

A woman with her back to the camera, wearing a white dress with a colorful floral pattern and dark boots, stands on a beach at sunset. Her arms are outstretched to the sides. The background is a bright, golden sunset over the ocean. There are decorative gold scrollwork elements in the top-left and bottom-right corners.

FOREWORD BY SUSIE LARSON

SUZANNE ELLER

Speaker Proverbs 31 Ministries

AUTHOR OF *The Unburdened Heart*

THE

*Mended*

HEART

GOD'S HEALING  
FOR YOUR  
BROKEN PLACES

## THE *Mended* HEART

Being hurt and heartbroken is a sad reality for most of us. But I'm so thankful for this treasure of a book written by my friend Suzie Eller. Page by page, Suzie will help you understand how God's truth can heal your pain so you can move forward whole and healed.

### LYSA TERKEURST

New York Times Bestselling Author  
President of Proverbs 31 Ministries

If you've ever felt too broken for God to fix, then *The Mended Heart* is for you. Suzie Eller takes you by the hand and guides you step-by-step toward the only Source that offers complete wholeness. Each chapter exclaims, "There's no hurt God can't heal." Do yourself a favor—read this book!

### MICCA CAMPBELL

Speaker, Proverbs 31 Ministries  
Author, *An Untroubled Heart*

The message of *The Mended Heart* is especially uplifting. The author beautifully emphasizes the redemptive power of Jesus and his glorious triumph of overcoming the plight of this world—a much-needed message to those carrying the burden of their personal sufferings. As a biblical counselor, I repeatedly come face-to-face with clients bearing the weight of their own brokenness and in need of a "mended heart." Readers who have ever known strife caused by adversity and worry will find this book to be an invaluable read as they discover the battle has been won by what Jesus has already done for us on the cross.

### CHRISTINA CALK

Board Certified Biblical Counselor  
Family Pastor at Praxis Community Church

*The Mended Heart* is part challenge, honest storytelling and deep, deep encouragement for anyone who has experienced loss, betrayal or pain. Eller acts as a gentle guide, shepherding you through your pain to find wholeness and purpose on the other side. Tenderly told, and filled to the brim with Jesus, this book will prove to be a blessing to many.

### MARY DEMUTH

Author, *The Wall Around Your Heart: How Jesus Heals You When Others Hurt You*  
Blogger at *Your Life Uncaged*, [MaryDeMuth.com](http://MaryDeMuth.com)

If you have experienced a broken heart due to pain, disappointment and hurt inflicted by others or because of your own wrong choices, read this book. In *The Mended Heart*, Suzie Eller reveals life-changing biblical principles and answers the tough questions we are sometimes afraid to ask. The "Just You and God" section will lead you step-by-step on a journey to healing. Don't miss this important book!

## CAROL KENT

Speaker and Bestselling Author, *When I Lay My Isaac Down* and *Unquenchable: Grow a Wildfire Faith That Will Endure Anything*

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“What You Don’t Have to Do,” the first chapter in Suzanne Eller’s *The Mended Heart*, hooked me. It wasn’t one of those books that gives simplistic formulas to solve all problems and makes us feel guilty because they don’t work. Eller writes with a warm sensitivity as she touches the wounded places. She writes with a compassion that helps us cope with the worst of pain—always reminding us that God’s love mends our hearts.

## CECIL MURPHEY

Author or Co-author of more than 130 books, including *I Believe in Heaven* and *I Believe in Healing*, and bestsellers *90 Minutes in Heaven* and *Gifted Hands: The Ben Carson Story*.

In *The Mended Heart*, Suzanne Eller holds her readers’ broken hearts in tender hands as she layers on healing truths about Jesus, the Healer. She skillfully communicates both the realities of our hurts—whether self-inflicted or caused by others—and the undeniable Hope for living whole again. Hope with a name—Jesus. Don’t skip the questions and answers at the end of the book. Eller’s empathy and practicality shine brightly in these “Q&A” pages.

## CYNTHIA RUCHTI

Speaker and Author, *Ragged Hope: Surviving the Fallout of Other People’s Choices*

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SUZANNE ELLER

*Speaker Proverbs 31 Ministries*

THE  
*Mended*  
HEART

GOD'S HEALING FOR YOUR BROKEN PLACES

  
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For privacy, the names of some of the people profiled have been changed. Permission has been granted for personal stories used throughout.

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# Dedication

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*I dedicate this book to my Savior, whom I rediscovered all over again in a small community prayer room in Fayetteville, Arkansas. His presence wrapped around me as I read and researched His story and as I prayed that He might show me what it means to live in His mission statement so that we might be made whole. I celebrated His response to flawed and hurting humanity, and how knowing Him and being known is such a gift.*

*I want to thank Richard, my husband. Who knew that when you saw that girl sitting in her Mustang, her hair flying in the wind, that we'd still be on an adventure 34 years later? Thank you for understanding and championing this call on my heart. You encourage me and offer grace when deadlines loom. You are my friend, my love, and a man who knows Jesus well.*

*To Leslie, Stephen, Melissa, Josh, Ryan and Kristin, you are some of my greatest cheerleaders. I'm so grateful for adult children who not only love to spend time with their mom, but who also encourage me to pursue all that God has placed on my heart.*

*To my grandbabies: Elle, Luke, Jane, Audrey and Josiah. Having five grandchildren ages three and under is not only crazy fun, but it's also a blast! Twenty-three years ago, when I heard the word "cancer," I didn't know if I would see my own babies grow up. To have your little arms wrapped around my neck is sheer joy.*

*And to my mom, Karen Morrison. I love you like crazy. Now we can have a lunch date!*

*I also want to thank Rachelle Gardner, my Books and Such agent. Thank you for partnering with me.*

*Thank you to Kim Bangs and Regal. How lucky I am that my editor and publisher are friends who pray for their authors, who continually encourage, and who show their love for Christ in their excellence and work! Special thanks to Kim, Jackie and Tasha, who selflessly work behind the scenes so that these words can reach as many as possible.*

*I also want to thank the women who served as a focus group as I penned these words. Thank you to Jennifer, Jill, Julie, Gloria, Sarah, Tracie and Amy. You didn't blink when I scrapped the first three months of work to start fresh. You simply jumped on board and started over with me. Thank you for reading each chapter, for being honest, and for sharing those "a-ha!" moments when the text touched you personally, as well as those "oh no!" moments when I needed to dig in a little deeper.*

*Last, I want to thank you, the reader. When you show up on my blog ([www.tsuzanneeller.com](http://www.tsuzanneeller.com)) or on Twitter or Facebook, or you send an email, it tells me that all the words written in a little coffee shop didn't just disappear into thin air. I love that we pray, explore God's grace, and discover healing*

*together. What a privilege!*

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# Foreword

As a young mom, I wore fear, worry and anxiety around me like a heavy old robe. I had three young boys and battled a disease that left me exhausted and constantly frustrated. Even so, I enjoyed sweet times of fellowship with God. I pursued Him, ran after Him with a passion and zeal. I pulled myself out of bed in the mornings before the boys got up so I could have some time in the Word, time for prayer and time to listen to what the Lord had to say to me. He really was my greatest treasure, even though up to that point my life was nothing like I thought it would be.

I struggled more often than not. I hated my fears and insecurities; I wondered if I'd ever get free from the past pain that plagued me so, or if God would ever deliver me from the sickness that sapped me of my strength. I finally cried out to God in the most reckless way, "Lord Jesus! I can't pursue You more than I do right now with three little kids and this wretched disease! I pray. I read. I journal. I spend time with You. But when I get up from this place, my life seems no different. I still battle the same fears and insecurities. What am I missing, Lord? Where's the victory?"

I waited.

Then He spoke to me:

*I get that you love Me. But you don't seem to understand that I love you. So from now on—until I tell you differently—every time you're about to say, "I love You, Lord," I want you to turn it around and say, "You love me, Lord." Say it now.*

Shocked and surprised by this revelation, I whispered under my breath, "You love me, Lord."

He whispered to me again, *Say it again.*

"You love me, Lord." I repeated this statement several times and had to admit, something about those words seemed both foreign and familiar—foreign because I'd put more emphasis on my walk with God than on His walk with me; and familiar because I realized that He designed me *for Him*, to be loved by Him, to walk with Him, so that *living in response to that love* would become the most natural, supernatural thing in the world.

Scripture tells us that God loved us first. While we were *yet* sinners, He died for us (see Rom. 5:6)—that it's not about how high we can jump, but that He stooped down to make us great (see Phil. 2:18:35). And that "it is *for freedom* that Christ has set us free" (Gal. 5:1, emphasis added).

We've all been bruised and battered by this life. People hurt us and we make our own bad choices, and, for far too many, that's where the story ends. But it doesn't have to be that way. There's a way to get unstuck, a way through the valley and to the other side.

God extends His hand to you on this journey and, if you trust Him, He'll do such a deep work in you that you'll barely recognize yourself once the story is over.

My friend Suzie Eller has written a book that invites you to take those steps toward healing today. She'll hold your hand, speak life to your soul and remind you of many important things, like:

You are not alone.

You don't have to earn God's love.

~~You don't have to run anymore.~~

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Suzie will teach you the wonder of a changed perspective—how when you shift your focus from what you do to what Christ has already done, that's when the healing begins. His finished work for you is enough to save you, *and heal you*.

Suzie is a wise woman of God with oodles of life experience. She oozes the love of God because she walks intimately with Him. Her greatest passion is to see others healed and restored and mobilized to be and do everything God intended for them, because that's what God has done for her.

Listen to this friend of mine. She speaks with wisdom and authority and compassion. Your healing journey truly is about to begin.

May God surprise and bless you with rich and deep revelations of His love in the days to come.

Susie Larson

Radio Host, Author, Speaker

What Jesus Has  
Already Done for You

# *Jesus' Mission Statement*

*“The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me,  
Because He has anointed Me  
To preach the gospel to the poor;  
He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted,  
To proclaim liberty to the captives  
And recovery of sight to the blind,  
To set at liberty those who are oppressed;  
To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD.”  
Then He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant  
and sat down.*

*And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him.  
And He began to say to them,  
“Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”*

LUKE 4:18-21, NKJV

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# Introduction

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*“I am anointed to preach the gospel to the poor,  
to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives,  
to give sight to the blind, and to set at liberty those who are bruised,”  
Jesus said in the most magnificent Mission Statement ever conceived.  
And He fulfilled it perfectly, exquisitely, completely.*

JON COURSEN<sup>1</sup>

Whenever I meet a woman with broken places in her heart and being, I almost immediately begin to wonder what she will look like in the hands of our Savior.

What will He do in those broken places?

In what ways will His touch change the direction of her life?

Who is she destined to be with a heart made whole?

Considering the possibilities excites me. For Jesus came to heal the brokenhearted! In fact, healing was part of His self-proclaimed mission statement (see Luke 4:18). He stood in Nazareth—His boyhood hometown—as He proclaimed those words. The crowd looked at Him and saw a carpenter’s son. Some questioned. Others walked away. Yet those who dared to believe discovered that knowing Jesus transformed their lives.

Those who accepted Jesus’ proclamation as truth put their feet on a new path. Even though Jesus’ mission statement was a fulfillment of the teachings they had studied all their lives, it challenged everything they had ever been told. This proclamation was hard to grasp, because it led them away from a tradition-based religion to the premise of an intimate relationship. It challenged the idea that they had to earn or work their way into faith. Instead, they were asked to accept that they were on God’s mind to such a degree that compassion came in the form of a Savior who was willing to shoulder a burden they—and we—weren’t equipped to carry.

Jesus stood in front of the crowd that day prepared to embrace a cross that would remove our sorrow and replace it with peace. This obedient sacrifice placed Jesus’ feet on a road that led to suffering for Him—but had a destination of healing, restoration and redemption for each of us.

Jesus’ message needed to be spoken then, and it’s just as powerful today. It’s a message that, if you embrace it, will challenge you to seek beyond what you see and feel, to find the Luke 4:18 threads running through your faith and inside of you.

Years ago I spoke at a small church. Afterwards two women approached me. They could almost pass for twins, except for the scars borne by one.

“She rescued me,” the younger sister said. “She drove through the night, even after I told her to stay away. She made me leave with her. I would be dead today if she hadn’t.”

This woman had filled her broken places with a man who fractured not only her heart, but also her bones. Even after her sister whisked her away in the dark of night, she didn’t know how to begin to heal. She wasn’t sure if God even knew that she existed.

“Can we pray?” I asked.

She knelt eagerly, pressing her forehead into my knees. She wrapped her arms around my legs before I could kneel beside her. Years of loss, pain, and a chasm so wide she feared there was no way back bled through her tears.

It is in moments like this that I realize how human I am, and how little I truly have to offer.

*But God.*

As we prayed, I placed my hands gently on her head and asked God for what felt impossible in the natural. I cannot explain the presence that filled that small space. It was a tangible, almost overwhelming compassion of a Savior for His beautiful daughter.

Now, this might be the point where you say, “My life doesn’t look like that. Perhaps this isn’t the book for me.”

There is brokenness that is easy to see, like that of a woman marked by abuse or of an addict perched on a sizzling sidewalk. But brokenness has many faces. It’s found in the heart of a 30-something woman who thrusts a photo of her handsome husband and a little girl with a sweet baby-tooth smile into my hands and whispers, “I just can’t keep feeling this way. I want more for them. I need more for me.”

It’s found in those who have been abused by a church doctrine or by parents who mixed Christianity with harsh or damaging theology. It’s the mark on the heart of a mother who held her young daughter in her arms as breath left her child’s body. It’s found in the woman whose life turned upside down when her husband left her.

Brokenness can result from discouragement and unmet expectations—in plans that fly far astray from the way you thought they would go; from events you didn’t see coming and couldn’t prevent even if you did; from the choices of your past—or the choices of others that brought pain into your life. We could focus on how the brokenness came to be, but what might happen if we turned to the promise found in Luke 4 instead?

Every story is unique—and each story, including yours, is important. In the pages of this book we’ll meet women who arrived at brokenness from vastly different starting points. But brokenness does not have to be the end of any of our tales. When we couple our stories with the Jesus Factor, we are offered the beautiful gift of a mended heart.

Now, when Jesus shared His mission statement, those standing in front of Him were familiar with the origin of the words (see Isa. 61:1-2), but they didn’t necessarily know how to apply them. The parents and grandparents and great-great-great-grandparents had talked about the Messiah who would one day arrive. But they were looking for a King, not a heart surgeon.

They were awaiting a sword-carrying, chariot-driving God of power and might who would rescue them from the nations that oppressed them and avenge them of misdeeds done to the nation of Israel. They didn’t recognize that the prophecies actually depicted a Savior who came specifically to open blind eyes, set prisoners free, mend broken hearts and the bruised spirits of His sons and daughters, and bridge the gap that divided man from the freedom of an oh-so-personal relationship with the Creator.

Though they didn’t quite grasp it, Jesus fully understood who He was and why He had come—and who was on God’s mind when He sent Him.

Maybe you’ve been searching for healing for a long time. You recognize brokenness because you *feel* it. Perhaps you have come to identify yourself as broken, or maybe others have tossed about the word when they describe you. Put yourself in that hopeful crowd. Hear what Jesus is saying to you. Those words spoken in the synagogue in Nazareth have your name on them. You can never be s

broken that He can't put the pieces back together. Your broken or wounded places may have caused you to feel "less than"—but to our heavenly Father, healing your heart is the very reason Jesus was sent. God's promise of healing is for you if you've been asking these questions:

*What's wrong with me?*

*Why can't I get past this?*

*God, do You even see me?*

When you realize that Luke 4:18-21 is for you, it creates a brand new set of questions. But we look at only one at this point of your journey:

*What miracle does my God desire to perform in me?*

I believe in miracles, because I am one. Jesus transformed me from a fractured, insecure, hurting young woman into a strong woman of faith, a mom, a wife, and a grandma to five beautiful babies.

Long after my initial encounter with Christianity, my Savior has been my Refuge and my Healer those times when life has hit so hard that it feels as if my breath has been taken away. He's a Rock so secure that I am able to stop running from brokenness and instead run toward my God and all that He has in store for me.

When we grab hold of Jesus' personal mission for us, something profound begins to take place. We become an integral part of the good news. The apostle John says this:

Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written (John 21:25).

Yes, there are 66 books in the Bible. But the story of God's people is still being written. As we walk with Him, we become the new books that might never be canonized but that proclaim the power of Jesus for others to see. What a beautiful story these living books tell—and what a wonderful gift they are to those who hear them! When we've experienced brokenness, and Jesus has healed our hearts, we can't help but come alongside others who are walking where we once walked, joining an army of strong women of faith to tell the world that there is a place beyond brokenness.

May I share something with you as we start this study together? Sometimes miracles are instantaneous: The person who could not walk suddenly leaps to her feet and dances away, all her troubles behind her. But for most of us, it's a process.

Embracing Jesus' mission statement might require going against your feelings. It's a trust walk—both on days when you feel it and on those days when you trust God despite your feelings. It's not always easy, but things of great value rarely come without personal discovery, exploration, insight and renewed direction.

Even as God works in you, you will still be human and fallible. You won't please everybody with your progress or the rate at which it takes place. At the end of it, you might not even look like a perfect church girl (which is okay—it's not all it's made out to be). But along the way you'll realize that you matter to God and that your existence impacts others, and you will no longer reside in those broken places, because you've found something much richer.

This is no less a miracle than the person who is healed instantly.

So, my friend, let's do this. Let's begin to soak in the truth that Jesus started your healing long ago, when He proclaimed His mission with you on His heart. The first step in this process is to establish a solid foundation—to understand what you *don't* have to do, because it's already been put in place just for you by Jesus.



## Note

1. Jon Courson, “A Most Magnificent Mission—Luke 4:18-19,” Sermon [Index.net](http://www.sermonindex.net). <http://www.sermonindex.net/modules/articles/index.php?view=article&aid=24495> (accessed October 2013).

# What You Don't Have to Do

*When the Greeks looked at a building's blueprint, they pictured the building whole and complete. . . . The Hebrews looked at the same blueprint more practically. They envisioned the process of building from hard hats to hammers, from scaffolding to skylights. "Ah," the Hebrews said. "This is perfect." The Hebrews and the early Christians understood perfection as a process, not a product.*

KENDA CREASY DEAN, *THE GODBEARING LIFE*

"Do A and B, and C will happen."

"Stay on track."

"Try harder!"

"Pull yourself up by your bootstraps."

"What's wrong with you?!"

Have you heard any of these? Maybe you've even said them to yourself as you tried a hundred times and failed. Sheer willpower may have worked for a while . . . and then unraveled. Perhaps you look like you've got it all together, but the mess that is underneath is still there.

The reality is that most of us care very much about our wellbeing; so when people tell us to clean up our act and do better, it's just a rehash of promises we've made to ourselves, like:

*I will be content.*

*I will try harder.*

*I will get past this somehow.*

*I . . . I . . . I . . .*

Your list is more personalized because you know yourself like no other. But can we put our list aside for a moment? There is power in choices, but let's begin by building a foundation on the choices we *don't* have to make.

## THE JESUS FACTOR

Herod the king was distraught. A child had been born; his birth was heralded by the very angels (see Luke 2:13-14). Some said this baby was the Christ child, the long-awaited Messiah. Herod was

jealous man, so—even though he had absolute power and rule—in his insecurity he commanded a party of Magi (wise men in service to the king) to locate this child in order that his life might be taken. It is said that Jesus was born and weaned on the sounds of sorrow, for King Herod ordered the murder of every male child under the age of two in his attempt to do away with the Christ child. The news of this massacre could not have been held back from the ears of His parents, who had whisked Jesus away to safety. Scripture does not share what this young couple went through as they held their beloved child in their arms, keenly aware that others mourned with empty arms and shattered hearts because of their son.

It was a humble and tragic beginning to the earthly life and ministry of Jesus.

No wonder our heavenly Father looked down at the state of humanity and grieved. No wonder He sent His Son! This sorrowful entry underscored the theme of Christianity and the mission of Jesus: to save us from the grip sin had on humanity.

Do you want to know what else is tragic? When you are brokenhearted, the first instructions you are likely to receive are to do more, weep less, and be stronger.

But in reality, the most powerful act we can do is to rest in what He's already done for us. It's the foundation upon which all other change can be built.

Before you consider what you should be doing, or what you didn't do, or what you may need to do, let's fully explore what you don't have to do.

## **YOU DON'T HAVE TO DO THIS ALONE**

My two-year-old grandson, Luke, stands at the edge of the pool. He has on his floaties. An Elmo swim diaper. Sweet little yellow goggles that make him look like a frog. I stand waist-deep in water, my arms open wide.

“Come on, buddy. You can do this.”

He edges closer and peers in, then backs away. After several trips back and forth, he finally sits on the edge of the pool and dips his toes in the water. I slip next to him when he's not looking and scoop him up and hold him close. Into the water we go.

“I got you, buddy,” I whisper. “I got you.”

He could fight me, but he trusts instead. After all, this is his Gaga. Over the next several minutes Luke gains courage to go further and further, until finally he is jumping into my open arms. Any time he feels frightened, he whispers these words under his breath: “I got you, buddy. I got you.”

It is his assurance that no matter how scary things might feel, he is not alone.

The reality is that sometimes we sense God calling us into deeper waters as part of our healing process, but we find the prospect intimidating. We aren't sure how to take the next step, or what to do if we take a dive and sink to the bottom. We want to trust, but it's downright scary.

The disciples felt that way too. In John 16:17-18, we see them congregating in a huddle to discuss something Jesus had just told them.

“In a little while you will see me no more,” He had said (v. 16).

This news stirred anxiety in the hearts of the disciples. Up until this time, whenever they'd had a question or needed assurance, they could ask Him directly. They were accustomed to standing back and watching Him work. They were key eyewitnesses to the power of Jesus. His words caused them

worry.

*What will we do without Him?*

*Whom will we turn to when we feel weak or unable?*

*What if we can't accomplish what Jesus says we can?*

*What if no one else sees in me what He does?*

These men were focused on their imperfections and their potential to stumble—or to fall short in a big way. They could recount the times they had failed Jesus and one another. To be honest, for some of them, it was a mystery why Jesus had even chosen them. They were prime examples of human frailty—not anything special, at least as far as their culture or peers might define the word.

Jesus saw that they were brimming with worry: “Are you asking one another what I meant when I said, ‘In a little while you will see me no more’?” (John 16:19).

He gently assured them that even in the absence of His earthly presence, He would still be with them. Close as a whisper. They could ask for what they needed in His name, and they would receive it. He saw their insecurity, and then reminded them that His love and plan for them weren't dependent on their efforts or worthiness, but on the Power that resided within them.

“In this world you will have trouble,” He said. “But take heart! I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

He steered their worried thoughts away from what they couldn't do or hadn't done and toward Himself, offering peace in exchange for their anxiety.

*I got you, buddy. I got you.*

Perhaps worry has been an integral part of your thought process for a long time. You may have come to believe that healing has something to do with what you bring to the table. Maybe, like my grandson Luke, you fear that jumping into the depths is just too big of a leap. You've listened to advice, and you've tried to get over it or pretend like it's not a big deal, but none of that has worked. You've made choices and sacrifices so you can find healing, but you've been broken for so long that you wonder if God can do a miracle in you.

How does Scripture respond to these fretful thoughts?

“Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you” (1 Pet. 5:7).

*I got you, sis. I got you.*

Jesus' message to His disciples, and to you and me, is that it's not our strength or power that will transform us. Yes, we make changes. Yes, we open our scabbed and broken heart to His tender touch. Yes, we allow Him to move us in uncomfortable directions to discover new paths—and leave old ones behind. But we can stop stressing, because our healing is not solely—or even primarily—dependent on us.

It's a partnership.

You and God—and He's bigger.

Perhaps you've come close to taking a leap of trust, but at the last moment you backed away. Maybe you've even dipped your toes in, thinking maybe that was enough. God isn't unaware of your fears or your failed attempts. He knows how scary this is for you. But He's asking you to allow Him to scoop you up and take you deeper, because there are things He sees that you don't yet. There are qualities He desires to instill in you that you aren't even aware of yet. There are elements of your faith, as you move from the edge of uncertainty to trust, that you have yet to explore.

Not too long ago, I stood in the pool again. Luke wore his floaties. He had on his Elmo swim diaper. His cute yellow goggles made him look like a little frog.

I held open my arms, and my two-year-old grandson jumped with glee into my arms. No reservations. No fear. This time I didn't have to say it, because it was ingrained on his heart:

*I got you, buddy. I got you.*

As you begin to heal, your God is with you every step of the way. You are not alone, and you don't have to do the work of healing alone.

Let's look at the next thing you *don't* have to do.

## YOU DON'T HAVE TO EARN GOD'S LOVE

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him (John 3:16-17).

This passage is the most familiar Scripture of the Christian faith. In fact, it's so familiar that the power contained within it can get lost.

*God so loved the world.*

Not just a little section of the world or one person over another. He chose from the beginning of creation to love all of us. Sometimes believers try to compartmentalize this love, saying that God loves just those who look like them, or sound like them. That you have to be a certain way or live up to a certain standard before God loves you. But that's not how it works.

When I was a teenager newly in love with Jesus, John 3:16 was the first verse I memorized. However, it took years for its truth to be engraved on my identity as a child of God. Though I loved Jesus with my entire being, the belief that exterior accomplishments or merits represented my worth infiltrated my sense of who I was. Perhaps my value was based on how well I performed according to certain standards, or on whether I attended church often enough, read my Bible enough, or stepped into my full potential.

While all of these are good things to do, basing our identity on them is contradictory to the teachings of Christ, who described faith as being in a personal relationship with Him. In fact, He said that loving God was the greatest commandment (see Matt. 22:34-38). Years ago, a friend helped me climb out of the religious pit that kept me striving to earn God's love. He said, "Take your finger and draw an X in the air."

I felt silly, but I drew a large imaginary X between us.

"That's sin," my friend said. "It's what separates us from the destiny and heart of God. Good people with a heart to serve God—like the Pharisees, and later churches and denominations—built walls around that X in the form of a set of rules that they hoped would keep sin safely at a distance. When the next generation came along, they identified the wall of rules as sin, so they did the same. This created a maze of walls erected generation after generation, until the actual definition of sin became very murky."

It's no wonder Jesus quoted the words of Isaiah 61:1-2 when He stood in the temple that day.

By focusing on the question "Who are you, Jesus?" rather than talking about what the people should or shouldn't do, what they hadn't done, or what they could do, He demolished the murky definition of faith as He shared a very clear mission statement that pointed directly at Himself:

*I've come to open the eyes of the blind.*

*I've come to set the prisoner free.*

*I've come with good news for the poor in spirit.*

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*I've come to heal the brokenhearted.*

*I've come to break the chains of the oppressed.*

No matter how you arrived at your brokenness, the power of the Cross is not found in what you do but in what has already been done for you. This is not to say that you do not play a part. Jesus said, "I demand that you love each other as much as I love you" (John 15:12, *TLB*). Our role is to accept His love, and then to allow that love to lead us to love others. It's a grace-drenched existence wrapped around relationship.

A small tattoo on my wrist in Hebrew script spells out "grace." It is a visual reminder to me that because of His sacrifice, there are no walls between me and God.

Any time I start to believe that I'm not enough, that I've fallen short, and that I'm not worthy of His love—or if I fall into the trap of trying to out-earn my Savior—this message shifts my focus from me to Him. It's a reminder that it's not my offerings that delight God, but my joyful acceptance of His love that brings Him pleasure (see Hos. 6:6).

A. W. Tozer put it this way: "What I am anxious to see in Christian believers is a beautiful paradox. I want to see in them the joy of finding God while at the same time they are blessed pursuing Him. I want to see in them the great joy of having God yet always wanting Him."

Maybe you are struggling with this message right now because of the giant X with all the walls around it that has been your theological foundation. Well, I have great news for you. The simple gospel message of God's love will not leave you unchanged. For when you return that love and begin to trust Jesus from the heart, you learn to listen for His voice. You sense when He is teaching you or redirecting you. You become fiercely aware of temptation—and when you feel the desire to give in or to allow idols of any kind to rise in stature in your life, you weigh those temptations in light of your love for your heavenly Father. This relationship without the maze of walls helps you discover your "true selves, [your] child-of-God selves" (John 1:12, *THE MESSAGE*).

## **YOU DON'T HAVE TO RUN ANYMORE**

As a young girl, I went to the crowded state fair with my mother. A neighbor family joined us and altogether there were eight children under the age of 10. The chance of losing a child along the way was high! My mother instructed me (I was a dreamer, and the most likely to get sidetracked and lost) "Suzie, if you get separated from the group, don't go down a different fairway or run in a different direction. Just stop and wait for me. I'll backtrack and find you. Just stay put."

When you have experienced brokenness, you may feel that you've taken a wrong turn somewhere. Perhaps that sense of lostness has sent you down paths you regret. It may have caused you to lie awake at night while frenzied thoughts raced through your mind. You can rest now. Let Jesus take you by the hand. You can get off that wandering side road you took in search of something or someone who could possibly make you feel less pain. You can slow down the activity that tells the world you've got it all together, though your heart hurts so much that you can't sleep at night.

*Stop.*

*Right where you are.*

*You are found by Him.*

One of the key truths we often ignore in our faith is that Jesus meets us where we are. A demon ~~rushes from a dark and bleak cemetery, desperate for help. He is bound in chains and frightening himself and to others (see Mark 5:1-20).~~

*Jesus meets him right where he is.*

A religious man named Nicodemus seeks Jesus under the cover of darkness. He is highly respected in his community, but his fears drive him to meet with Jesus in secret (see John 3:1-21).

*Jesus meets him right where he is.*

A woman kneels and pours perfume over Jesus' feet, while others look on with disdain (see Luke 7:36-50).

*Jesus meets her right where she is.*

Through each of these interactions, a life is changed. One walks away in "his right mind." Another becomes a courageous follower in broad daylight. Another realizes for the first time what it is like to be truly loved.

The more you understand Jesus' mission statement and recognize that it is for you, the more you are free to simply sit in His presence, expectant that the person you always knew lived inside of you will emerge with His touch. This is when the miracle begins to take place. You understand that He "got you," that you are not alone, that you are loved, and that you can stop running.

## THEN YOU TAKE HEART

Let's go back to John 16:33. The anxious disciples were worried that they couldn't do what they needed to do on their own.

Jesus told them, "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

*Take heart.*

Let's pause for a moment to receive courage and comfort from a few facts. First, let's recognize how strong you are.

*Oh, Suzie, I'm not strong at all.*

**Take heart:** to receive courage or comfort from some fact

Aren't you? After all, you got up this morning, even though you may not have felt like it. You are seeking answers for yourself, and for those you care about. Each of these actions is a tribute to the truth that you desire nothing less than God's best. You are aware of your fragile places, but that's when the Jesus factor kicks in. You receive courage, for "when we are weak in ourselves, then we are strong in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ" (see 2 Cor. 12:9).

A foundation of healing is built on the promise that God will be your strength. He is in the middle of this healing process with you—right where you are.

*With all your baggage.*

*With your broken heart.*

*With your messy emotions.*

*With your faith and love for Him, in spite of the pain that just won't go away.*

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All that is required of you is to accept what He so willingly offers.

Even if these are concepts you've heard your whole life, you may still be saying, "Can it really be so simple?"

The truth is that many of us, even though we can quote Scripture and unearth the Hebrew and Greek meanings of words and phrases, are still striving. We are so focused on what we haven't done or what we need to do or the broken pieces that seem too fragmented to put back together that we've forgotten the power of what Jesus offers. We can be immersed in Christian culture and forget what He has done.

But there's good news. When we rediscover what Jesus offers, we join in with the multitudes of others who sing:

*My chains fell off, my heart was free; I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.*<sup>1</sup>

## LET'S START PEELING AWAY THOSE LAYERS

A scene from one of my favorite movies, *Shrek*, offers some helpful insight into the way our perceptions and understanding of life change during the healing process. Donkey and Shrek are walking along together.

Shrek says, "For your information, there's a lot more to ogres than people think."

Donkey says, "Example?"

"Example . . . uh . . . ogres are like onions!" Shrek holds up an onion, which Donkey sniffs.

Donkey isn't getting it, and he guesses three or four ways that Shrek could be like an onion. As Shrek starts to peel the onion, he says, "Layers. Onions have layers. Ogres have layers. Onions have layers. You get it? We both have layers."<sup>2</sup>

Shrek was telling Donkey that there's more to a person than what can be seen on the surface. When you are in pursuit of a mended heart, the Holy Spirit will gently peel away one layer of brokenness at a time. It's a merciful and exquisite process that gradually reveals the healed and whole person you are meant to be.

As we dig into this process together, I invite you to make it personal, taking time to interact with God about the work He may want to do in each layer of your heart.

Even if some chapters don't seem to apply to you, the underlying precept might. Maybe your husband didn't leave you (like Carol's in the next chapter), but you understand abandonment. Perhaps you haven't lost a loved one (like Amber in [chapter 4](#)), but you know what it is to mourn what you cannot bring back. In each chapter, there will be those "a-ha!" moments when the Holy Spirit speaks just to you. Rather than try to write about every life event that can bring brokenness, my hope was to connect with the underlying need and then explore how Jesus' mission statement meets that need.

As you go through this study, write in your journal. Underline in this book. Scribble your thoughts in the margins. Don't be afraid to go deeper as the Holy Spirit leads. If a moment is painful, pause and let the pain be exposed long enough to sense Jesus' touch in the midst of it.

As you respond to the questions in the "Just You and God" sections, be assured that there are no right answers. This is intended to be a time of simple intimacy with your heavenly Father as, one by one, layers are gently lifted and peeled away, and you discover together what is underneath.



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