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WITH KEITH WALL

Make Peace *with* Your Past

Living a Life with No Regrets



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Make Peace with Your Past: Living a Life with No Regrets

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INTRODUCTION

It's Time to Make Peace *with* Your Past

Here is a product label you'll probably never see: "SURGEON GENERAL'S WARNING: Living in the past is hazardous to your health."

Yet many people show unmistakable symptoms of "time sickness." Like oxygen-deprived mountain climbers who lose their mental grip, they stagger and stumble aimlessly, stuck in the past and unable to live freely in the present.

They struggle to overcome anxiety, depression, and regret, because their mind continually travels back to mistakes they made, traumas they endured, and hurts they caused.

Unfortunately, they often miss the joys and delights right before them every day.

Everybody wants to feel energized, optimistic, and fulfilled. We want to wake up each morning eagerly looking forward to the day ahead, rather than dreading it.

**WARNING: LIVING
IN THE PAST IS
HAZARDOUS TO
YOUR HEALTH.**



We want to enjoy our work, relationships, and hobbies, thankful for the meaningful people and activities that fill our lives.

We want to go to bed at night knowing we will sleep peacefully and deeply, feeling content and satisfied.

We want to feel alive, not numb.

We want to feel hopeful, not hopeless.

We want to feel grateful, not bitter.

If you haven't experienced living with this kind of joy and vitality, it's quite possible you have not made peace with your past.

Are you carrying the deep pain of past regrets? Are you angry with yourself for making mistakes that had

far-reaching consequences? Do you lie awake at night wondering how your life could have been different if you had not made foolish choices that harmed yourself or others? You are not alone.

Or perhaps the pain of your past was not your own doing. Maybe you have suffered from the bad choices and mistakes of others. Do you view yourself in the shameful way that toxic people from your past did? It's all too easy to listen to people who implied or said outright, "You don't measure up. You're no good. You'll never amount to much."

The reality for most of us, however, is that we have experienced a combination of personal regrets and mistreatment from others. To add insult to injury, the pain we suffer at the hands of others often contributes in some way to our own bad choices.

People weighed down and held back by the past often feel they are in a captivity of sorts—trapped and immobilized by a force bigger than themselves. When you are struggling with depression or anxiety about your past, it's difficult to feel enthused about the future—if you can envision one at all.

Does this describe how you're feeling? If so, I have fantastic news: It doesn't have to be this way! You can have clarity and peace about where you've been

WHATEVER IS
BEHIND THE
PAIN OF YOUR
PAST, GOD OFFERS
FREEDOM.



and where you're going. Your hurts can be soothed and your burdens relieved.

Are you ready to renew your dreams and refresh your energy to achieve them? Whatever is behind the pain of your past, God offers freedom. He is powerful enough to help you deal with the consequences of your past and steer your life in a better direction.

Allow the principles and practical steps in this book to equip you to look back on your past in a way that brings fresh perspective to your present and optimistic hope for your future. You'll explore several keys for moving beyond regrets, failures, and the pain of hurts and heartaches. As you do so, I encourage you to reflect on the following life-changing words from the book of Jeremiah:

“I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me

when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you,” declares the LORD, “and will bring you back from captivity.”

JEREMIAH 29:11–14

Embrace these words as you pursue your own emotional, spiritual, and physical wellness. They offer hope that although your past may have been disappointing or even disastrous, your present and your future can be better than you ever imagined. You *can* make peace with your past.





CHAPTER 1

Move *from* Hurting to Healing

As *a* twenty-year-old college sophomore returning home for Thanksgiving break in 2009, Mary “Mo” Isom found herself hanging upside down by her seat belt at 1:30 a.m., trapped alone inside her wrecked car and struggling to breathe.

Mo had lost control of her Jeep, hit an embankment, flipped over three times, and landed upside down in a ditch. The accident resulted in terrible injuries for Mo, including a broken neck, fractured ribs, serious bruises on her brain, and injuries to her lungs and liver.

Even as Mo choked on her own blood and writhed in pain, God’s presence flooded her vehicle. His voice spoke strongly to her heart. Despite her life-threatening situation, the first words out of Mo’s mouth were not

curses or painful moans. Instead, Mo kept saying, “God is beautiful. God is beautiful. God is beautiful.”¹

This was quite curious to the man who had been driving the same stretch of road when he saw Mo’s lights flicker and swerve. A retired paramedic and a Navyman, he stopped to investigate and spotted Mo’s twisted Jeep in the ditch. Expecting to find a dead body, the man made his way toward the wreckage. By then Mo had somehow slipped out of her seat belt, and he found her lying on the ceiling of the Jeep’s interior.

“God is beautiful. God is beautiful. God is beautiful,” Mo repeated with a smile on her face.

“That’s great,” the retired paramedic said as he tried to gently remove her from the mangled vehicle, “but if we can just get you out ...”

As Mo’s life hung in the balance, she was forever changed. It was the moment she came to understand that she was loved and forgiven—the moment she started the journey from hurting to healing—toward the freedom of making peace with her past.

| Spiraling Downward

Mo grew up in a close-knit family that included her parents, John and Heidi, and her older sister, Sloan.

They faithfully attended a local church, and Mo's father was a well-known attorney. In high school, six-foot Mo excelled on the soccer field and became one of the nation's top goalkeepers.

But underneath this ideal exterior, trouble brewed on several fronts. Mo's dad pushed her hard in her budding soccer career. When she played well, he was affirming and complimentary. When she didn't, he often gave her the silent treatment.

The social pressures to look beautiful and be accepted by the popular crowd also weighed heavily on Mo. Feeling she didn't always measure up, Mo developed an image crisis. As so many teens do, she hid her insecurities by putting up a front of faked perfection. But the more she tried to control her life by achieving success at school, on the soccer field, and in beauty pageants, the more she lost control of her life.

Eventually, Mo fell victim to an eating disorder. For three and a half years, she hid her problem until she was desperate enough to pray for help and confess her struggle to her mom. Working with a counselor and a

AS MO'S LIFE HUNG
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CHANGED.



nutritionist, Mo eventually found healing and set her sights on the next challenge: her freshman year at Louisiana State University. Ranking as one of the top six senior goalkeepers in the nation, Mo had earned a full-ride scholarship to LSU.

Meanwhile, however, Mo's dad had been dealing with his own serious struggles, including unpaid taxes and the use of pornography. Still, John tried to be a dedicated father and husband.

**THE MORE MO TRIED
TO CONTROL HER
LIFE, THE MORE SHE
LOST CONTROL OF
HER LIFE.**

Like clockwork, he always arrived home by 5:30 p.m. on weeknights. That's why it was strange when he didn't come home the evening of January 2, 2009, when Mo was home on Christmas break.



John had left a voice mail for Heidi, saying he just needed to drive around and clear his head. There was also a note by the phone: "I do love you." Early in the morning on January 3, Heidi discovered a four-

paragraph suicide note that John had emailed to her. Mo woke up to her mother screaming, "Get in the car! Get in the car! Grab your shoes; grab your things! Get in the car!" After a frantic but fruitless search around town, Heidi, Mo, and Sloan learned the horrific news

from local police: John had died of a self-inflicted gunshot wound in a hotel room located several hours away in a different state.

Mo went into an emotional tailspin. To retain some sense of normalcy, she returned a few weeks later to Louisiana State. She put on a mask and tried to act like everything was fine, numbing her pain by partying, drinking too much alcohol, and pushing sexual boundaries. But the more she did those things, the emptier she felt.

Mo was in so much emotional pain that she briefly considered taking the same path her father had chosen. In her anger and anguish, she cried out in prayer, “God, if you’re so real, just wreck my life, because I’m just tired of living it. And if you’re so real, reveal yourself in some way that I just can’t miss it.”

In fact, that’s exactly what God did when her Jeep spun out of control during that fateful trip home the following November.

When Mo regained consciousness as she hung upside down, the presence of God was strong. The words of Psalm 46:10 came to her: “Be still, and know that I am God.”

“BE STILL, AND KNOW
THAT I AM GOD.”

—PSALM 46:10

Despite her near-death experience, Mo felt overwhelming peace. Before long, the retired paramedic arrived and pulled her from the mashed heap of metal. The wreck was a wake-up call for Mo—the beginning of her journey of moving from hurting to healing. In the months that followed, Mo started putting the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual pieces of her life back together as she made peace with her past.

“That wreck was brutal, and the injuries were brutal,” she says. “But I was brought from death to life in that car. My soul was saved in that place.”

| Starting Your Journey

For some of us, the journey from hurting or regret to healing and hope involves a dramatic series of events like Mo experienced. For others, the transition is a prolonged journey, with small steps forward over time. Whatever the cause of your pain, you can still make peace with your past and, in the process, gain a deeper understanding of yourself and life. Here are four principles to help you get started.

1

Keep a Balanced Perspective

Everyone on planet Earth has endured life's hurts and heartaches, and everyone has their own set of mistakes and list of ways they have hurt others. Some are terribly severe and others less so. But all are real and not to be dismissed.

Chances are, the longer you've lived, the more regrets you've piled up and the more emotional scars you have to show. Broken relationships, financial calamity, and the death of a loved one are just a few examples of hurts that people can inflict on others or experience themselves. Such is the reality of fallen people living in a fallen world.

When you least expect it, memories of foolish actions from the past can invade your thoughts and destroy your peace. Those regrettable events have the potential to loom larger than life and overwhelm you with the message that you're a total failure.

**"I WAS BROUGHT
FROM DEATH TO
LIFE IN THAT CAR."**

—MO ISOM



Yet the truth of the matter is that you are not alone in your mistakes and shame. Every person on earth is vulnerable to missteps, and whether an offense is minor or horrific, the fact remains that we are all created by God with a unique and loving purpose—yourself included.

As you move from hurting to healing, it's important to keep this balanced perspective in mind.



2

Choose Who Will Define Your Worth

Validation is the recognition and acceptance of another person's thoughts, feelings, sensations, and behaviors as understandable. *Self-validation* is the recognition and acceptance of your own thoughts, feelings, sensations, and behaviors as understandable. It's a way of honoring who you are, what you feel, and what you believe.

WHATEVER THE
CAUSE OF YOUR
PAIN, YOU CAN STILL
MAKE PEACE WITH
YOUR PAST.



People who lack validation in their lives fail to understand their own intrinsic value. Without this, a person will often look to the passing whims of circumstances and culture to provide a framework for their worth.

It is easy to fall into the trap of thinking your worth as a person comes from what you do instead of who you are. It's also easy to perceive your worth as a reflection of what others think instead of allowing it to shine out from your own confident assurance. And when you allow other people or outside situations to define your worth, you make yourself a hostage to them.

Despite the ways you have disappointed yourself, you are a person with great potential. Despite the regrets or hurts you carry from the past, the fact is that you are a person of infinite worth.

“I PRAISE YOU BECAUSE
I AM FEARFULLY AND
WONDERFULLY MADE.”

—PSALM 139:14

Notice I didn't say you create or cause your own worth. Each of us has a value that we did not generate. This value is a gift from God. He made you who you are and loves you for who you are.

This is the bedrock foundation for self-worth anchored in God; this is your special identity, safe and protected in God's hands. As you move from hurting to healing, remember that God created you for a purpose, and that purpose is good.

3

Learn from Your Past

The hard truth is that you will learn far more from pain and loss than you will from a life of success or void of challenges. The crucible of suffering is an outstanding instructor—if you allow it to be. An essential element of moving from hurting to healing is being open to the life lessons that painful experiences teach and the character they build.

Research backs this up as well. According to one study, “people with a history of *some* lifetime adversity reported better mental health and well-being outcomes than not only people with a *high* history of adversity but also than people with *no* history of adversity”² (emphasis added). Time-honored wisdom from the Bible confirms the value of hardship:

We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation. And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us.

ROMANS 5:3–5 NLT

YOU WILL LEARN
FAR MORE FROM
PAIN AND LOSS
THAN YOU WILL
FROM A LIFE OF
SUCCESS OR VOID
OF CHALLENGES.



EIGHT WAYS TO GLEAN WISDOM FROM YOUR PAST

You've heard the axiom, "Those who do not learn from history are bound to repeat it." Some people experience ongoing difficulties because they've never taken a hard look at the past to see how it affects their present and future.

But let's emphasize the positive: Everyone can gain valuable insights by exploring their personal history. Gleaning wisdom from your past will improve your life in every way. Here's how to get started.

- 1. Consider how your family of origin shaped you.** All of us are largely products of the families we grew up in. We are shaped and molded in thousands of ways by our parents and extended family members. How is this true for you?
- 2. Identify the turning points in your life.** Everyone has experienced significant events (some positive, some painful) that redirect or reshape their lives. What were yours?
- 3. Weigh the words of wisdom that stuck with you.** Perhaps a parent, teacher, or coach gave you some advice—or lived in a way that served as advice. How did that affect who you are today?

- 4. Unpack your life in five-year increments.** In a notebook or journal, write out the main events from each five-year segment of your life.
- 5. Gauge how you have changed over the past ten or twenty years.** Everyone grows and develops as time passes. In what ways are you different from the person you were a decade or two ago?
- 6. Assess your successes.** What do you consider your most successful events and experiences? What qualities did you bring to these achievements?
- 7. Examine your failures.** Psychologists often say we learn most from our failures. Mine them for all they're worth.
- 8. Notice how your dreams have changed.** The dreams you have now likely aren't the same ones you had in the past. What circumstances or lessons led them to change? After reflecting more on your past, do you find your dreams are shifting yet again?

If your interpretations of the past or expectations for the future are off track, you may need help dividing the facts from the fiction you've bought into.

As you might suspect, I am a big believer in engaging in therapy with a skilled, experienced practitioner who can help you identify the thought patterns that are keeping you mired in pain.

Whether with a therapist, a spiritual mentor, or a trusted friend, putting your feelings into words will help you take steps toward inner peace and bolster your emotional health in many ways.

**THE PATH OF LIFE
WAS NEVER MEANT
TO BE WALKED
ALONE.**



I agree with psychologist Georgia Witkin, who describes talking as “one of our natural, built-in, therapeutic capacities. We use our words to express what we want and need, and the same should be for our feelings.”³

Psychology professor and author Steven C. Hayes also notes, “There is a myth in Western countries about the so-called ‘self-made person,’ and how we all should

strive to become, well, self-made. But nobody is an island, and we all need other people.”⁴

WHY TALK IT OUT?

- Hearing our internal thoughts expressed externally can actually reveal the path forward.
- It's an active step toward a solution, even if the solution isn't immediately evident.
- It gives us a chance to hear the helpful perspectives of others.

Mo Isom subscribes to this principle of talking it out. She experienced healing when she started sharing her story. “In this fake-it-till-you-make-it culture,” she said, “it’s amazing to see when you do just show those vulnerabilities ... when you don’t worry anymore about this faked perfection, but you just bear the dirty laundry, how much community it creates in people saying, ‘I went through the same thing.’”

It's true. Everyone goes through hard times, and faithful friends will shine the brightest in those moments. They might not be able to fix your problem, but their love, support, and encouragement can make a huge difference.

The path of life was never meant to be walked alone. Proverbs 17:17 says, "A friend loves at all times." Your real friends will rise to the occasion when you need them most, so talk to them. Share with them. Lean on them. Chances are, you'll be able to return the favor one day.



Today, Mo Isom is a completely different person from the one who pleaded with God to wreck her life. A few weeks after her car accident, she began sharing her story

**REAL FRIENDS RISE
TO THE OCCASION
WHEN YOU NEED
THEM MOST.**

online and attracted many people who could relate to her pain. Since then, Mo finished her undergraduate degree, got married, became a mom, published books, and started a ministry called Boldlife Initiative. Over the past several years, she has spoken at hundreds of conferences, schools, and churches.



"Injuries heal, and you can buy a new car, but we have moments in

our life where we have the freedom to choose whom we will serve, and that choice can change everything,” she said.

It wasn't always easy—her life literally had to be flipped upside down. But because she chose to persist in moving from hurting to healing, she is in a far better spot today than she was in that wrecked Jeep in 2009.

That's Mo's making-peace-with-her-past story. What will yours be? In the next chapter, we'll take a look at an important step in writing that story.

