been my companion these many years, this yearning to be seen as beautiful, desirable, pretty, attractive. As I walked my confession toward the large wooden cross looming before me, I prayed.

Dear Jesus, I want to be free of this. I'm tired of needing this. Please take it. Please help me be happy without it. I surrender. Oh how I surrender. I want Your filling of me to be enough.

At the cross, I lay down the card, then picked up a scripture. I didn't read it until I got back to my seat. There, staring back at me, was the perfect answer to my embarrassing problem:

"If you [really] love Me, you will keep [obey] My commands. And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Comforter [Counselor, Helper, Intercessor, Advocate, Strengthener and Standby], that He may remain with you forever." John 14: 15-16 AMP

There in my seat, a realization hit me. I'd been trying to fill a father hole with what I'd thought a father was supposed to give. I'd been groomed to believe that a father's love involved a predatory glance, the way I looked. But that is not pure love. That's a shaky, painful, empty substitute. I wrote this as I thought further about it: "I crave/craved the kind of attention I was groomed for. I believed that kind of love was what a true father's love was. I chased after what is bent on destroying me because that's what I thought (subconsciously) a father's love was. I had too low a view of genuine fatherly love. A distorted view. So I spent my life longing for something God didn't intend."

The scripture affirms that pure form of love I really need: the constant comfort of the Holy Spirit.

I sat there thankful for the revelation. One I'd never thought of until that moment. I marveled at how beautifully the Lord unfolded it for me. And suddenly my "need" for male attention looked trivial. As in the C.S. Lewis quote about sufficing myself with mud pies when a holiday at sea beckoned. I want to be that Mary who chose the good part, the God who won't be taken from her.

I'm tired of filling myself with little gods, little subverted needs. And I'm ready for freedom, blessed freedom.

What about you? What would you write on your card? What do you need to give up today?

*

I'm thankful to have a blog post up on The Washington Post about the Belgium Catholic Church scandal. You can read When Sex Abuse Isn't Taken Seriously here.

I can't describe how angry I get when I hear about victims being ignored or shunned or silenced. Something akin to a holy roar rises up inside me. I remember a time in my life when a well meaning friend excused a man who may have been perpetrating (we couldn't prove it). "You need to offer more grace," he said.

I did not agree. Since when is it okay to give grace to an adult who has a choice to offend or not, particularly when that adult hurts a child? Shouldn't grace be extended more freely to the young victim who had no choice in the matter? I'm not talking about an adult who comes out and realizes what he/she's done is wrong and seeks to ask forgiveness and pay restitution (and/or serve time). I'm talking about having a culture of community where we fear the adult, give preference to the offender, because to get involved and help a child is just too hard, too sticky, too risky, too much work, too much stress.

Giving grace to the unrepentant offender is simply called cheap grace.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, "Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ."

Real grace is that which forces sin out into the forefront, calls it the hellish thing it is, and applies redemption in healthy doses to it. It's calling sexual abuse what it is: heinous, violating, dehumanizing. It's bringing it to the light, no longer shoving it in the back room of hushed conversations. Grace happens in that sort of vulnerable, real light.

Some will say that folks who offend can't help it. But I know from personal experience that's not a viable excuse. I was violated as a child, yet I don't violate. There are millions of victims out there who grow up, heal, and do not perpetrate. And as long as we turn our eyes away from those who inflict harm on

vulnerable children, we, in a sense, validate the abuse as okay.

It's not okay.

It's sin.

And it must stop.

*

I received a comment on my Family Secrets blog that got me thinking about just how hard it is to forgive those who deeply wound us. Here's the comment from Anonymous

"I too am dealing with the same issues...at 30 years old I am still finding it very difficult to forgive my stepfather (whom is still married to my mother) for the sexual abuse that started at age 5 to 12.

The last portion of your post [where you wrote], 'Because anything we still hold onto can be a divider between us and our Creator who loves us. He simply does not want to be rejected by us, and if we try to face our issues on our own, we must turn away from Him in order to do so. However, if we trust our issues into His hands, we can face them and still face Him at the same time' was very powerful to me and enlightened me on some things that have been happening in my life. I feel as though I am stuck and God is not allowing me to go any further in my life until I forgive this man, but how do I truly in my heart do this? I guess I will devote future time and energy into figuring this out."

Here is my response:

When I walked the forgiveness road regarding those boys who raped me, I didn't want to at first. What they did was horrific. Its ramifications resonate even now. Their heinous, dehumanizing acts have made me cautious, afraid, insecure, and torn. By God's grace, I've healed, but the scars remain. But I realized the more I hated them, the more I was tied to those boys. It didn't happen overnight (by a long stretch), but eventually it happened. I started feeling sorry for them, wondering what kind of abuse they received to treat me so awfully. And I wondered what kind of haunted lives those men live today. Hurt people hurt people. They must've been hurt to hurt me so much.

That empathy helped me forgive.

But again, that's taken me years. Now I pray that God will open their hearts, let them tell the truth about what they did, and be set free by His

forgiveness.

Honestly, if I met them today, I'd probably weep. I might yell. But after that, I'd pray for them and tell them about Jesus. Because He's the One who bore all my ick on the cross.

*

I want to change. I really do.

But I'm held back by the rut I've created with my own words whispered to myself over a lifetime. Words like, "You'll never be enough. Never do enough. Never achieve enough." Beyond those words, which I've learned to quiet more and more, **worse words scream at me the moment I feel guilty**. The hyperactive conscience words. Words like...

"You should have..."

"Why didn't you..."

"You've really messed up this time..."

"You will never overcome this sin. It's part of you now. It's written in stone ..."

"Because you did/thought this, you are unworthy of God's love..."

I cower at the thought. I feel pain in my gut when I read over the words I've spoken over myself, how I've abused me.

I treat myself like a criminal. And sometimes I think I'd treat a criminal much, much better.

I'm the victim of myself, of my hyperactive conscience. (Aside: Here's a helpful article about hyperactive consciences.) I feel bad for things I didn't do or intend. I can't seem to touch, to feel, to receive Jesus' wild, affectionate love.

I want to change.

What would it look like if I grew in this area? Some thoughts:

- When I messed up, I could offer myself grace, the same grace I offer others when they wrong me.
- I can silence the angry words directed my way by simply saying, "Jesus loves me."
- I would live in a deeper level of freedom and joy because I would no longer believe in my deep unworthiness.
- I would have more moments in life when I felt genuine elation, rejoicing in the outrageous grace of Jesus.

• I would better forgive others as I revel in the sheer volume of how much God has forgiven me.
• I would no longer take responsibility for others' sins.
• I would truly believe God has removed my sin as far as the east and the west, then live joyfully accordingly.
• I would smile more.
• The static anger in my head would be silenced, replaced by the affectionate words of the Almighty.

I'm weary of this hyperactive conscience. I want to grab it in the same manner Darth Vader nabbed the evil Emperor and disposed of him once and for all.

Because this is how ugly it sometimes looks in my mind. I have listened to wormtongue. And I'm so very tired. I want to be free. Joyful. Alive. Reveling in Jesus' love. But I can't do that when I listen to my own berating.

*

A reader asked: "Do you sometimes feel disconnected when or after you tell your story - kind of like you're another person outside of yourself, not wanting to feel the pain? How do you deal with it? My counselor once said that the more one shares the painful story, the more empowered one becomes. Do you find this true for you?"

My answer:

Yes, there are times I feel that way, and if I really listened to myself talk, I might just cry. Sometimes it's good to have an emotional distance between you and telling your story. Thankfully, healing has helped me create that distance.

I don't know if I feel more empowered after sharing. Sometimes I feel depleted, actually, like a part of me has leaked out for others to consume. But I will say that the more I share my story, the more I marvel at God's grace. I'm stunned that I'm a functioning member of society with a great husband and three amazing kids. This is all God's grace.

Another question: "It has only been in the last little while that I shared my story at all. And while I have felt some relief in sharing it with others, it feels as if the pain will never go away. I have written a journal for years, have stacks of

them hiding in my closet. Writing words and stories and poetry has been a way of releasing some of my emotions and story but I still struggle so much. Do the people I share with really truly understand? Why does our God allow suffering? Why did he allow me to be sexually abused as a little girl and then raped at 23 by a coworker? What good can come from that? I sit here now at 36 years old with tears streaming down my face because I truly don't understand what good can come from such suffering. And yet I love my Lord and know he has brought me through all this for a reason. Thank you for sharing your story. It helps me know I am not alone."

My response:

Oh reader, I have felt your pain, and there are days I still remain in the questions. Not everyone will understand your story. Not everyone will have empathy. And sharing doesn't always mean benefit.

There were times I shared and I felt violated in doing so. I'm not sure of the magic line needed before we're ready to share. For me it was the difference between having to share with a gigantic need to be understood versus sharing for the sake of setting others free. In between those two margins, healing had to happen.

Part of that healing came through wrestling with the whys of abuse, particularly with a sovereign God. If I believe God is omnipotent, loving and omnipresent, I have a hard time reconciling why He would allow a child to be abused. After all, as a parent, I would do anything to prevent abuse in my kids. So why wouldn't God? I've come to the place where I have chosen to rest in God's paradoxical plan. The truth is He will redeem it. The truth is He gave us free will, which means He also gave rapists free will.

Another thing that helped was forgiving and praying for those who raped me. I don't know where they are or what they're doing. I've tried to figure that out, but have only found dead ends. Still I'd like to believe that if I met those boys (now men), I'd be able to offer forgiveness. Actually, I'm in that place where I grieve for them. They must've been violated to be violators. And now they have to live with themselves knowing they raped a five-year-old girl. How do you live with that? So I pray for them, that God would set them free somehow.

What good can come from suffering? For that I go back to Job who lost everything—his children, his livelihood, his health, his will to live. He heard God at the beginning of his ordeal, but the scripture says he sees God at the end. That's what I want. To see God. And, counterintuitively, I see God in the midst

of my trials much more than I see Him in my prosperity.

Those trials in my life **drove me** to God. Not finding appropriate love made me long for perfect love. Feeling alone helped me reach my hand to a God who was there. When I think about it that way, I begin to thank God for the trials because they plunge my back into His embrace.

That all sounds so flowery. Please know that what I write has been hard won. I've been in those sad places, those questioning places. And please know that I don't have an adequate answer even today. I truly don't know why awful things like rape happens to people. On this earth I live in the tension of that.

Mind if I pray for you?

Lord, why? Why would You allow rape in this reader's life like that? Help her to wrestle long enough so that she nestles once again in Your arms. Be the protector she needs. Help her to work through the questions. I pray they drive her closer to You, not farther away. Lord Jesus, redeem these awful parts of her story. Make them sing. Use her to touch many, many women with Your grace. But first she needs to be filled up with Your grace first. Fill her to overflowing. Right now. In this moment. Shower her with Your unconditional love. Help her see herself as you see her: spotless, beautiful, worthy of redemption. Amen.

2.

But let it sleep on the bosom of Christ

So we've explored our pasts (or at least you've seen me "go there" to the tunnel of healing.) I hope my journey of being honest about the past has inspired you to do so. When you start sharing it, be sure you entrust your story to trustworthy people. One of the most interesting things the Lord has taught me is that what wounds and scars you is the very avenue God uses for healing. In other words, if you were wounded by others, you'll also be healed by others.

Is it a risk? Yes. Of course. But that's where the beauty of this section shines. We can lay everything on Christ's capable chest. (It's still a little weird to type the word "bosom.") He will give us the courage to let our past rest, to put it to bed. He will enable us to share when we need to share. He will send good people in our lives who will listen, validate, cry alongside us, and pray for us. My avenue of healing involved just that: daring to tell my story to trusted people who then prayed up a storm on my behalf.

With Jesus' help, it is possible to heal. To become the best you He intended. To make you authentic, whole and joyful. That's not to say you won't run into heartache. You will. But He promises to hold you and shoulder your stress. This section is about what Jesus does on your behalf. Spend some time here. Read and re-read. And then ask Him to do something utterly new and exciting in and through you.

*

Velveteen Savior

The Velveteen Rabbit taught me to be real

That being shabby was acceptable
As long as I was loved
But today my shabbiness is showing

Strings of despair hopelessly tangled

Buttoned eyes that feign sight

Stuffing of my tendered heart
Poking through my coat of rags

I am a tattered rabbit

Worn and stretched

Whole but holed

Patched and threadbare
All I can do in the land of threadbare

Is remember
That I am loved as I am
By the One who stitched me first
Who dared to step from perfection
To earth’s sodden shore
To don the distressing disguise of humanity
To welcome the torment of others’ ripping
To feel the threads of life be torn from His flesh

To become all things Velveteen
So that I could know afresh
In my shabbiness, I am loved

Anyway

*

Good Practices.

Those two words are reverberating through me today as I once again try to foster discipline in my life--to spend time with Jesus, to pray, to examine my day with purpose, to eat well, to worship in song, to exercise, to bless my children with attention and prayers, to read out loud to my kids, to be alive in the moment.

These are all things I desire. These are all things I know will deepen my relationships, my resolve to follow Jesus.

Why is it so hard to do these things, then? Why is it so hard to run away from good practices? Ah, I can be so lazy, so self-slothful. But today's a new day, a clean piece of lined paper full of possibilities. As I ran in the neighborhood, then through the park, I sensed God whisper the word Sanctuary to me. He did it as I watched birds pecking at food from a feeder. I want my home to be that kind of place--a place of sustenance, a place of invitation, a place of welcome. But to have that, I must first have His sanctuary ways deep in my heart.

I remembered the line of an old Kim Hill song:

"You are my lifeline. You are my sanctuary. You are my torchlight. This is my testimony."

He is all those things. But I'm afraid in the rush-rush of to do lists and the frenetic pace of this life, we forget His sanctuary ways. We forget to take shelter under His wings, preferring to try to fly on our own cardboard wings. We flap longer, faster, thinking we'll finally fly, only to crash to the ground in a heap, wondering why God didn't help us fly. He didn't because we didn't need Him.

This world is an illusion, a matrix if you will, full of bells and whistles and attractions. We chase crazily after all of it, only to grasp at air. What is real is this: eternity. Jesus. Relationships. Prayer. Hope. Words.

I fear we spend most of our days chasing unreality while the reality chases us and we never turn around. And then we collapse under the fatigue of all that running, unsatisfied, needy.

Mind if I pray?

Jesus, forgive us all for forsaking You, the fountain of Living Water, and digging ourselves into cisterns that can hold no water. Forgive us for flying on cardboard wings, chasing after illusions. Forgive us for being far too busy for Your voice, Your beckoning, Your strength. We are a tired people, Lord. We are needy. But we don't run to You for sustenance. We keep at our pace, forgetting Your sanctuary. Bring us back. Forgive us our busyness. Center us on Your heartbeat. Keep us close to Your wings, Your breath, Your sustenance. We are tired of running on empty. Forgive us. Oh dear Jesus, forgive us. We want to rest in Your forgiveness today. Now. In this moment. Stop us. Help us to choose the art of stopping long enough to smell the air of rest, to revel in Your beckoning. You are good. You are strong. You are our hope. You are the reason we live, move, breathe. You are everything. But we think we are. Forgive us. Renew us. Settle us. Rectify us. Imbue peace where rushing and hurry just lived.

Scripture for meditation:

"For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, The fountain of living waters, To hew for themselves cisterns, Broken cisterns That can hold no water" Jeremiah 2:13.

"The more I thought about it the hotter I got, igniting a fire of words: "LORD, remind me how brief my time on earth will be. Remind me that my days are numbered—how fleeting my life is. You have made my life no longer than the width of my hand. My entire lifetime is just a moment to you; at best, each of us is but a breath." *Interlude* We are merely moving shadows, and all our busy rushing ends in nothing.
We heap up wealth, not knowing who will spend it" (Psalm 39:3-6 NLT).

*

I watched The Junk Brothers on HGTV while eating my frosted wheat cereal. Here's the premise of the show. The two brothers, Steve and Jim Kelley, forage neighborhoods under the cover of darkness, looking for junk that could be transformed into something useful, beautiful.

This show they found a pair of old wooden snow skis. Then, they take what they've found and create furniture (beautiful furniture, actually) using the castoff. In today's episode, they created a curio cabinet, shaped like the top end of a wooden boat, complete with mirrored back, glass shelves, a door, and an

upper inside light. The skis framed the whole thing.

The coolest part of the show comes when they place the new piece of furniture on the castoff home's doorstep, ring the bell, then leave. A hidden camera picks up the people chatting, marveling, and wondering how something they'd thrown away has become something beautiful.

Isn't that the perfect picture of redemption? Jesus is The Junk Brother (Savior) who takes our castoffs, creates something beautiful with what we perceive to be unnecessary in our heart, and reconfigures it into beauty. Then He dares to surprise a dying world with the beauty He's wrought in us.

All of this reminds me of this verse: "To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified."—Isaiah 61:3.

And this one from 1 Corinthians 1:27-30: "But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption."

Amen, friend! God takes our junk and rejuvenates it to treasure! Alleluia!

*

This is a hard post to write and admit to. But it's true. You'd think that someone who was a victim of abuse would shun that victimhood status the moment she realized it, flinging it as far as the East is from the West. Nope. I coddled it. Nursed it. Loved it to ragged death.

At first I said nothing of the abuse. For ten years, I kept my mouth shut. I had nightmares, waking with sweat and fear and heart pounding, but I still didn't reveal what had happened to me.

Then I met Jesus, and He gave me the courage to share once. By the time I walked with him a few years, I shared the story more times. Then it became a strange, happy drug. When I shared it, folks would empathize, send me kindhearted looks, offer to pray. For several years, I relished the attention the story would bring until being a victim became sort of an idol.

Instead of running to God for healing, I ran to human empathy and

approval. I hoped the embrace and pity of others would fill me. And they did for a time.

But then something dynamic came. Healing. Blessed, needed healing. My friends in college probably don't even realize they were part of such a revolution for me. But they were. They prayed me toward health. And suddenly, I no longer felt the need to share my story in order to get attention.

For ten more years, I kept it inside, remembering how I'd made it an idol. My twenties blurred by as I birthed and raised three kids. But the wounds, which I thought were healed, came back. The scars resurfaced. As if God knew that I'd need to revisit them when I was stronger.

So I spent my thirties tentatively sharing my story. With counselors. With a few trusted friends. With my husband. And more healing came, this time slower, more methodical.

Today I am more whole. I know my vulnerability to idolize victimhood. Even typing it here is a risk. I'll risk getting empathy for my story, of trying to fill myself up with praise rather than a settled peace in God. I'm here to tell you that making an idol of my plight got me nowhere, really. But throwing the whole sorry mess at Jesus' feet brought the healing I needed.

If I cling to the past that way, needing it to validate and lift me up, I will miss the now, the future. I truly believe that many of us who had painful stories from our pasts sometimes prefer to continue to live in them. If we know chaos and pain, chances are that our fallback will be to live in that same chaos and pain. If we've been victimized, chances are if we're not victimized again through our choices, we're choosing to victimize ourselves by berating ourselves internally.

Some questions:

- Do you want to be set free?
- Are you afraid of normal?
- Do you cling to your victimhood for attention? To feel alive?
- How has God been asking you to grow into health?
- What prevents you from pursuing healing?

I'm curious what your answers will be. Spend some time journaling your responses.

*

Today I received constructive feedback from something I participated in. I should've known better than to open the file. But I did. And now I'm lost in unworthiness.

Yes, there were nice things folks wrote. Some positive comments. But my mind doesn't stay on those. It clings to everything awful, to the cutting remarks. I'm not sure why I'm this way, and I do wish I were different. Criticism makes me cringe. It makes me want to cry. This is what I hear: "You're not worth being here."

Of course I know that's not true. Jesus paid so much for me, for you, for the people who penned those critical words. Jesus helps me to remember to be gentle on my critiques, to sand away the snide, to think of constructive words. And when I receive them? I should place them in His hands. After all, He received the harshest rebukes. Some folks even called him the devil.

I'm not saying I'm Jesus and that I am above criticism. Lord knows I have a lot to learn in every single area of my life. But it helps me somehow to know He understands what it feels like to be criticized. And that He gave those over to His Father. It comforts me to know Jesus was fully human as well as fully God, that He suffered the same temptations I've suffered. That He knew how to walk through criticism with grace.

Lord, I'm feeling as small as can be today. Ready to cry, ready to throw in the proverbial towel. But as I pray this, as I hold those words of critique close to my heart, I realize there are others out there reading this going through much deeper trials, much sadder days. Lift their heads as You lift mine. Help us all to see Your beauty in the devastation of the day. Help us see You in the midst. Thank You for Your life, for walking this earth as a man, yet triumphing so beautifully. Touch us, please. Amen.

*

I'd given my book *Thin Places* to the people at my table group at Cape Town 2010, a world missions conference. Towards the end of the 8-day event, one of the men in my group approached me. "I've been reading your book," he said. "And I'd like to talk to you."

We sat away from the hubbub. He told me God had been prompting him to say something to me and that he'd learned over his years with Jesus it was better

to obey. He found that those promptings were God-breathed.

And then he said those words.

“On behalf of all men, I apologize for what those boys did to you.”

My heart stopped.

He continued to say how wrong those boys were, how violating, and that as a man, he felt the weight of their sin. “I am sorry,” he said.

His words washed a dark part of my heart, an angry, helpless part. His words shed light on a corner I’ve tried not to linger in. That places of devastation, innocence stolen. He asked if he could pray for me.

I nodded.

I don’t remember the words of his prayer, but I remember the way they made me feel. Cleansed. Heard. Validated. All the opposite things I felt thirty-eight years ago when those boys stole my dignity under tall evergreens. I was so young to lose it all.

Five.

Years.

Old.

And now at forty-three, I’ve heard the tenor of grace from my new friend’s mouth. “I am sorry.”

All I can do is fall on my knees, thanking the God who loves me enough to prompt a man to say such words. Thank You Jesus. Thank You.

*

A very good friend emailed me today, encouraging me. I’ve been discouraged about writing, wondering if this is the gig God has for me. It is. I know that deep down, but sometimes I let discouragement get the upper hand. She told me that I write things people think but can’t articulate. That I give words to people’s worries, pains, wonderings. That blesses me. It encourages me to keep going.

She once shared the words of a Margaret Becker song with me during a particularly hard time: Those words came back to me today. **It’s never for nothing.**

All the pain you are facing today, particularly if that pain is at the hands of people claiming to love Jesus, is not for nothing. Even if you feel your productiveness as a minister is over, realize God uses the broken pieces of our

lives to do the things only He can do. Ernest Hemingway put it beautifully: “The world breaks everyone, and those who are broken are strongest in the broken places.”

That’s the great paradox of following Jesus. We are weak; **He is strong in that weakness.**

So if you’re despairing today. If you feel like everything’s crashing down around you, take heart. It’s never for nothing. God will use even your pain and bewilderment for His glory and your ultimate good. As Corie Ten Boom was famous for saying, “Don’t wrestle; just nestle.” Rest right now on the mighty chest of God, laying your burdens and pains on His chest. Nestle yourself there. Consider the advent of His coming, and that when He came, He appeared in the frail wrappings of infant humanity.

Rest there. Be frail. Watch the strength of God take over. It’s never for nothing.

*

I watched *The Majestic* this weekend with my daughters. One of my all time favorite movies. If you haven’t watched it yet, you should. I cried six times. The first time I cried was when a man who thought he’d lost his son in World War II reunites with him. He tries to make him coffee, and continues a one-sided conversation from the other room. When he enters the living room, his son is asleep.

He lifts his son’s feet onto the couch, takes off his shoes, and places a blanket over him, pausing briefly to watch him sleep. I cried.

There’s something so tender about that moment, so perfectly portrayed. A father in longing for his son. His tender, sweet care. The kindness welling up in his eyes. It makes me miss having a father. More than I can articulate. More than I can put words to. More than I can possibly convey on a screen.

A child never outgrows the need for a daddy. Never.

As I go to sleep tonight, I’ll be picturing God the Father looking down on me. He sees my feet dangle off the bed, so he lifts them up. Takes off my shoes. Places fuzzy socks on my feet because He knows how cold my feet get. Then smooths the covers over me, watching me as my breath moves in and out.

Oh how He loves me.

Oh how He loves you.

The Father loves His children.

*

As I was making dinner tonight, the Lord sweetly reminded me, *I am **for** you.*

Really Lord?

Really.

It's hard for me to internalize that. Feel it. Believe it. Yet I know that if I truly, truly believe those words, I'll be transformed forever.

***God** is for me.*

*God **is** for me.*

*God is **for** me.*

*God is for **me.***

Read again Romans 8:31-39, this time in the Message. Let the truth sink into you while I pray it sinks into me:

So, what do you think? With God on our side like this, how can we lose? If God didn't hesitate to put everything on the line for us, embracing our condition and exposing himself to the worst by sending his own Son, is there anything else he wouldn't gladly and freely do for us? And who would dare tangle with God by messing with one of God's chosen? Who would dare even to point a finger? The One who died for us—who was raised to life for us!—is in the presence of God at this very moment sticking up for us. Do you think anyone is going to be able to drive a wedge between us and Christ's love for us? There is no way! Not trouble, not hard times, not hatred, not hunger, not homelessness, not bullying threats, not backstabbing, not even the worst sins listed in Scripture: They kill us in cold blood because they hate you. We're sitting ducks; they pick us off one by one. None of this fazes us because Jesus loves us. I'm absolutely convinced that nothing—nothing living or dead, angelic or demonic, today or tomorrow, high or low, thinkable or unthinkable—absolutely nothing can get between us and God's love because of the way that Jesus our Master has embraced us.

God is for you.

*

A few days ago my husband and I had a great conversation with my agent and

her husband. One of the topics of conversation was narcissism. Hubby said something that stuck with me: “Narcissists want everyone to like them.”

Oh no.

I’ve constantly feared I’d become a narcissist.

I’ve read through narcissistic traits like this and felt better about it, but still I worry.

Being in this particular profession where I’m “out there” in the public eye (sort of, it’s not like I’m famous), **I’ve prayed that the Lord would keep me humble, teachable and kindhearted**. I have a prayer team of people who I’ve given full permission to confront me if they see me becoming “all that.” So I’ve set safeguards in place.

This morning on my run, I ran by a house that reminds me of one of my relational failures. Not a deep relationship, just an acquaintance, **but my overactive (hyperactive) conscience reminds me again and again of my failure**. So I ran by the house and schemed ways I could make restitution, amends, anything. Problem was, I really didn’t do anything wrong, and the relationship was very minimal in the first place. And, as I’ve talked to God about it, I haven’t sensed the need to do anything about it. It’s one of those, let-the-past-be-the-past-and-move-on things.

So as I forgot God’s encouragement to let it go and plotted how to reconcile, my husband’s words came back to me. **“Narcissists need everyone to like them.”**

I needed these people to like me.

I wanted them to like me. I couldn’t live with knowing someone out there in my neighborhood thought ill of me.

I continued running, wrestling with the notion. I gave up my need to be liked in that moment (though I’m sure it will revisit me often).

I don’t want to be a narcissist, needing every. single. person’s. approval. Or admiration. Or toleration.

Sometimes you just gotta let go. Which reminds me of the anti-narcissism song, All for You by Starfield. It reminds me that everything I do on this earth is all for Jesus. If He asks me to let go, I need to. If He tells me to reconcile, I need to. If He dares me to risk, I should. It’s all for Him.

So I’m letting go.

Right now.

I’m trusting.

I’m learning to be okay with people not liking me. I’ll rest there. It may be restless for me at first, but I’m trying.

Something for you to explore: What about you? When did you realize your need to be liked by everyone? Or are you comfortable with others not liking you?

*

I've been thinking a lot about healing lately, particularly since I'll be teaching about it the next six weeks at church. I'm living proof of two things:

1. That God can utterly transform a life.
2. That you have to **want to be** transformed.

Jesus asked the paralytic, "Do you want to get well?" Notice that the man, lame and crippled, didn't answer the question. And yet, even in that frail state of not knowing what to say to such a question, Jesus reached out his hand to the man and restored him. This man was waiting for years for healing at the pool, only to meet the Living Water and be healed.

My question to you: **How have you placed yourself near Jesus?** How have you sought healing? I'm convinced that often the difference between those who are emotionally healed from the past and those who are enslaved by the past is this: tenacious pursuit of healing.

Your past will either haunt you or it will break you enough to reach for rescue. Which will you choose? Haunting? Repeating the same sins that were done to you? Or will you be one who says, "Enough!" Will you chase instead after Jesus, the Author and source of all healing?

2 Corinthians 7:10 has some interesting things to say for those who are haunted by difficulties and pain. "Distress that drives us to God does that. It turns us around. It gets us back in the way of salvation. We never regret that kind of pain. But those who let distress drive them away from God are full of regrets, end up on a **deathbed of regret**s."

The truth? We all have distress from yesterday. The question becomes will you let it drive you to God or from God? He is able to transform your heart. He is. I'm living proof. He can salve the bitterness, slake the fear, give you a heart of compassion and forgiveness. But you have to choose. Actively choose. Running from God will only lead to a lifetime of bad choices and deep regret.

Which will you choose?

Perhaps it's an emotional day, though I didn't anticipate it would be when it started. I do have several friends battling awful, scary diseases, and a distant family member who has died. One friend has surgery today, something I dreamed about last night. My heart is prayerful.

But it still surprised me when I listened to National Public Radio about the devastating aftershocks of Nashville's floods. They praised volunteer organizations, then the host said something like, "But this doesn't begin to measure the aid provided by local churches." A man broke in, a simple man from a nearby church. I don't even remember what he said, exactly, but just hearing his voice made me cry. He spoke of the honor it was to help, how the church should be the first to respond. And here he was giving his life, time, skills, and heart to strangers. Selflessly.

Then I turned on the TV while I ate my 9 grain hot cereal to a show on HGTV called Holmes on Homes. It's where this contractor (Mike Holmes) goes into folks' houses that have significant issues. Almost always the family has been taken advantage of by unscrupulous contractors. This particular episode, the family experienced a fire, then while the "contractors" were doing everything slipshod, a grandmother and a father died. In one month's time. They didn't have it in them to monitor the work. And the work was bad. Raccoons scuttled through the home. And the contractors stole things from the homeowners including banking information, writing checks on their account.

When Mike Holmes put his arm on the woman's shoulder, I lost it again. He told her he would fix what was damaged, would deal with insurance, would restore the home. He rescued her.

I resonated with both because both men represented Jesus to me. The One who didn't have to, but chose to stoop to my life, look at the pain there, and choose to "be the church" to me. To restore what had been devastated by enemies. To create beauty from ashes. To right the wrongs. To come alongside. To weep with me, then selflessly repair my heart.

Thank You, Jesus. And thank you to the people in this world who show me Him. To those who restore and volunteer and sacrifice, know this: Your work is not in vain. It is seen by the One who sees in secret.

Mind if I pray?

Jesus, as my friends suffer, help me to be one who comes alongside, who can be the church. I pray for my family that You would bring comfort. I pray for those in Nashville who are digging out of wet drywall and broken dreams. Bring healing and new life. Make me a believer in You who sacrifices, who puts others' needs

before my own. And, Jesus, it's my prayer that those who follow after You would represent You beautifully today.

*

(Aside: My husband and three kids and I were church planters in Southern France from 2004 to late 2006. Some of these ramblings come during that time. It was a difficult ministry experience, one I haven't shared about publicly. Here you'll see a few glimpses.)

I ran the hills of southern France again today, inhaling honeysuckle, feeling a slight breeze against my face. The scenery here is breathtaking. Just as a stand of evergreens and a glimpse of Mount Rainier used to awe me as a child, so does seeing the Sea, the Alps, the palm trees.

But it wasn't enough.

If you've been reading my blog for any length of time, you may have detected my small agonies. Loneliness. Stress. Worry. Being a church planter is hard. Living in a nation not your own is often bewildering. Not being able to fully communicate when communication is how you process and view the world is excruciating. Sometimes I've felt like I lost myself and that the Me I once was has tumbled off a French cliff, never to be resurrected.

On my run I saw two dead critters (to use a Texas word). A coiled snake right at my feet. A white cat with a bulged out eye (made me almost hurl!). Sometimes I feel like that in this cross-culturization. Dead. Lifeless.

So, Jesus whispered to me again, as I pondered the dead creatures. "Am I enough?"

The scenery isn't enough to fill me. The amazing culture isn't either. People can't fully. Maybe I'm here to learn my lack. To see the need to grab His hand when I'm walking in the dark. Is Jesus enough? Oh, I hope so. Because I'm empty and weary.

*

I'm reading an interesting (probably out of print) book entitled *Madame Guyon Martyr of the Holy Spirit* by Phyllis Thompson. The book is about a woman named Madame Guyon who loved Jesus Christ while communing with Him

through prayer, Bible reading and self-denial during the seventeenth century in France.

What struck me was how many times she was misunderstood and maligned. Everywhere she turned, folks were stirred up about her from her enemies. And yet, she felt joy when she encountered all this. Even in prison.

Today, Patrick and I spent lunch at some new friends' home in St. Laurent du Var, near Nice. Around a lovely lunch table, he said, "It's often when we are doing God's work that the enemy attacks again and again."

"I know," I said, "I've heard that before, but to be honest, I'm a bit tired of it all."

"Yes, I can imagine," he said.

Later, he handed me the Madame Guyon book. I felt a bit under the weather today, so I curled up with the book and read about half of it. I realized through her life that our friend's words were true. When you are trying to affect a dying world with the Good News of Jesus Christ, there will inevitably be opposition. Paul explains it plainly to 2 Timothy 3:12: "Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." It's a given that Madame Guyon understood. She felt joy when the persecution and accusations came because it was proof that she was striving to live a godly life.

So, why am I so surprised? Why am I bothered when people misunderstand my heart and malign me in front of others? I take great comfort in these verses, written by Peter. Take some time to really read these verses, let them sink into your weary soul:

"Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, **keep on rejoicing**, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, **you are blessed**, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; but if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, **but is to glorify God in this name**. For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And if it is with difficulty that the righteous is saved, what will become of the godless man and the sinner? Therefore, those also who suffer according to the will of God shall **entrust their souls** to a faithful Creator in doing what is right" (1 Peter 4:12-19).

So, if you are suffering under false accusations today, rejoice because it shows that the Spirit of glory rests upon you. All we can do is entrust our hearts

to the God who ***sees*** everything. My friend Sandi's words have helped me tremendously. She asked me to consider how many times Jesus was misunderstood when He walked this earth (and as I type the question, I realize, too, that He is still widely misunderstood today). If I am misunderstood and mocked, then I am in the company of Jesus, who was God and yet people treated him like a criminal. Surely, He can hold my hand in the midst of a storm of words!

God sees. Those are two words that have sustained me. God sees. He is capable of holding my heart and my reputation, both of which are His anyway. Nothing escapes His notice. I pray that I would be as brave as Madame Guyon, entrusting my everything to the God who sees.

*

I've been meditating about Jesus and His amazing walk on earth. How He touched the untouched and empathized with the neglected. How He experienced frailty and anguish and the ache of being hurt by those He created. How He was often misunderstood and maligned. How He exercised utter humility, being God but being treated like a common man. Oh, how I love Jesus who walked the same dusty earth I've dirtied my toes on.

In France, I've felt a longing for home, not a sentimental need for the familiar, but a deep longing for the home God meant for us to have. A place where love abounds. A place where loneliness ebbs away like a receding tide. Randy Alcorn says we are made for a place and a person. The place is heaven; the person is Jesus. On this earth, I will not have heaven. Glimpses of it peek through the matrix of this darkened world, but even so, I've come to realize my true home, at least on this earth, is in the arms of the One who went through hell for me.

And finally to my meandering meditations: If we are lonely or despairing, consider that Jesus was far more. He, unstained by any sin, felt the weight of every wicked thought and act upon His holy shoulders. Because of His sacrifice on the cross and willingness to bear the weight of humanity's sin, I *never* have to experience utter loneliness because now the Holy Spirit can always be with me. Wow.

Consider that Jesus experienced what we will never have to: separation from the Father. For one sacred, terrible moment, as Jesus cloaked Himself in

our rags, the Father turned His holy and loving face away. For one agony, the Trinity lost fellowship. Sin was so hated by God the Father that He excruciated Himself by pulling away from His son who wore our sin. I can't fathom that. I can't understand it. Jesus went through utter dark loneliness in that moment so that I never would have to.

So, we humans struggle. We eke out a living. We live. We eat. We get sick. We blame. We try to make sense of this world. And we forget Jesus. He experienced more pain than we ever will. And He comes to our help because He is the epitome of the Empathetic God. "For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:15-16).

I love Jesus. I'm enamored by Him. I'm grateful He sits on a throne of grace. I'm dazzled that He understands my own loneliness, joy, perplexities and humor because He has walked where I walk today--on this needy, fallen earth among needy, fallen people.

Jesus, You are my home.

*

I recently wrote a post for (in)courage about how a mean girl helped me make a positive change. You can read it here if you're interested. At the end of the post, I asked readers to share their own mean girl stories and how those encounters helped them choose to do something positive.

One of the commenters stunned me with her answer. She wrote:

I was my own mean girl. I was as self-depreciating as they come, often calling myself horrid names for my imperfections. One day I stood up to myself in the mirror and decided to prove that mean inner voice wrong. And I did.

Wow. She could be me. Could she be you? I've been a mean girl to myself. Things I've told myself I would never breathe to another person. I've berated myself, called myself lazy, ugly, a loser. I've despaired over this. Wondered why I did it. Puzzled over why it's a struggle.

Then I thought about mean girls in general. They usually victimize others because they have their own insecurity and injury. To cover up their vulnerability, they maim others with their words. It's a defense mechanism to keep people far away from their hearts.

How is this true for me? For you? Has your own insecurity and injury caused you to turn on yourself, call yourself horrid names? Do you victimize your own vulnerability under the guise of trying to be self aware and godly? Would you say that your voice that shames you is Jesus' voice? How has injuring yourself kept yourself from your heart? Have your mean words resulted in positive change? Freedom?

It's time we stop being our own mean girls. It's time to be gentle with ourselves. One time I let my hubby know what kinds of words I pummeled myself with. After he heard how hard I was on myself, he said, "Mary, I would never treat you that way. And you wouldn't treat others that way. Why in the world would you treat yourself like that?" His words stopped me. And helped me.

So if you struggle with being your own mean girl, ask yourself this next time your being mean to yourself: Would you treat your best friend this way? And if you did, what would he/she feel? What would those words do?

Mind if I pray for us?

Lord Jesus, help us not to be our own mean girls. Forgive us for harassing your creation (us!). Heal us so we don't have to treat ourselves this way anymore. Thank You for absorbing all those mean words on the cross. Thank You for loving us beautifully. Help us to realize that our harsh voice is not Your voice. Help us silence those tirades so we can hear Your encouraging, cheerleading voice today. Do something brand new in us. Free us from ourselves. Amen.

*

I called the kids downstairs and made hubby turn off sports when I spied the show. House Hunters International featured a couple and their four children looking for a home in Mougins, France. This was very, very near where we lived in Le Rouret. And for the first time, I was okay watching Southern France.

As you've surmised, Patrick and I and our three kids moved to Southern France in August of 2004 to plant a church. Although we thought this was a permanent move, a series of difficult circumstances facilitated our coming back to Texas at the very end of 2006. Someday I'll write more about that time, but it's still very hard for me.

To understand more fully how monumental it is that I could watch this show, I still have a hard time remembering our time in France. Much of it has been strangely blocked from my mind. Though I walked our kids to school nearly every day (several times a day to get them to school, pick them up from lunch, bring them back, pick them up again), I have very little memory of doing that. I have to actively think about France to recall a memory, but even then it's hard for me.

Trauma does that to a person. Even a person like me who remembers EVERYTHING.

So I'm thankful that five years after our homecoming, I was able to sit through the entire episode of House Hunters International and actually remember some positive things. The food. The sites. The beauty. The beach. The people. The French language. The houses. For one of the first times, I smiled in the recollection. This is proof that God can take tragedy and trauma and heal us. It may take a very long time, but it can happen.

I once heard that you know you're healing from the past when you can uncover positive memories. So this little TV show foray brings me hope.

3.

And go out into the irresistible future with Him

To be honest, I've spent a whole lot of time looking back. So much so that I didn't give much thought to right now or what would come. I didn't anticipate well. I survived but I didn't thrive.

This has all been part of my journey. Yet I'm thankful I've taken a turn in the road of looking backward. (By the way, it's really hard to walk forward when you're constantly gazing behind you." By God's grace, I'm learning to embrace the "irresistible future" Oswald Chambers champions.

That's my hope for you too. That you'll spend the needed work in the past, long enough to tell your story, be listened to and healed, but not so long that you have a morbid fascination with it. Not so long that you use it as an excuse for all sorts of crummy behavior.

No.

There is a time in our lives when we must move on. These essays highlight my struggle in learning how to do just that.

*

On my run last week (yep, I need to have more than one run!), I prayed, cried, and prayed some more. I'd received hard news about a publishing dream, so I languished, fretted and grieved.

Of course I know all about sovereignty, as in God's ownership and orchestration over my life (and yours). But again, my praxis (the practical living out of that belief) fell short. As tears kept springing from my eyes, even though I told them NOT to, I sensed Jesus say, "I am the Gatekeeper of your career. Trust Me."

Oh, yes, that.

He is the gatekeeper.

Of my (your) dreams. Of my (your) ambitions. Of my (your) career. Of my

(your) ministry.

Nothing happens in this life without it first filtering through the hands of our Creator.

Still, the pessimistic, untrusting side of me wonders a little. How did Jesus feel when He saw me get excited about this opportunity? Did He try to tell me to calm down because He knew what was coming? If so, I sure didn't sense that. Did He rejoice that I would suffer a setback? Did He grieve as I heard the No?

I'd like to think He did. And I have to think that in His sovereignty, He smiled. Because He knows my outcome. He knows my heart. He knows what is best for my soul. And this opportunity, shiny as it was, with bells and whistles aplenty, was not His desire for me.

That helps me as I grieve and move forward.

But, to be very honest, I'm still in the grief stage and would greatly appreciate your prayers. I hesitated at first to write this honest post. I worried about what you would think of me. Or that you'd tell me to buck up. (Maybe I should). I've determined to be honest here, to show you my heart, even the painful parts, the disappointments.

Here is what I know. If God has given you a dream, tuck that away in your heart. Write it down. Collect mementos that help you remember His calling (cards from others, emails, words spoken over you) so that when that calling is tested, you will persevere anyway.

I know God called me to write (Click here to see if you are). He calls me today to write. He has not revoked that call. So I write. It may be that I write unpublished words (in the traditional sense), but still, I write. I speak too. God has called me to speak. I don't speak often, but when I do, I take it very seriously.

I may not ever write a bestseller. I may not ever stand before a bustling crowd of people. I may not ever see the fulfillment of some untold dreams. But God is sovereign over all. And really, when you think about it, all that matters are these simple words:

Well done, good and faithful servant.

*

I recently re-read a section of *Thin Places* where I pine (in high school and college) for a boyfriend. My constant prayer is "God, give me a boyfriend." (I named him Bob.) Embarrassing, I know.

Here's an excerpt:

I pine for a boyfriend. I ache for one like a thirsty dog pants for water. It's obsessive. Hunting for "Bob" populates nearly every page of my high school and college journals. He's on every prayer request list I write. I pray about Bob, for Bob. Every single man I meet I size up for boyfriend potential. I have a thousand crushes, most leading nowhere. Bob is everywhere, but he doesn't seem to notice me.

While this wreaks havoc on my self-esteem, I see now how God's firm answer of "no" is the most beautiful thin place of my life. In those times of wrestling with Him over His debilitating no, I see how very much I need Him, and how quickly He'd be replaced by Bob. And if I tell myself the truth, I know way down deep that I will place Bob on the throne of my life. Couple that with the rape at five and my gaping need for a father, I see God's severe mercy on my life during those years. So many with similar upbringings walk a painful path of sexual impurity. If I look myself in the mirror, I see my own potential to sin. ... I ache for me back then, how tethered I am to male attention. And really, it all falls back on my desire to be held and comforted as a parent would comfort. I placed on men the insufferable burden of becoming my parents—shoes no man should fill.

Even though I plead and cry and hope, God, in His sovereign kindness, holds all the Bobs far, far away for a long, long time. In college when I meet a man who I nearly place on the throne, God graciously severs the relationship, leaving me licking my wounds and asking all sorts of whys. For two years, I flounder in bewilderment, only to realize, finally, that I don't want to live my life for any Bob. I want to live for Jesus.

{holy pause}

I'm back.

I'm so utterly grateful God didn't answer my boyfriend prayer the way I demanded him to. And as I reflect on it, I realize afresh that God doesn't grant me all my wishes. Thankfully! Had I had instant success when I wrote my first book, what kind of crazy woman would I be today? If I'd had only a smooth, easy life as a mom and wife, how would I ever need to trust God?

My question for you: What is your boyfriend prayer right now? Can you take a moment to see beyond your perceived favorable answer and begin to see the wisdom of God in not answering it quite the way you want? Look back on

your life and marvel at how God didn't answer some of your prayers the way you wanted Him to. Are you thankful for that? Why or why not? Journal your answer or chat about it with a close friend.

*

I've worried whether I'd be a pessimist for the rest of my life. But, oddly, after our time in France, something paradoxical happened. I became strangely positive. But then I read the book *Learned Optimism* by Martin E. P. Seligman, PhD, and took a little test that bothered my little paradigm. Even though I felt more optimistic, I really was a true pessimist.

Drat.

On a few points, I was moderately optimistic, tempered by a slew of "very pessimistic"s. **These results, of course, result in more pessimism**.

So **I'm on a little quest this week about optimism**. I'm learning and doing things that help tilt my scale toward optimism, and **maybe along the way, it'll help you too.**

One thing I read recently (and I have to admit, I can't remember where) was that one way we can turn pessimism on its heel is to list the things that makes us happy. And then, the kicker: actually reorient our lives to do those things. So here's my list:

I am happiest when:

- The kids aren't spread out around the house, each of us in our own rooms.
- I am gardening.
- I am outside.
- I am praying for others, directly.
- I am running.
- I am creating art in some way.
- I'm taking pictures.
- I'm cooking something new and creative.
- I'm writing.
- We eat outside.
- We do something together as a family.
- We vacation. (Oh how we missed our vacation last summer!)

• I am exploring the Bible, particularly around a topic.
• I'm decorating the house.
• I'm at a farmer's market.
• I'm reading a cookbook.
• I'm spending one on one time with one of my kids.
• I'm dating my husband.
• I'm riding my bike.
• I'm listening to worship music.
• I'm singing worship songs.
• I'm talking to a great friend.
• I'm having lunch with a great friend.
• I'm planting flowers.
• I'm reading something beautifully written or compellingly fresh.
• I'm communicating with someone from another culture.
• I'm speaking to groups about healing from the past.
• I'm deliberately choosing not to worry and resting in God's peace.
• I'm receiving feedback about how one of my books has blessed someone.
• I'm drawing goofy cartoons.
• I'm investigating something and actually getting somewhere.
• I'm sitting quietly in a well organized, non-cluttered home.
• I'm donating excess stuff.
• I give money or possessions away.
• I surprise someone.
• I cook something for someone else.
• Guests are over.
• I'm hiking.
• I can smell the freshness of air.
• I'm reading/looking at decorating magazines.
• Flowers are blooming.
• Birds sing and I'm slow enough to hear them.
• Something new in nature catches my eye.
• I let go of the people who don't like me.
• I discover something new about Jesus.
• I'm laying out in the sun.
• I'm on the beach.
• I'm viewing the stars.
• I'm taking a walk with my husband.
• I'm with a group of dear friends on vacation.

OK, that's a long list!

Here's your assignment. **RIGHT NOW, grab a piece of paper and a pen and jot down the things that make you truly happy.** And then, this week, give yourself holy permission to do a few of them. Let me know how they affect your pessimism levels. Really, go. Write. Even if the things on your list are crazy, write them down anyway.

*

They thought I was more successful than I was. But they were wrong in their assumptions. And I'm left wondering what to do about it. Not to chastise those who thought more highly of me than they ought (or that I deserve), **but to think deeper about how I approach others**. I hope this makes sense.

Let me clarify: A writer who writes books, who is seemingly everywhere on the internet, is not necessarily successful. I may appear to have it all together. I may appear to have financial success. I may appear to have a glamorous life (ha ha...sometimes I write in my jammies!) **But the truth is, I'm an artist who struggles.** Who trusts God for provision. Who feels small and insignificant. Who battles my own fears, worries, and dreams. I worry about paying for college. I worry about the future. I worry far too much.

Since I'd been misunderstood to be more than I am, **it made me take a better look at the way I can be jealous of others' seeming success**. Or to take a deeper stab at my own icky jealousy or envy. I remember a time when I drove by a friends' house. It loomed large on the block, breathtaking, beautiful. I said a snide, jealous comment about it. Unfortunately, my window was down, and I noticed the owner in the garden. I don't know if she heard me or not, as she was always gracious to me, but I have worried about that moment ever since.

I had judged her for what she had. Yet, when I pulled back the curtain on her life, I saw much more complication there. The house really meant nothing in light of everything else. And I felt awful jumping to such a snippy conclusion. I am embarrassed to even type this. But it is instructive. How?

If you're thinking jealous, judgmental thoughts toward someone who has more stuff/intelligence/wit/looks/money/fame/power than you, what would it sound like if you verbalized them in front of that person? If you'd be embarrassed (and they'd be shocked), **then you probably have a problem**.

You're probably being unfair or unkind. Or jealous. Or envious.

Oh that we'd all just love each other. Oh that I would love you, as you are, no matter what you do or don't have. **Oh to see instead the light of Jesus in other**s, their uniqueness and beauty as He created each of us. Oh to let go of wanting more than our God-given lot. Oh to foster contentment. That's my prayer.

I have a hunch it's yours too.

*

I am a sucker for old homes. My husband knows this, and today he said casually, "You know, Mary, if *The Muir House* takes off, we should buy that home and make it The Muir House Bed and Breakfast."

"I already thought of that." I smiled back.

"Of course," he said.

The Muir House is my latest novel (Zondervan). It takes place mostly in Rockwall, where I live, in an old home that used to be a funeral home. I based it on the actual home near my house.

What prompted this post was something I watched on HGTV while folding clothes. A young twenty-something girl fell in love with an old, needy house. She had a slim budget and with that meager amount decided she'd renovate the entire home, including a kitchen and bathroom, all the hardwood floors, the plaster, every molding, ceiling, *etc*.

Her extended family came out for an entire summer helping her with the project, sacrificing for her sake, loving her well by nailing, sanding, hammering, refinishing. Every time I saw her family work on her behalf, I cried. And then when the show revealed the final home, I cried some more.

Something visceral snaps inside me when something old is made new, something dilapidated is restored.

Maybe because that's so much like my life. I was that old, rickety, falling down, broken house. Jesus decided to "buy" me one day, seeing my potential and His ability to renovate. He recruited members of His family to help sand, refurbish and rejuvenate me. And at the end of His work, I no longer looked forgotten or abandoned. I looked loved.

I've never owned an older home. In actuality, I'm no handywoman. But every time I walk through an old house, my heart soars. Perhaps one day God will see fit to give me that old farmhouse on acreage, a grand old lady in need of

love and restoration. For now, I'll marvel at Jesus' remodeling in my heart and settle myself there.

*

I felt it this weekend.

Home.

I sat high in the football stand, scanning the crowd below, watching the players move the ball. I knew in that moment I was in love--with a town, as if love could be as wide as streets and people and fight songs and friends.

I'm terrified to admit this.

Why?

Because I fear being happy in a place. I moved as a child, too much for my liking (as if I could control that). The nature of moving uproots me, rips out my roots, sometimes leaving tendrils of them still in the soil I'm torn from. Once married, we continued the tradition, new towns, new states, a new country. The move to France fully ripped me apart in every hard, yet good way. I learned deep lessons about identity, worth, and Jesus being my home. I learned the art and craft of blooming where I'm planted, even when I feel I don't belong.

But now we're on the cusp of living in a place the longest I've ever lived. I admit it freely: Rockwall, I'm smitten with you. I love your streets, your trees, the way the sun dances on the lake at dusk. I love your football games, your churches, your people. I love the mayor and his wife. I love the way my perennials thrive under your sunshine. I love neighbors (though I regret not engaging enough). I love my friends here. I love running toward the lake, feeling the breeze on my face. I love a big sky, populated with fluffy clouds. I love the taste of autumn here and the beautiful, relentless sunshine.

Over dinner, I talked to my daughter Sophie about this. I hesitated at first to say it, but then took the risk. "I feel like this is home," I told her.

"I do too," she said.

I let our words linger there, this mutuality of our family feeling planted in a place.

And I risk in sharing my heart here because I fear someday God will uproot me again, ask me to bloom somewhere else. I love Him enough to follow Him anywhere. I guess it's just a blessing, such a huge, beautiful blessing, to call a place home and smile as I say it.

*

It happened so long ago. Nearly forty years now. The year the boys came and took me away. Stole a year of my life. In ravines. Under trees. In a sheet-canopied bunk bed. With their friends in increasing number.

By grace, I faked sleep so they couldn't take me.

By grace, we moved away from those boys.

By grace, though others would try to attack through the years, God gave me legs to run away. Far away, palms sweating, heart beating, mind remembering.

I've walked through years of healing. Folks prayed. A lot. Friends listened. Counselors unpacked the abuse. Books helped. My husband supported. And yet, the struggle remains. Less so, but it's still there haunting.

I wrote a post, a very personal post, about how the marriage bed can be a place of healing for victims of sexual abuse. It's blessed folks. I'm thankful. But there's still a hint of that feeling of dirtiness that lingers. A place in the shadows where I beg God to show me beauty in the dark places. He has, oh He has. In thin places where the membrane between heaven and earth is sheer. I recounted His nearness in my memoir, *Thin Places*, where I bled on the page for the sake of others, so they would no longer feel alone.

I am not fully healed. I still fear. Sometimes I sleep. Or move away. Or run. But I'm closer to Jesus in the aftermath. He, who hung naked, fully exposed and humiliated on that cross. He who was victimized by others, yet also by my own sin. He who knew neglect, betrayal, fear. In a way, we share a deeper bond because I endured sexual abuse. He is a friend to the broken. He understands my pain. He walked through it on earth, and He continues to walk through it today. With me. With you. With millions of other victims.

I am not fully whole, but I am wholly loved by a holy God. I rest there today.

*

I'm convinced that the devil's greatest weapon is plain old discouragement. He whispers things in our ears, helping us along the pathway of discouragement.

- We look at others who don't seem to suffer and ask why we have a hard life.
- We covet someone else's lot in life.

• We allow our minds to go down streets they shouldn't go, living in the treacherous land of What If.
• We listen to the tidbits of worthlessness he says, then rehearse them. And then we say them back to ourselves!
• We view a problem as gigantic, and our heart and courage weakens

Here's a quote that might help:

"Are you in the midst of a situation where, as you pray, you find yourself putting the problem first? If so, you're starting where you should end. You're rehearsing the problem, making it seem larger than it is, when what you need to do is rehearse God's greatness and bigness. Then the problem shrinks to its right portions." Mark Buchanan, The Rest of God, page 74-75.

Oh to kick discouragement in its teeth by simply believing God is bigger than any obstacle. Oh to have that faith today!

*

France had a way of beating me down. Not the whole country, but the sum of our experience there. We'd made friends who were leaving the country and decided to throw an enormous, lavish party.

I didn't really want to go. I was in that place where I'd rather stay at home, safe inside the four walls of our tiny place, and be quiet and sad. But this was such a big celebration, I knew I couldn't bow out.

So Patrick and I went. We ate. We talked. We interacted with new people.

And then the dancing began. At first I didn't want to. I wanted to go to the bathroom and cry alone. But the beat of the music wooed me. Patrick and I danced. And danced some more. And the more my feet lifted off the floor, the lighter my mood became.

The wife of the couple came to me that night. She'd known I'd been battling depression there. She said something like, "See Mary, sometimes you just have to have fun, to let go."

That dance came back to me today. How free I felt in the moment, even when the moment was surrounded by heartache, fear, and the deepest fatigue and loneliness I'd ever experienced. The dance was a light in that darkness.

Which leads me to ask: How can you step outside your pain right now and dance? What one thing can you do to break the cycle of sadness? How can you

risk, step out of your comfort zone, and fly?

*

I perceive myself to be a wimp. The reality, if I'm honest, is that I'm not. I may not be Susie the Workout Queen by any stretch, but I can run a few miles, do a few girl pushups, and survive an hour-long boot camp (barely). Recently a triathlete wrote that I wasn't a novice at it since I'd done triathlons before. But I still feel like a neophyte.

Why is that?

Because my own personal perception of myself doesn't match the reality. I wonder if it's that way with you. Do you perceive yourself as less than?

I remember hearing once that folks perceived me as shy, yet I don't see myself this way. It plunged me into some introspection. Was I shy? Were others' perceptions of me accurate? In this case, my reality didn't match up with what other people thought. I'm not shy.

Which goes to show we all need some sort of grounding force, Someone who accurately knows us. That Someone is Jesus. He sees me as I am. He perceives the depths of me. He is not fickle. He doesn't overemphasize one part of me and de-emphasize another. And through it all, He loves me anyway.

He encourages, "You're not a wimp, Mary.

He soothes, "They simply don't know the outgoing you, Mary."

And He corrects, "Stop beating yourself up."

And He loves, "I made you to be you, and I love you."

He is my Reality, to be sure. My perceptions may cave with emotions, or be influenced by the opinions of others, but He stays the same. Mind if I rest there today?

- You are not the person devalued by others' casual opinions.
- You are not the sum of your righteous (or unrighteous) acts.
- You are not a thing to be consumed or used.
- You are not small and unworthy.
- You are not insignificant.
- You are not deserving of deceit.
- You are not the words spoken over you.
- You are not what they say you are.

You are who He says you are.

Beloved.

Welcomed.

Cherished.

Powerfully weak.

Beautifully rejuvenated.

Whole.

That's who you are.
That's who I am.
Though it's a battle to believe the right Voice.

Mind if I pray?

Lord, speak life over me, over my friends reading this book. Help us to hear Your aspirational whispers over us, Your words of courage and power and love and acceptance and grace. We need that Voice. Forgive us for letting the other voices rule our minds. Help us feel Your favor. Help us rest in Your pleasure right now. Amen.

*

Recently I had the privilege of hearing Charlie Peacock teach at Mount Hermon Christian Writers Conference. I loved what he had to say about art and the movement of our world, so much so that I picked up his book At The Crossroads, his magnum opus about CCM (Contemporary Christian Music). Fascinating, enlightening book. As a closet singer, and a lover of music, I so appreciate his heart and mind.

And then I read this gem:

"In truth, the idea that any element of God's creation—be it music or a tree—has to do something in order to justify its existence has more to do with capitalism, consumerism, and marketing than with the doctrine of creation" (p.

104).

This turned my world upside down. Why? Because my whole life I've (wrongly) felt that in order to justify my existence on earth, I had to do things. To perform. To be perfect. To do everything right. And if I didn't (which happens every. single. day), I felt I had to reason to be here.

But that's looking at creation (me) as a commodity, not as a created being. It's assigning worth based on my intrinsic value to produce, to fill holes, to do things.

It's not true.

It's not true.

It's not true.

As much as I've entrenched this idea way deep into my DNA, it's not true that I must live up to standards or be super cool to earn my keep here. I simply must be. To revel in being a creation, dearly loved by Jesus, sacrificed for, graced unconditionally.

I am not a product.

I do not need to market me to prove my worth to others.

I am too valuable to be consumed.

I wonder how much my mindset about everything is tainted by a consumerist mindset. I wonder if I view others as things to be had instead of people to be loved. I wonder why I've lacked in grace for myself when I didn't perform up to standards.

What if I'm just loved? Right now. Right here. For no other reason than I am a creation who breathes, laughs, weeps, rejoices, hollers, loves?

It may take me a while, but I'm liking the sound of these words: I don't have to justify the space I take up on earth any more.

And neither do you.

*

God speaks to me when I run. (Can you tell that by now?)

Today, chilled to the fingers, I ran toward the lake, my mind wandering. Something shiny and bright caught my eye. Caught in the overhead telephone line was the shredded remains of a kite. It couldn't get free, the tangles getting the best of it. But just as I looked skyward to see the imprisoned kite again, a flock of birds, flying in V formation, soared overhead.

In that moment, I knew.

Sometimes (a lot of times, if I'm willing to admit it), I am caught halfway between earth and heaven, imprisoned by something that looks an awful lot like shame. I am not alive where I'm caught. And yet, living creatures built to fly soar above me.

Those birds are what God intends me (and you!) to be. He never intended His children to become so entangled by shame and pain that they cease to live. That they give up and hang on a wire while others fly on the wind. He made us to fly.

I feel the need to break into prayer:

Oh dear Jesus. I want to fly. I'm tired of being tethered. Tired of the strings of shame wrapping themselves around me, choking me. Oh dear Jesus, make me a bird. Make me fly. Free me from whatever others have done that have shackled me to the wire. Free me from what I have done to myself and others that have kept me captive. I want to fly. So high. So long. To soar with You as my elevation. Raise me. Resurrect me. Make me alive. I love You. More than the wire. More than the tangles. More than the shame. More than the pain. Free me to fly, Jesus. Amen.

*

The Lord spoke to me as I jogged by this seemingly dead tree the other day. I'm finally coming to the place where I'd like to write about it.

So much of my earlier years felt like this tree—decaying, dried out, devoid of life. Sometimes our early days go this way, don't they? I'm not sharing this to point the finger, to blame, to even make sense of my childhood. Because today I am deeply aware that who I am today is resurrected from the decay of what once was. That, to me, is the beauty of this tree.

Because as I jogged by, the Lord reminded me to look up. Although the lower branches seemed stark and dead, the tree's upper branches boasted green brilliance. Such life! Such new, spring joy! Springing from a seemingly dead tree.

Then He reminded me of my husband's life-changing words to me. "Mary," he told me. "My hope is that I can make the latter half of your life more beautiful, more full, more alive than your first half."

He, by God's strength, has kept his word. I have a vibrant, joy-infused life

today. My trunk (and my humble beginnings) may bear the scars of a difficult past, but even so, life has sprouted. Alleluia!

*

I've spent the last two days studying confidence. What is it? Can we have it? Should we have it?

There are times I feel my confidence drain from me and I am left insecure. But as I studied Scripture, I found some very compelling and interesting tenets about confidence.

• **It is not dependent upon circumstances**. "When you are cast down, you will speak with confidence, and the humble person He will save" (Job 22:29). "If a river rages, he is not alarmed; he is confident though the Jordan rushes to his mouth" (Job 4:23). "Though a host encamp against me, my heart will not fear; though war arise against me, in spite of this I shall be confident" (Psalm 27:3). So, we can be in the pits of emotional despair, up to our eyeballs in raging rivers of trials, or feel battle weary as war erupts around us--and yet, we can be confident. Trials cannot steal our confidence unless we let them.

• **God is our confidence.**"For the Lord will be your confidence and will keep your foot from being caught" (Proverbs 3:26). "For You are my hope, O Lord God. You are my confidence from my youth" (Psalm 71:5). It's not that I have to conjure up confidence. God supplies it. He IS it. The God of the Universe who made stars with a whisper of His breath, who holds oceans in His palm, who fashioned Redwood trees--He is FOR us, on our side.

• **Fearing God rather than man is the key.** "In the fear of the Lord, there is strong confidence, and his children will have refuge" (Proverbs 14:26). *When People are Big and God is Small* touches on this. We have confidence when we fear/revere God more than we fear/revere other people's opinions. Perhaps the reason I shrink from confidence is that I worry incessantly about what other people think. Consuming myself with what really matters--what God thinks--will free me to be confident.

• **God gives confidence in impossible situations.** "And now, Lord, take note of their threats, and grant that Your bond-servants may speak

Your word with all confidence" (Acts 4:29). Even when we are threatened, worried, helpless or afraid, God will give us confidence to speak the truth in love.

• **It all comes from Him, not from ourselves.** "Such confidence we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God" (2 Corinthians 3:4-5). He supplies it. We need it. Without Him, we are like this: "So are the paths of all who forget God; and the hope of the godless will perish, whose confidence is fragile and whose trust is a spider's web" (Job 8:13-14).

• **Because of Jesus' death on the cross, we can confidently approach God.** "Let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16). "...Jesus Christ our Lord, in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him" (Ephesians 3:12). What a gift! We don't have to cower in fear beneath the titanic throne of God, but as a child who knows his king as father, we can scramble up the steps, onto the throne, into the lap of our Heavenly Father BECAUSE of what Jesus did on the cross. Our confidence is a result of His sacrifice for us. Our ability to boldly come to the Father is a gift, wrapped in the gift of Jesus' death and resurrection. WOW!

• **Confidence is something God wants us to hold onto.** "But Christ was faithful as a Son over His house--whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and boast of our hope firm until the end" (Hebrews 3:6). "Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward" (Hebrews 10:25). There is reward in our confidence. It is something to be prized and cherished. Because of Jesus, we have confidence. Throwing it away is like saying "Jesus, Your sacrifice was not enough. I can't approach the Father. I just can't. I've done too many terrible things." Jesus was enough. We are not enough. Don't throw away your confidence in what He has done. Yes, we fail. Yes, we hurt others. Yes, we make a royal mess of things. True. But Jesus made a way. Don't throw away that confidence. Don't let your sin keep you from the joy of relationship with your Heavenly Father. Remember the story of the prodigal son? The Father waited on tip-toes at the end of dusty road, longing for his son to return. He didn't wait with a hammer; He waited with outstretched arms. God the Father welcomes you today because of the outstretched arms of His Son on the cross. Hold onto that. Keep that confidence. "Beloved, if our heart

> does not condemn us, we have confidence before God" (1 John 3:21). A condemning heart steals our confidence. If that is you, lay your condemning heart before God as an offering. He is the only One capable of taking it. In its place, He will give you confidence--confidence that He loves you, accepts you, delights in you, and holds you.

Confidence is not the same as being assertive and pushy. It's a quiet knowing that God is in control, that He sees us and hears us. That no matter what may befall us, God is on the throne and we can approach Him any time because of Jesus' death and resurrection. Confidence is not an elusive quality that a fickle god dispenses on a whim. It is a promise, not because of our merit, but because of His.

Rest. Be assured. Don't let go of your confidence. The God who gives confidence does not let go of you.

*

This topic has been ricocheting in my heart and head many years. But recently, I've noticed a greater influx of reader email about this topic, so much so that I felt it would be wise to address it. Although I am thankful I haven't had an extreme experience with spiritual abuse, I have had some incidences that have scarred me and made me leery of churches and ministries that bully.

Some of my spiritual abuse experiences include:

- A leader above me telling me that even though I was burned out and losing my health, I had to stay in the ministry because if I didn't I would lose all my gifting to do future ministry.
- A church that repeatedly told us they basically had the corner on the market of Jesus and that if we had to go elsewhere, we would miss God's highest.
- A leader who found ministry to be a vehicle for his great gain, lying and manipulating donors to earn more and more money.
- A ministry that shamed me into throwing away all my evil music (including Lionel Ritchie and Duran Duran…oh the evil!)
- A leader who cornered me, threatened me, and yelled because I brought up a concern that others saw. This led to panic attacks.

Perhaps you have a story to tell too.

I woke up last night at 3 in the morning with this burden I couldn't shake. I sat down and wrote these traits of spiritually abusive ministries and churches. This is not an exhaustive list, but it typifies what happens. Often you don't realize you're in a situation until your health is damaged, your soul is torn, or your outside relationships suffer. My heart in sharing this is to simply shed light on unhealthy, manipulative, controlling practices.

Spiritually abusive ministries…

1. **Have a distorted view of respect.** They forget the simple adage that respect is earned, not granted. Abusive leaders demand respect without having earned it by good, honest living.
2. **Demand allegiance as proof of the follower's allegiance to Christ.** It's either his/her way or no way. And if a follower deviates, he is guilty of deviating from Jesus.
3. **Use exclusive language.** "We're the only ministry really following Jesus." "We have all the right theology." Believe their way of doing things, thinking theologically, or handling ministry and church is the only correct way. Everyone else is wrong, misguided, or stupidly naive.
4. **Create a culture of fear and shame.** Often there is no grace for someone who fails to live up to the church's or ministry's expectation. And if someone steps outside of the often-unspoken rules, leaders shame them into compliance. Can't admit failure but often searches out failure in others and uses that knowledge to hold others in fear and captivity. They often quote scriptures about not touching God's anointed, or bringing accusations against an elder. Yet they often confront sin in others, particularly ones who bring up legitimate biblical issues. Or they have their circle of influence take on this task, silencing critics.
5. **Often have a charismatic leader at the helm who starts off well, but slips into arrogance, protectionism and pride**. Where a leader might start off being personable and interested in others' issues, he/she eventually withdraws to a small group of "yes people" and isolates from the needs of others. Harbors a cult of personality, meaning if the central figure of the ministry or church left, the entity would collapse, as it was entirely dependent on one person to hold the place together.

6. **Cultivate a dependence on one leader or leaders for spiritual information**. Personal discipleship isn't encouraged. Often the Bible gets pushed away to the fringes unless the main leader is teaching it.
7. **Demand servanthood of their followers, but live prestigious, privileged lives.** They live aloof from their followers and justify their extravagance as God's favor and approval on their ministry. Unlike Jesus' instructions to take the last seat, they often take the first seat at events and court others to grant them privileges.
8. **Buffer him/herself from criticism by placing people around themselves whose only allegiance is to the leader.** Views those who bring up issues as enemies. Those who were once friends/allies swiftly become enemies once a concern is raised. Sometimes these folks are banished, told to be silent, or shamed into submission.
9. **Hold to outward performance but rejects authentic spirituality**. Places burdens on followers to act a certain way, dress an acceptable way, and have an acceptable lifestyle.
10. **Use exclusivity for allegiance.** Followers close to the leader or leaders feel like insiders. Everyone else is on the outside, though they long to be in that inner circle.

Have you ever experienced this kind of situation? What did you do? How did you heal in the aftermath? And what can we do as responsible Christ followers to expose this kind of abuse? What can we do as leaders to follow in the gentle footsteps of Jesus?

*

It's an interesting pattern we find in Scripture. First folks break down, then God breaks through. This leads to breakout. Look at Joseph. His breakdown happened slowly (but painfully) over many years as he suffered rejection by his brothers, was sold into slavery, framed by Mrs. Potiphar, and landed in jail. His breakthrough came when he learned to be obedient to God when no one was watching, when he entrusted his reputation to God. Only then did Pharah nab him and begged for dream interpretation. The breakout happened when Pharaoh promoted him in an instant, and Joseph was able to save the very family that rejected him.

Breakdown.

Breakthrough.

Breakout.

I'm in the breakdown phase right now. How about you? I'm the fishermen on Galilee, trusting far too much in my empty, unsatisfying nets. Nothing seems to be working. I place my nets over the edge of my boat's precipice, hoping, hoping, hoping.

But something my friend Mike said in a prayer group sticks to me now. He said, "The disciples followed Jesus at the pinnacle of their livelihood."

The disciples did have breakdown, then breakthrough when Jesus filled their nets with the biggest catch of their ENTIRE LIVES. Then He asked them to follow Him. They could've stayed. But they didn't. They followed Jesus. And then the breakout, in terms of the kingdom of God and changed lives, exploded.

I wonder what would happen if I found success in this writing gig **if I'd be willing to drop it all and follow Jesus no matter what.** I'd like to say that I would, but I'm not sure. I've been working so hard at this for so long. The sweet reward of success is intoxicating. I pray I'll be able to leave it all, if He asks.

You may be wondering why I have this particular picture on my post. It's the church I walked by every day bringing my kids to school in France. In that moment, as my career was in its infancy, God asked me to follow Him to France. And I did (oh by His strength). So, perhaps it's in my DNA to drop my nets.

I pray so.

I want to follow.

*

I had some interesting interactions this week, just a few actually. But in them, I realized that I'm just not that young girl anymore. I don't turn heads. I feel my age, particularly as my wrist and hand hurts. As I looked at myself in the mirror, I wondered when it all happened, this aging thing. And I realized that I am growing old, less beautiful in the world's eyes.

I hate to admit this, but it bothered me. A lot. I lamented the loss of youth, the loss of young beauty, the loss of who I used to be. This realization put me in a funk, not one that I shared with anyone outwardly, but one I battled with internally for several days.

And then the Lord spoke.

Oh how He spoke.

It came after a sigh of a prayer where I prayed, “Lord, I don’t want to be so consumed by this. I don’t want to be shackled to who I once was and who I am now. I don’t want to live a life of regret, always grasping at youth. I want to be content as I grow older. Help me.”

“Picture a beautiful soul,” He said.

And I stopped.

And listened.

And tried to picture what a beautiful soul looked like.

But all I came up with was a montage of accusing photos that shout my inadequacy from the checkout line. Young skinny women, perfectly polished, not me. Though I tried, I couldn’t picture a beautiful soul. But I’m trying. I’m trying to picture something full of shekinah glory, sparkly and radiant, the center of myself.

And as I picture it, I see myself standing before Jesus, in my new body, holding my soul out to him like a diadem.

You know what? I want that diadem to be beautiful. I want the worry of my decay to be but a fleeting thought. I want to cultivate the kind of life that creates a bigger jewel in my soul, enlarging my heart, making me more like Jesus. When I see Jesus face to face, unashamed because of His sacrificial act, I want my soul to be beautiful. I want Him to see it, to be pleased with how it shines.

But I can’t do that if I constantly point back to the young, naive me, worrying about fading beauty, now can I?

Dear, dear Jesus, I want to picture a beautiful soul. Help me live for that beautiful soul, not for that which fades and fades and fades. Amen.

*

I’ve had my share of fear in this lifetime, as have you, I’m sure. But lately they’re cropping up in my pursuit of words on a page.

Over the years, I’ve received a lot of email about my writing, mostly positive and kind. But in the course of writing umpteen books and blogs, I’ve also had people disagree with me. Most of these have been kindhearted as well. Once in awhile I receive a virulent, angry email, full of sarcasm, meant only to demean me. Thankfully, this is rare. But when it happens, it takes me several weeks to recuperate. And those words, though deleted, haunt me.

This week I’m writing scared. An angry email from the past has kept its clutches in my heart and mind and warped my perception of myself as a writer.

Every word I write, I scrutinize. Every paragraph I pen, I fret about. Will it not be enough? Will it bring more anger? Will I incite more hate mail?

I cannot live that way, and neither can you.

We cannot let the haters of this world define us.

Or frighten us into no longer being ourselves. Because the letter that hurt me was about my style of writing, what makes my words uniquely Mary. I couldn't change that if I tried, **and if I did, I would no longer be writing as Mary DeMuth**.

Which goes to show that no matter who we are or what we do, we must be ourselves, and in so doing, we'll make people angry. **If we lived safe lives, always afraid of what others think, we'll live in the land of vanilla.** I don't want my writing life to live in reaction to someone's bully comments.

I'll end this by quoting from one of my favorite movies, *Strictly Ballroom*. The protagonist, Scott Hastings, gets in trouble for deviating from others' expectations, gaining enemies aplenty, even in his own home. His father bowed to the forces that be and capitulated. He danced the same old steps. But Scott gives up everything, even fame within the dancing community to dance his own steps. In the last scene, his father says this: "We had the chance but we were scared. We walked away. WE LIVED OUR LIVES IN FEAR!"

You have the chance right now. To be yourself. To write or work or perform or dance or sing or be uniquely you. Here's a warning. Some people won't like it. Some will send you letters about your errant ways. Some might ridicule you. Don't let that criticism shake you or make you shrink from being yourself. Be all you.

James has something very helpful to say about this when he wrote, "When all kinds of trials and temptations crowd into your lives my brothers, don't resent them as intruders, but welcome them as friends! Realise that they come to test your faith and to produce in you the quality of endurance. But let the process go on until that endurance is fully developed, and you will find you have become men of mature character with the right sort of independence" (Phillips translation).

So next time you're criticized, try to shake hands with it, not as a statement of your worth, but as a way to grow your faith. **And then boldly dance your steps. I dare you!**

Postscript

God has been up to something new in my life over the past year. An unsettling. A shift in perspective. A new life. He is freeing me, moment by moment.

Which is why I changed my tagline from Turning Trials to Triumph to **Live Uncaged.** It's not that I don't embody the first tagline. It's that it seemed to place more emphasis on trials, and I really didn't like the word triumph. It connotes something I've done, as if I've triumphed over my past in my own strength. So not true. It's all Jesus, folks.

And as I examine what the Lord has done in my heart these past few months, I know **He** has uncaged me. Set me free. Allowed me to soar. This is something I couldn't do on my own; it's His sheer gift of grace. Nor is it that I'm a Pollyanna now, rejoicing when bad things happen. It's that my perspective on my life is shifting from pessimism to optimism. A Jesusy optimism.

I learned this truth: **I no longer need to be defined by the trials in the past.** I am not Mary who suffered (though it is part of my story). I am Mary who has been set free. Untangled. Opened up. Ready for new things. Anticipatory.

I'm reminded of one of my favorite Scriptures which I've quoted earlier in this book:

Isaiah 43:18-19
New International Version (NIV)
"Forget the former things;
do not dwell on the past.
See, I am doing a new thing!
Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?
I am making a way in the wilderness
and streams in the wasteland."

I have spent a lot of time in the past, dwelling there, ruminating, digging deeply. But God has been clear over the past 12 months that He is about to do something brand new. He is going to restore the desolation, renew what has been lost. He asks me (and you) the probing question, "Will you not perceive it?"

I believe our cages (usually created from our painful past) have become comfortable and easy. We've learned to live in them, to have them be our normal. Flying and soaring are too scary, too new, too different. We'd rather live

trapped because it's become our strange comfort zone.

In Colorado during our vacation, the Lord directed me to the Scriptures about fowlers. A fowler is someone who catches a bird in a trap or snare. He is a type of hunter who observes the behavior of birds to predict what they will do next. Then he traps the bird based on what it typically does. In like manner, Satan is our fowler, but Jesus sets us free. Satan wants to trip us up. Jesus wants to watch us fly.

Consider this scripture: **"For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the deadly pestilence" (Psalm 91:3, ESV).**

Or this: **"We have escaped like a bird out of the fowler's snare; the snare has been broken, and we have escaped. Our help is in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth" (Psalm 124:7-8, NIV).**

Charles Spurgeon aptly expounds about this freedom here:

God delivers his people from the snare of the fowler in two senses. From, and out of. First, he delivers them from the snare—does not let them enter it; and secondly, if they should be caught therein, he delivers them out of it. The first promise is the most precious to some; the second is the best to others. "He shall deliver thee from the snare." How? Trouble is often the means whereby God delivers us. ... At other times, God keeps his people from the snare of the fowler by giving them great spiritual strength, so that when they are tempted to do evil they say, "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" ... Thou shalt yet be brought out of all evil into which thou hast fallen, and though thou shalt never cease to repent of thy ways, yet he that hath loved thee will not cast thee away; he will receive thee, and give thee joy and gladness, that the bones which he has broken may rejoice. ***No bird of paradise shall die in the fowler's net.***

We are all birds of paradise, meant to soar. We are meant to be free. To live so fully engaged and joyful in the present that most folks wouldn't be able to tell that we've had difficult pasts. That's how big our God is compared to our trials. **"For he shatters the doors of bronze and cuts in two the bars of iron. ... He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, and burst their bonds apart" (Psalm 107:6, 14).**

My heart for you who are reading this book is that you'll experience uncaged, joyful freedom as I have. I'm still in process. I still deal in the doldrums, but I'm seeing more light lately. And that is why I write. I can't help but tell you the beautiful things God is doing in my life. God gave me a voice. **"If the Lord had not been my help, my soul would've lived in the land of**

silence” (Psalm 49:17).

He’s given you a voice, too.
And wings to fly.
Dare to.

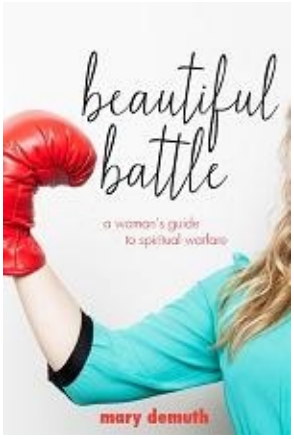
More Books by Mary DeMuth
to Help You Live Uncaged

If you enjoyed this book about getting set free from the past, you may be interested in this one that deals with one of the scariest, painful battles many people face:



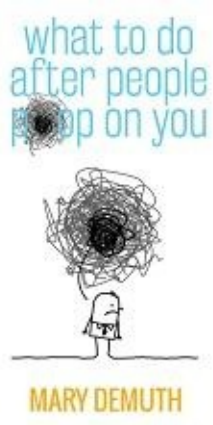
Not Marked: Finding Hope and Healing after Sexual Abuse

Or maybe you feel like you're in a battle, and you need a guide to navigate the trenches.



Beautiful Battle: A Woman's Guide to Spiritual Warfare

Thanks a Bundle!



My passion is to help you live an uncaged, freedom-infused life. As a thank you to you, I have a free ebook I'd like to offer you that mirrors that joyful message. **Simply click here to download it.** I won't sell or give your email to evil spammers, but I will send you content like this once a month. You can opt out at any time, but the free ebook is yours to keep nonetheless. (Note: I like to write free ebooks, so the title and content may change by the time you're reading this.)

A Super Quick Favor:

When you flip to the next page, you'll see a landing page set up by Amazon to review *Live Uncaged: Find the Freedom You've Always Wanted*. The way I make a living is selling my books, and the more honest reviews, the more the book gets noticed. Can you take a moment and write a short 1-2 sentence review?

And if this book has benefitted you, would you please take another moment and share the book on Twitter and Facebook? I so appreciate it.

If you'd like to see all my bucketload of books (designed to help you live amazingly uncaged), simply go to http://www.marydemuthbooks.com.

Mind if I pray for you?

Jesus, I pray for the person holding this book that You would set in motion what needs to be done to be set gloriously free. You so much desire that we live in light of Your reparation, not shackled to the haunting of the past. Give us guts, hope, renewal and joy. Use our past memories as springboards to new life. Help us rest in knowing we are worth Your time, worth Your healing, worth Your intervention. Unstick us. Unravel the harmful patterns in our lives. Do something brand new. We trust You to do good work in us. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

May this be an amazing, uncaged day!

Mary DeMuth
http://www.marydemuth.com

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