



W H O L E

Restoring What Is Broken in Me, You, and the Entire World

S T E V E W I E N S



This book is beautifully written, and the honesty in its pages invites the reader's honesty—which is, in my view, one of the best things a book can do. This is a book that will transform you.

SHAUNA NIEQUIST

Bestselling author of *Present Over Perfect*

Steve Wiens is a writer unique in my experience of reading books, and I have read a lot of them. What is unique about *Whole* is that he inserts you (me!) into the biblical story in a way that makes the story convincingly contemporary with us. His children (he has boys), his wife (one wife), and his friends (he has many) become authentically biblical, and we find ourselves living in our own backyards what we previously had only read about.

EUGENE H. PETERSON

Professor emeritus of spiritual theology at Regent College, Vancouver

If you are looking for a simplistic solution to the brokenness you see in the world (and in yourself), this book won't be helpful. But if you're willing to leave the known for the unknown and if you dare to ask the soul-enriching questions found in Steve Wiens's imaginative work, you just might find yourself on the road to wholeness.

RICHARD ROHR

Founder of the Center for Action and Contemplation

I've been lucky enough to sit around a fire in Steve's backyard and talk into the night, and I left that evening feeling as though I'd been breathing fresh air into my lungs. You will feel the same when you read *Whole*. Steve has a gift for telling stories that connect at the deepest level to your own story. This is inspired and compassionate writing that invites us to step into our own promised land.

STU GARRARD

Songwriter and author of *Words from the Hill*

Many authors who brave the subject of brokenness lead us down one of two paths: One glosses over the pain with sugary anecdotes or bulleted prescriptions. The other leaves us wallowing in the pain a bit too long, with perhaps no hope for redemption. Rarely does

an author show us another way. Steve Wiens does just that—carving out a new trail where brokenness meets beauty, where humility is a catalyst for becoming whole.

MATT BAYS

Author of *Finding God in the Ruins*

Steve Wiens's book *Whole* stopped me in my tracks. It is a timely, prophetic message not only for the culture and church at large but also for every individual seeking a life of shalom on a deeply personal level. This book forced me to look at others with compassion and gentleness, grace and potential. But more important, it forced me to look inwardly at myself with that same gentle spirit. I'm so grateful for this book, and I look forward to handing out copies to everyone I know along the path to wholeness.

NISH WEISETH

Author of *Speak: How Your Story Can Change the World*

Steve reminds us that it is in the ordinary of everyday life that we are daily invited to experience and participate in the extraordinary. Not extraordinary in the sense of superheroes, but in the simple journey of living into who we were created to be all along. We are the restored ones, and in the sacred mundane of everyday life, we are invited to participate with God in restoring our broken world. This book is not only a reminder of who we are but also an invitation into our collective healing. Let's get after it together.

JON HUCKINS

Cofounding director of The Global Immersion Project

I am a huge fan of pastor Steve Wiens and his savory new book, *Whole*. I tore into it, huge chunks at a time, hoping that his words would heal the hunger in me. Instead, he convinced me that hunger is the lifeblood of being human and that questions are, like bread crumbs, the path to wholeness. If you, too, need fresh perspective on your story, Wiens is a salty sage worth reading.

ERIN LANE

Author of *Lessons in Belonging from a Church-Going Commitment Phobe*



W H O L E

Restoring What Is Broken in Me, You, and the Entire World

S T E V E W I E N S



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FOREWORD

THIS IS A BOOK about wholeness, and as that is the case, I suppose it should start with a caveat: *Wholeness*—most of us don't come by it honest.

In my midthirties, I found myself in a premature midlife crisis. It was not the sort of crisis brought on by the boredom of a career, nor was it born of that time-honored existential question of white middle-class maledom: *Does my life matter?* This was a real crisis, a familial one. The snake eyes of sickness were staring down my youngest son, and who could say whether he'd make it?

Life did what it does—it brought pain to bear—and as that pain pressed and pressed and pressed, everything began to fracture. There were things that—follower of Christ as I was, student of the Scriptures and all—I could have done in the breaking season. I could have turned to the tradition of my faith, could have searched for solace in God's history of restoration, reclamation, and reconstitution. I could have found myself in the narrative of wholeness handed down through

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the ages. This was not what I chose. Instead, I numbed the pain of cracking up by crawling to the bottom of too many plastic bottles of Gordon's Gin.

This is the straight skinny of my own experience. How many of you have lived a similar experience? How many of you are living it now?

I'm in the dry days now—the days of real *inner sobriety*—and here's what I've found: I've found that even in the fracturing, there is the promise of being put back together. In the days of coming to understand this truth, I began to read Scripture as a participant. I found myself in the story of Job, my own years of loss being restored. I found myself in the story of Peter, whose moment of broken betrayal was redeemed by the risen Christ. I sank into the story of the Christian-murdering Saul—perhaps Christ's greatest reclamation project—and came into wholeness with him on the road to Damascus. I found myself in these stories, and time after time, they worked their magic in me. In the stories, I found the Christ of Scripture, always working for my restoration, redemption, and reclamation. Doesn't he put my broken pieces back together?

This is the beautiful message of Steve's book. We are participants in God's continuing story of whole-making. We've been written into this story no less than Job, Peter, Paul, or any of the characters described in these pages. We are the Living Parables of Christ, the modern personification of God's ultimate promise: *Behold, I make all things new*. Perhaps it could be said this way: *Behold, I make all things whole*.

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I wish I'd have known Steve in the darkest days of my brokenness. I wish I could have sat at his table, broken bread with him, and received his invitation to explore the God of wholeness. I wish I wouldn't have had to back my way into the beauty of this understanding. That's precisely why I'm grateful he penned this book. This is his service to the broken—to us—and there's healing in these pages. You'll find Steve writes from a deep well of pastoral mercy, exchanging every "Shame on you" for "Yeah, me too." In that mercy, he calls us from the shame of our fractures and into the story of a kind-eyed, ever-loving, whole-making God.

Read these pages with care. Enter into them with intention. Find yourself descending into the Scripture, becoming a member of the Living Parables. Discover your fractured pieces fusing; feel the fissures healing. Read, read, read, and hear the voice of the God speaking these words over you: *Behold, I make all things whole, even you.*

Even you.

Seth Haines
Author, *Coming Clean: A Story of Faith*

PREFACE

If you're the parent of a toddler, you learn to scan every environment for weapons of mass destruction—basically anything not stuffed. Because if you don't, there's a 100 percent chance your child *will* find that priceless dagger from Morocco and impale the nearest animal, himself, or your foot.

One day when Mary and I were sitting at our kitchen table and *not* scanning for toddlers in danger, our fifteen-month-old son, Isaac, lurched over to us. I noticed something under his tongue, so I put my index finger into his mouth (which is a very offensive thing to do to any other human being but completely normal with a toddler). Because . . . CHOKING HAZARD!

That was when I realized that he had a jagged piece of glass about the size of a quarter in his mouth.

I'd noticed that piece of glass, wedged in the crack between the refrigerator and the wall, a few days earlier. I should have picked it up then, but I didn't. It was there because one of us (I can't remember who) had dropped a large glass bowl, which

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had splintered into a thousand pieces. That week, we'd swept and vacuumed the floor several times and worn shoes in the kitchen to avoid getting glass in our feet. Yet we had somehow missed that one piece of glass, and it found its way into Isaac's mouth. I pulled it out, and he was fine, but my heart was hammering just thinking about what we'd narrowly escaped.

If only it were always that easy.

When something shatters, the broken pieces find their way into hidden cracks and crevices. Then they end up inside of us, causing pain, especially to the most vulnerable. It's easy to walk past the fragments of brokenness. We're busy and overwhelmed. And maybe that particular piece of jagged glass hasn't hurt *you*. But it is hurting *someone*.

Last night, I watched a video showing a five-year-old boy in Aleppo, Syria, being pulled from a burning building and placed in an ambulance. His home had just been bombed, and he was covered in dust, stunned. The left side of his face was bloody, but he didn't say a word. He didn't cry. He simply touched his face with his hand and then wiped that blood on the orange seat where he sat.

Who is going to pull the jagged glass out of his mouth?

I'm a pastor, and I live in the suburbs, far away from buildings that get bombed. But I see jagged glass everywhere. Last Sunday at church, a dad came up to me with tears in his eyes. "He's back in treatment," he choked out, speaking of his youngest son and the addiction that keeps getting the best of him. I hugged this brokenhearted dad, prayed with him, and held him as he cried.

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The Germans have a word that describes the unsettled ache I feel for the brokenness to be made whole—like river water in a jar that keeps getting shaken. *Sehnsucht* is the inconsolable longing for something that you're ardently missing but can't quite name. *Sehnsucht* is what you feel when you get a glimpse of that faraway country and you realize just how far away it is. *Sehnsucht* is a wave that pounds you to the ocean floor and then sweeps you out to sea.

What do you ache for? What keeps you up at night? What can you barely contain?

"Let me tell you a secret," my friend Stefan began his sermon one Sunday. We all leaned forward in our seats. Sermons don't usually start that way. You could feel the *Sehnsucht* in the air.

"I want to change the world."

Stefan preached that sermon eight years ago. Since then, he has started a nonprofit that mentors kids in some of the poorest areas of Minneapolis. His heart breaks when he sees kids in poverty, because he knows that poverty leads to hopelessness and that hopelessness leads to violence. But a mentoring relationship leads to hope. And hope leads to wholeness. Recently, when he was picking up one of his mentees, another boy rode up on his bike and yelled, "Ahh, man! Why can't I have a mentor?"

As Stefan drove away, he watched that boy's image get smaller and smaller. But *Sehnsucht* will bring Stefan back.

What's the secret you long to whisper?

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There's an ancient idea that needs unearthing, but it's buried under wars and breakfast dishes and the argument I had with Mary yesterday. It's hidden beneath dusty beliefs and traditions that are now fraying at the edges. The idea is a word, but it's so much more than a word.

The idea is *shalom*.

Shalom is a diamond, and if you hold it up and turn it, you'll see its many facets glinting in the morning sun, sending bright light everywhere. It comes from a Hebrew word that is usually translated as "peace." *Jerusalem* literally means "city of peace."

But let's keep turning the diamond. Let's keep watching where the light goes.

In addition to "peace," *shalom* also means "wholeness, completeness, a state of being unbroken." It's a wedding ring, a perfect circle, even if it's scarred and scuffed. It's the long passage of the sun across the sky as our earth spins on its axis, giving us lush sunrises and expansive sunsets. It's the reconciliation that is forged after a long conflict, when there is genuine repentance and authentic forgiveness.

Shalom is the sense of well-being that comes when brokenness is made whole again.

"In Hebrew, peace-making means whole-making, and not warm-fuzzy-deny-your-concerns-and-stop-being-difficult-making."¹ Shalom is a state of being that is forged in the cooperative work between God and us. Like a diamond,

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shalom can sometimes look like jagged glass. The journey of whole-making can be dangerous. It's costly. The opposite of *shalom* is the Hebrew word *ra*, which means "evil." It's connected to the word *ratsats*, which means "to crush and break into pieces." Evil, at its essence, is anything that conspires to crush and break into pieces that which was created to be whole. *Ra* creates distance between anything that should be connected together.

Ra fueled the planes that flew into the Twin Towers on 9/11. *Ra* prompted Dylann Roof to walk into the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina, where he sat calmly with its members for more than an hour before murdering nine of them. *Ra* marched into Pulse nightclub with Omar Mateen in Orlando, Florida, as he shot and killed forty-nine people and wounded fifty-three others in the summer of 2016.

Ra influenced a man named Cain to murder his brother, Abel. *Ra* persuaded Joseph's brothers to sell him into slavery. It plagued brothers all throughout the book of Genesis.

Ra causes war, deception, and slavery. Whatever else *ra* does, it shatters what was made to be whole.

We've all swallowed the jagged glass of *ra*. But there's something else inside of us, deeper than that, and if it can see the light of day, it will change the world.

You have a secret you want to tell, a whisper of shalom. A whisper of restoration.

I'm a pastor, but even so, it may seem like a stretch to tell you that I think the Scriptures can help you tell your secrets.

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The Scriptures hold both pain *and* promise; they're the seeds from which restoration grows. They are shared when great questions are asked, the kind of questions that are strong enough to hold the weight of our secrets.

As you read this book, you'll notice that I'm at least as interested in the questions that are raised in the Bible as I am in the answers that we find. For this reason, I spend lots of time wondering how *this* story relates to *that* one. I believe that the Scriptures tell an overarching story that leads to wholeness, but the Scriptures also include stories of heartbreaking brokenness. We prolong our pain when we try to fix the brokenness without going on a journey of restoration, which includes additional heartache, questions, and long periods of waiting. I point this out because you'll notice that I use my imagination when I write about the stories of familiar characters such as Joseph, Moses, and even Jesus, exploring what might have happened in the white spaces around those black words on the page. I hope you'll see my reverence for the Scriptures humming within those stories.

The Bible itself is whispering something, if we have the patience to hear it. And we are—all of us—caught up in it, whether we know it or not. The stories are sometimes epic and transformative, other times punitive and tribal. And yet the river of the Scriptures flows toward restoring everything that is broken.

Uncovering the secrets buried in the Scriptures will help you tell your own secrets.

Even more than answers, I believe that the Bible contains

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some of the best questions in all of literature. I've been a pastor for more than twenty years, and I've savored these questions, allowing them to marinate and become something I hope you will relish.

I love what Krista Tippett has to say about questions:

If I've learned nothing else, I've learned this: a question is a powerful thing, a mighty use of words. Questions elicit answers in their likeness. Answers mirror the questions they rise, or fall, to meet. So while a simple question can be precisely what's needed to drive to the heart of the matter, it's hard to meet a *simplistic* question with anything but a simplistic answer. It's hard to transcend a combative question. But it's hard to resist a generous question. We all have it in us to formulate questions that invite honesty, dignity, and revelation. There is something redemptive and life-giving about asking a better question.²

In the first part of this book, I ask five of the richest questions found in the Bible. The first three are literally in the text, while the last two are inferred. I took this liberty to make the structure of this first portion less clunky. And, as the great rabbis always said, less clunky is *good*.

Where are you? God asks the man and woman who risked it all and lost it all, and who hid from the one who found them anyway. But this question isn't directed only to them. It's asked of you, too. And it will keep haunting you until you

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come out of hiding, until you come face-to-face with the one from whom you never need to hide.

Am I my brother's keeper? the murderer asks after burying his brother in a field. It's an evasion, the kind that keeps you behind walls, exposing your fear of the "other." This question pursues you until you recognize that you cannot be made whole until the "other" is also made whole.

What are you seeking? the stranger asks the brother who will be betrayed and left for dead by his older brothers. His answer is the hinge point for the restoration of the children of Israel, and if you follow his lead, it will be for you as well. And for the entire world.

Where are you going? God asks the childless couple before sending them on a journey to an unknown destination with nothing but a promise. This question will lead you away from what is known and into the wild, where sacrifices are made and promises are kept.

What will you bring? Jesus asks his followers before instructing them to bring nothing but trust in the one who sent them. When you set out on the journey of restoration, you'll be tempted to bring a whole lot more than you need. This question invites you to leave behind what is unnecessary so that you can receive something much more powerful.

In the remainder of the book, we will follow the people of Israel as they travel from Egypt, through the wilderness, and finally to the Promised Land. I believe that the journey out of slavery is not only my journey and your journey but also *our* journey.

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Shalom is never about just you or me; it's always about *us*.

I tell stories of what happens when people are stuck in slavery or lost in the wilderness or trying to inhabit the Promised Land. I also tell stories about friends of mine—in real life and those I have made in the ancient pages of the Bible. I tell their stories because they have surprised and blessed me with their courage, humanity, and desire for restoration.

I'm intentionally telling mostly stories of *ordinary* people missing and seeking wholeness, because I think most of us believe that we're too ordinary to be swept up in the adventure of wholeness that we see in the Scriptures. So many of us don't believe that our common bumps and bruises of daily life need restoring too. When I coach people on preaching, I encourage them not to use the earth-shattering example (the drug addict who was rescued from the brink of destruction)—not because it's not true, but because most people will be in awe of the story instead of entering it and believing it's for them. I'm taking my own advice in this book: telling ordinary stories in the hope that you'll believe that the story of wholeness really is for *you*.

At the end of each chapter, I've included a benediction—a short appeal for divine help, blessing, and guidance, which is usually given at the close of a worship service. My hope is that it will rise off the page and meet you someplace deep in your heart, giving you something mere words never could. Also included are questions for reflection and discussion. Because, as we often say at our church, “The voice of the chorus is so much better than the solo.” Whether you process

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these questions alone or with friends, I hope they help you go further than my words could ever take you.

A glossary of the main Hebrew and Greek words that I've used is provided because glossaries are nerdy but helpful, and so am I. I had fun with it—adding color, vibrancy, and stories to highlight the meaning of each word—so don't be surprised (spoiler alert!) when you see Taylor Swift's name back there. When you can't quite remember what a certain word means or you want more explanation than I gave you in that particular paragraph, head back to the glossary. You're welcome.



Maybe you wake up with a fire in your belly.

Maybe you're a quiet caregiver who offers daily kindness to those who likely won't change, whose bodies or minds are sick.

Maybe you're an artist or an author. Maybe you write poetry or make music. Your eyes sparkle when you make something beautiful.

Maybe you're a stay-at-home mama and all you feel is exhausted.

Maybe you're a pastor in the second half of life and you're not sure you can hold on to your fragile faith anymore.

Maybe you're angry.

Maybe you're so full of energy that you're dangerous.

Maybe you're afraid.

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No matter who you are or where you live, no matter if you're a raging extrovert or a cautious introvert, the secret that's inside you is there to restore what's broken in me, you, and the entire world.

We need to hear your secret.

Steve Wiens
Maple Grove, Minnesota
SUMMER 2016

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WHERE ARE YOU?

*Still I'm pinned under the weight
of what I believed would keep me safe.
So show me where my armor ends;
show me where my skin begins.*

“PLUTO”

BY SLEEPING AT LAST

I'M SITTING UNDERNEATH the rustic beams of a sturdy deck at a bed-and-breakfast in Somers, Montana, overlooking Flathead Lake. A pair of deer just ambled by, nosing each other in the early morning fog, oblivious of the brokenness in our world, oblivious of the brokenness in me.

I'm looking for something here in Montana. Perhaps what I'm really looking for is *in here*, deep inside me, but it feels elusive, like the deer I just saw. Perhaps it's my secret, wanting to be heard.

I'm in Somers because I won the lottery and got to spend some time with former pastor Eugene Peterson, author of *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language* and many

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other books. His books remind me that you can be a pastor *and* a human being, though it isn't easy.

Eugene said a lot of things during our past two days together, and I wrote down as many of them as I could. He's in his eighties, and his gentle, unassuming wisdom is the kind you lap up like water. I asked him what unique temptations pastors face today. He didn't hesitate with his answer.

"Impatience. Pastors want so badly to be successful *right now*."

I'm sure he saw me wince, but I tried to hide it.

Later he said, "It's impossible to be a successful pastor. You're a bundle of failings."

When he said those words, I dropped my shoulders, as if someone had just let a little bit of air out of the balloon of my soul, just enough so that I could take a small breath of real air again. But those words also stung, because the truth really does hurt.

Please feel free to laugh out loud at this next admission.

In 1980 our very Baptist family somehow came into the possession of a record by the soft rock duo Air Supply, even though I'm pretty sure we weren't allowed to have secular albums in our house. I played that record over and over again, singing loudly along with the melancholy melodies, all of which were designed for the heartbroken.

I wonder what sadness I was trying to express by singing those songs?

I was nine years old, and apparently I was "all out of love."

We've all experienced times in childhood when parts of

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ourselves felt exposed, when we needed someone to help us through something sad, terrible, or confusing. And these orphan parts of us end up lost, and we have no idea how to get anywhere in the world.

I believe that those orphaned parts of me were raised by immature older siblings, Approval and Admiration, who taught me I'd survive only if I could continually achieve enviable levels of success and admiration. I'd keep producing success because the alternative was to look inside myself, which would be terrifying. Approval and Admiration said I'd always need lots and lots of success and positive feedback to hide my very real insecurity.

They also gave me a very simple formula I needed to follow: Succeed at everything, be admired, keep achieving.

If you're familiar with the Enneagram,¹ you'll understand that as a 3, I'm very effective at getting things done and persuading people to go where I'm going. But it also means that when I feel as though I'm failing at what I'm doing, I think that I'm all out of love. More than that, I feel as though I'm disappearing.

All those things came tumbling out of my mouth years later as I sat with my friend Seth Haines while overlooking the overgrown willow trees in my backyard.

Seth is a Southern gentleman who lives in Arkansas. He's gentle and strong, tethered to something ancient and true. He and his wife, Amber, have four boys, the kind who bring home snakes and who conceal and carry Arkansas dirt in their pockets as if it were gold. Their life is busy and happy,

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filled with all the normal joy and anxiety packed into a family of six.

But when they almost lost their two-year-old son, Titus, Seth swallowed some dangerous glass.

Titus had been losing weight and was constantly sick, and they were worried. The only diagnosis they had was “failure to thrive,” and the doctors didn’t know what to prescribe. Titus’s large eyes stared out at them as he began to slip away in the hospital.

When the doctors finally said, “All we can do is help him be as comfortable as possible,” Seth decided he wasn’t going to feel anything anymore. So he asked his sister to smuggle a bottle of gin into the hospital, and he started drinking in earnest. Gin was his alcohol of choice, perhaps because it was the choice of his father and grandfather before him.

When he was out with friends, family, and coworkers, he limited the number of drinks he would have, but in private, his daily regimen included polishing off a drink or two before he left his law offices and then drinking several more at home. This went on for a little more than a year, with Titus not getting any better, until Seth woke up one day with what he calls a “glorious Christian hangover.”

That day was the beginning of his journey toward sobriety.

Seth wrote his story in a raw, gorgeous book called *Coming Clean: A Story of Faith*, which details the first ninety days of his sobriety. Seth’s sin of choice was abusing alcohol, but as he says, “My alcoholism is not the thing, see. Neither is your eating disorder, your greed disorder, or your sex addiction.

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Your sin is not the thing. The thing is under the sin. The thing is the pain. Sin management without redemption of life's pain is a losing proposition."²

So you can guess where Seth's questions focused when he and I talked, the time I couldn't hide under those willows.

If you're going to do the good work of restoring what's broken, you're going to have to deal with your own jagged glass and come out of hiding.

Where are you?



When the first human beings lost their way, God asked them a question. I find this hopeful. From the very first interaction, God was attentive and curious, inviting them to be honest.

They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, and said to him,

“Where are you?” GENESIS 3:8-9

As the story goes in Genesis 3, this question comes directly after the first really big train wreck, after which things went hopelessly wrong. Whatever you believe about literal talking serpents and actual apples, this scene has been repeated so many times over the course of human history that it's

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obviously *more than* literal. It's true, in every desperate sense of the word.

The story of the first cover-up is the story of all the cover-ups, which we have reenacted many times. We could just as easily call these cover-ups *sin*, which is admittedly a grenade of a word, but let's be honest, what else would you call rape? What else would you call the slaughter that is happening right before our eyes at the hands of ISIS?

And what else would you call the small movement you make toward your coworker, who is not your spouse, following that undeniable spark? That small line you decidedly and intentionally cross? What else would you call it?

If you're still not convinced, what else would you call snarky Facebook comments?

I was recently speaking at my friend Andrew's church in Providence, Rhode Island, where I came across the best definition of sin I've ever heard: "Legitimate longings that have gone astray."

I have a legitimate longing to be significant, to see that whatever mark I make in my corner of the world *matters*. I have a legitimate longing for my words to find a soft place to land, in the hearts and minds of people who want to find a God who seems to be unfindable. I have a legitimate longing to be noticed and to be affirmed for what I bring to the world.

But the edge between using my gifts for the good of the world and relying on my gifts to make me valuable is razor-thin, and I fall off it entirely too often.

What do you do to get noticed? Where do your gifts blur

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into self-indulgence? Where have your legitimate longings gone astray?

We can surely all agree that we have some idea of what *good* is but that we seem to be unable to carry it out consistently. And we have at least some idea of what *bad* is, and we seem to indulge in it more often than we'd like to admit.

There does seem to be an undeniable human propensity to mess things up, doesn't there?³

And when you mess things up, you feel shame, and so you run away and hide.

Sin first entered the picture when Adam and Eve mistrusted the one who had otherwise been trustworthy, because it suddenly seemed as if God might have been holding out on them. And so they reached out and grabbed the thing they believed should have been theirs in the first place (of course it was *they*; Adam was all too eager to get in on it with her but then conveniently offered Eve the blame). Then the blaming went back and forth until they were both covered in self-hatred. And then they heard God coming. That's when their innocence floated away.

And so they ran away and hid.

God pursued them with a question, one that brought them out of hiding.

"Where are you?" God asked.

Oh, God, where am I?

God hasn't stopped asking that question.

Where are you?

Before they chose to hide, Adam and Eve lived in the

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Garden in the physical and emotional state of being naked and unashamed. To live naked and unashamed means to live in the radical vulnerability of complete trust. The closest resemblance we have now is a newborn baby with his or her mother.

We think growing up means getting increasingly more independent, but life in the Garden seemed to demonstrate something different: a vulnerability that involved both personal agency and dependence. Adam and Eve are instructed to take care of the Garden while also depending on the God who put them there in the first place. When we believed the lie that the serpent whispered to us, we lost the thread that connected personal agency to trust. And so every time we fail, we feel shame and go into hiding instead of looking back into the eyes of our mothers and receiving more of what we need to keep growing.

GOD called to the Man: “Where are you?”

He said, “I heard you in the garden and I was afraid because I was naked. And I hid.”

GOD said, “Who told you you were naked?”

GENESIS 3:9-11, MSG

Adam evaded God’s question. He told God that he had hidden, but he didn’t tell God where he actually was. To admit out loud where we actually are is one of the most vulnerable things we can do. It’s far easier to hide, even from ourselves. We hide because we are afraid.

When the serpent had come to the couple and incited

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them out of that vulnerability and into mistrust, he also came with a question.

The serpent was clever, more clever than any wild animal GOD had made. He spoke to the Woman: “Do I understand that God told you not to eat from any tree in the garden?” GENESIS 3:1, MSG

The word for “clever” (*arum*) can also mean “crafty or shrewd.” The man and the woman had previously been naked but felt no shame. After their interaction with the crafty one, they *felt* naked. They were covered in shame for the very first time.

Have you ever met someone who had the uncanny ability of making you feel naked and ashamed?

When the serpent asked the woman if God had really told her not to eat from any tree in the Garden, he was planting a seed of doubt in her mind. The serpent was implying God could not be trusted.

Don't miss the larger truth happening here: Sin isn't the first true thing about being human. The first true thing about being human is living with God, and with one another, in the radical vulnerability of complete trust. And we gave that radical vulnerability away. We exchanged it for independence and mistrust and scarcity.

The work of restoration starts with the desire to come out of hiding and return to the radical vulnerability of complete trust.

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Where are you? There are lots of places to hide when you feel exposed. We typically hide by fashioning armor that will cover our weaknesses and prevent us from having to be vulnerable.

Maybe you hide in your perfectionism.

Maybe you hide by deflecting praise.

Maybe you hide by always remaining the victim.

Maybe you hide by making sure you're always the first one to offer help but never being the one who needs help.

Maybe you hide by wearing the coat of the activist, but you won't admit that it's easier to love someone across the world than someone who lives in your own home.

Maybe you hide by insisting that you're a contemplative, but you won't admit that part of your lack of engagement is that you're just afraid.

Adam and Eve allowed God to *cover* them after they felt the hot shame of their nakedness (see Genesis 3:21). Do you dare to believe that your journey out of hiding will start with being clothed *by God*—not yourself—so that you can go where you need to go?

You've swallowed some jagged glass, and you've gone into hiding. This is part of what it means to be human. What would it take for you to come out of hiding? What would it take for you to name where you actually are? What would it feel like to return to a state of vulnerability and radical trust?

It's a wise person who knows where he or she is, even if hiding. It's from that honest place that wholeness can grow. For many of us, we're hiding in the very place where we lost

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our innocence, when we traded radical trust and vulnerability for shame and hiding. For some of you, this may have come from obvious trauma, and for others, it may have come from the minor cuts and bruises that accrued over time while you were growing up.

What sent you running? What made you hide?



I was in second grade, and I was shooting baskets alone at recess. Even back then, I liked to steal away by myself. I got nervous when Jimmy walked up to the basketball court and just stood there. Jimmy was the kind of kid who made you like him one moment and fear him the next. He asked to shoot baskets with me, and I asked him to leave, but he wouldn't. He just stood there and kept asking. I kept shooting, ignoring him. Finally, he rebounded one of my shots and got ahold of the ball, and when he did, something exploded inside of me. I tackled him and began punching him, over and over again.

In the principal's office, as she was trying to figure out what had happened, I couldn't stop crying. Jimmy sat there stone-faced, looking much stronger than I felt. Hot shame covered me as I cried and cried. Not only had I lost control of myself on the basketball court, but even worse, I was losing it in front of the person who intimidated me. Being exposed like that felt terrifying. This was the seventies; no crying was allowed if you wanted to be a strong boy. I never, ever wanted that to happen to me again.

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I learned that day that I couldn't trust myself not to lose control—in anger or in sadness. And so I made a vow to hold it together, to never lose it, to keep those dangerous emotions inside of me.

It turns out that if you try to keep those dangerous emotions stuck inside of you, other things get stuck down there too.

I stuttered badly until I was about fourteen or fifteen. It's hard to describe what it's like to stutter, but back then no one called it a disability. Those of us who stutter are working really hard all the time, constantly searching for easier words that will replace the ones that get stuck in our throats. And the harder we work, the worse it gets.

My parents took me out of school one day to go to a speech therapist. We went to an old elementary school, in a storage room. Why didn't we meet at an office? Honestly, what were we doing in a storage room? I didn't want to be there, and I was convinced that it wasn't going to help. I really can't remember much about the therapy. What I remember in vivid detail was that some older boys were staring at me through the window in the door, making faces at me, making fun of me. I had never met them before, and I never saw them again, but something about their faces made me feel so exposed, so defective, that I never went back to speech therapy.

I learned that day that my voice was defective. And there was something about that storage room that said disabilities of any kind should be hidden, that they shouldn't be brought out to the light of day.

When you have a disability with your voice, you try to

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make up for it by being spectacular in some other visible way. I chose sports.

I've always been a good athlete. I've made all-star and all-conference teams and have been named team captain many times. But it took me until I was in sixth grade to decide to play organized sports. I think I waited that long because I was nervous about how the other boys on the team would react to my stuttering. I couldn't wait for that first game. I remember putting on my uniform: white pants, black-and-gold shirt, and black hat with a gold *P* on it. We were the Pirates, and I was the starting shortstop and leadoff hitter.

I struck out in my first at bat.

Then I struck out in my second at bat.

And my third.

I prayed I wouldn't have a fourth-plate appearance, but I did.

And I struck out then, too.

So in my first game of organized baseball, I struck out four times.

I remember going home and lying on my bed, crying. My dad came in to talk to me, reassuring me that there would be other games and that we could work on my hitting. But I felt like such a failure. I imagined what it would be like to never get a hit, to never even touch the ball for the rest of the season.

Failure felt like the absolute worst thing in the world, and I must have made a vow then that I would work as hard as I could to never fail again.

I wouldn't know it until many years later, but I would grow

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up to use my voice to discover strength in others. My voice would not be used to knock down people but instead to restore that which is broken, to set free that which is imprisoned.

Approval and Admiration played important roles in my life. They got me through some very scary times in childhood. They're not inherently bad. Everyone wants to be appreciated for his or her work in the world. But approval and admiration will take you only so far, and then they'll trap you there. I've hidden there for many, many years. I've worn that armor for too long.

My journey of restoration has been a long road of coming out of hiding to realize that I have a quiet but formidable strength, that my emotions are okay, and that my voice isn't broken. I'm learning to trust God and other people with my vulnerability instead of only my success.

I'm learning to answer God and others when asked where it is that I'm hiding. I'm learning to receive the clothes God has for me instead of insisting that I make them for myself. This is part of my journey out of hiding.

Where are you?



Mary and I recently performed a wedding for two close friends in Winter Park, Colorado. The ceremony was outside, in the thin air of nine thousand feet. Natalie and Chris wrote their own vows, using the Hebrew word *hineni*, which means "Here I am." It's used in the Scriptures in moments

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when God calls to someone when he or she is at a turning point, when God is calling that person on a journey. “*Hineni*” is the response people give to God when they want to indicate that they are all-in for the journey, even though they don’t know where they are going. Natalie and Chris wanted to say “*hineni*” to each other, to communicate that the answer to the question “Where are you?” will *always* be “Here I am.”

They gave me permission to reprint part of their vows:

*I am very aware of my own flaws and ways I have
and will miss the mark in loving you well.*

*When I am crazy about you . . . and when you make
me crazy . . . Here I am.*

*When I want to run toward you . . . and when I want
to run away . . . Here I am.*

*When our life is full of adventures . . . and when it's
full of the mundane . . . Here I am.*

*When things go as we'd imagined them . . . and when
they don't . . . Here I am.*

*I promise to learn with you,
to ask questions with you, to listen to you,
and to care for your heart, your body, and your soul.
From this moment forward, you have my wholehearted
commitment.*

There won't be anyone else.

You are the one I choose.

Here I am.

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It was one of the most beautiful weddings I've ever been a part of.

"Abraham," God whispered one early morning, the chilly air feeling like razor blades around Abraham's shoulders. God was about to ask Abraham to sacrifice his only son on a distant mountain.

"*Hineni*," Abraham answered. Would Abraham trust God to provide, even if he had to give up what he loved most?

"Jacob," God whispered in a dream.

"*Hineni*," Jacob answered, his tongue sticking to the roof of his mouth. Would Jacob return to the land where he was from, to face his brother, whom he had deceived?

"Moses," God called out from the burning bush.

"*Hineni*," Moses answered, starting a conversation that would last for two chapters, finally ending with the decision to return to Egypt, the place from which he had hidden for forty years.

"*Hineni*" is the response you give God when you want to tell him that you're fully present and want to come out of hiding. You don't know where the journey will take you or even all that it will cost, but you want to say that you're fully present with God in a state of radical trust and vulnerability.

Is your heart fully present? Is your spirit fully present? Are you willing to walk toward vulnerability so that you can go on a journey of restoration? Or will you remain hidden? Will you come out of hiding and courageously name where you actually are so that you can begin the journey out of

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hiding—back into a life of vulnerability and trust? Richard Rohr wrote,

Human strength admires holding on. Human weakness is about letting go into the Other, handing over the self to another and receiving your self from another. Human strength admires personal independence. But God's Mystery is total mutual dependence and interdependence. We like control more than surrender. God loves vulnerability. We admire needing no one. The Trinity is total intercommunion with all things and all being. We are practiced at hiding and protecting ourselves. God seems to be in some kind of total disclosure for the sake of creating and loving the other.⁴

“Steve,” God calls out to me.

“*Hineni*,” I answer. I don't know where this answer will take me, but I know I want to go, out of hiding and into trust.

Is God calling your name?

How will you answer?

Committing to your own restoration is risky. It might even feel selfish. But restoration is constructed by God to be *all-inclusive*. That's why *shalom* means “completeness, wholeness.” True restoration for one person leads to restoration for another, or else it isn't restoration. We create a false bifurcation when we believe that the restoration of others is

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somehow different from our own restoration. We lose the plot if we believe that our own restoration is somehow less important than, or even separated from, the restoration of others.

Caring for your own restoration is essential if you're going to work for restoration in the world. If you don't commit to your own restoration, you'll continue to choose mistrust and violence as the only ways to deal with the brokenness you see inside of you and all around you.

Adam and Eve's sons will teach us that lesson, and it will be a costly one.

God will ask us *where we are* over and over again in our lives, because we'll get lost over and over again. At that moment, God isn't asking us to make a plan. God simply wants to call us out of hiding and into a new beginning.

May you hear God's voice calling your name in your deepest, darkest corner of shame, where you have hidden yourself away from everybody, even yourself. And may you rise from that place and boldly answer, "Here I am."

QUESTIONS *for Reflection & Discussion*

1. In what ways can you relate to the stories from Steve's childhood? What is one story from your own childhood that marked you in a similar way?

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2. Steve said immature siblings named Approval and Admiration raised him. What words would describe how you tried to gain a sense of identity and safety for yourself?
3. Finish this sentence and explain your answer: Vulnerability is _____.
4. Where are you with God in terms of wanting to be fully present and wanting to come out of hiding?
5. If God asked you, “Where are you?” right now, how would you answer if you knew you were completely safe in answering with whatever was really true?