The background of the cover is a light cream color, adorned with various floral illustrations in shades of pink and gold. In the top left corner, there is a large pink flower. On the right side, there are several pink flowers of different sizes and stages of bloom. At the bottom, there are more pink flowers and a cluster of gold berries. The overall aesthetic is soft and elegant.

collide

*Running into
healing when
life hands
you hurt*

willow weston

Collide is a soul-stirring invitation to healing. Willow writes with vulnerability and insight, offering women a lifeline of hope as they walk through life's heartbreaks. This book will meet you in your pain and gently lead you to the Healer.

BOB GOFF

New York Times bestselling author, speaker, and coach

In *Collide*, Willow Weston, through her own vulnerable storytelling and honest teaching, has offered us not only a path to healing but a process to deepen our faith in a loving and kind God, a journey to take that will grow us and change us, and an opportunity to run the race marked out for each of us. What a gift of a book.

ANNIE F. DOWNS

New York Times bestselling author of *That Sounds Fun*

In a world where it's easy to hide the hard, Willow is choosing to be raw and vulnerable out loud, and it's transforming an entire generation of women. I'm just grateful to be able to see it up close through the *Collide* conference year after year! I can't wait to see the fruit of her bravery on paper.

TONI COLLIER

Author, preacher, and podcast host

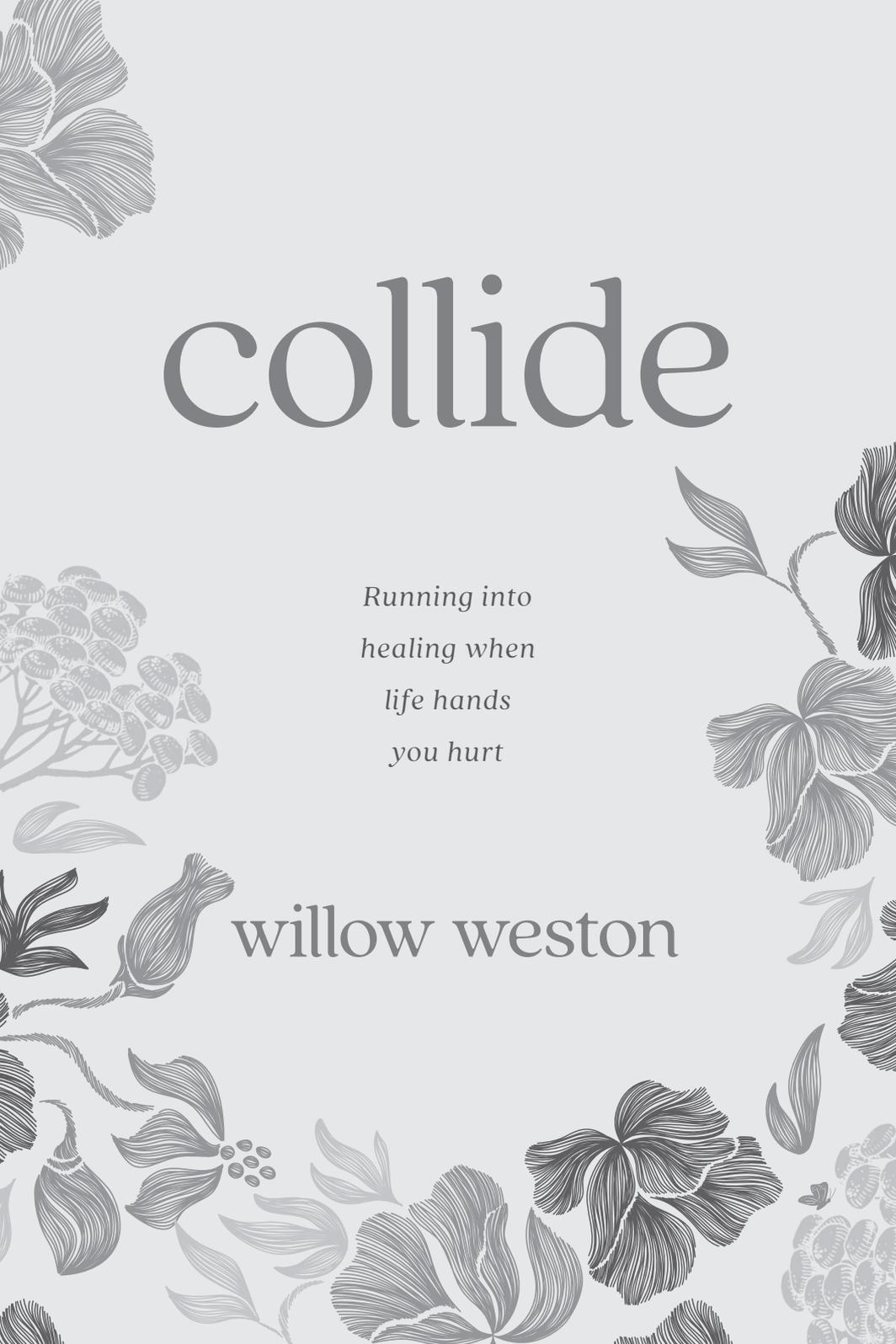
Willow has an infectious love for God, His Word, and other people that permeates her life. If you have the privilege of being around her—whether through her teaching, her writing, or simply waiting beside her in line at a coffee shop—you'll encounter genuine joy!

LISA HARPER

Author, Bible teacher, and host of *Back Porch Theology*



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introduction

Dear friend,

You and I have been through a lot. We have experienced some joyous joys but also some tremendous loss and pain. We have run into hurting people who hurt us. And I'm afraid we haven't always been invited to heal in ways that truly heal. If we don't get healing for what hurt us, our wounds start to wound and wound and wound.

Our wounds begin to speak. Our experiences, conversations, and memories have a voice, and they start to tell us who we are, who others are, and who God is. Our view of ourselves, others, and God can become so very wounded.

We walk into job interviews, parties, churches, teams, first dates, and committees expecting to be hurt again, which wreaks havoc on our lives. We self-protect by controlling, hiding, shutting down, and putting up walls. Some of us build such high walls that they put the Great Wall of China to shame. Nobody will ever climb them. And if someone *tries* to climb our walls, we will Taser them with our pain. That oughta keep them out!

Wounds that haven't experienced repair can lead to self-sabotage. This is the sad story of my life, and maybe yours too. We quit before we get fired. We dump before we get dumped. We withdraw before we

collide

get rejected. We break up with the cool kids club before they can break up with us. We live small so we aren't disappointed by dreaming big.

In all this pain, we look for easy versions of pleasure or safety or busyness with our deep-seated hurt. We turn to Cheetos and red wine and boobs and boob tube—anything we can to avoid our pain.

Our wounds can find us trying so hard to convince others that we are worthy. We sign up for every board, every volunteer opportunity, every cause. We close more deals and drive flashier cars. We host parties that we hope are supercool so people think we are too. Sometimes we pretend we are nice when we don't feel nice. We laugh at jokes we don't think are funny. We say yes when we want to say no. We don't stand up for what *is* right because we want to be *in* the right with those we know are wrong.

Before long, the hurt from our past begins to mess with our present. We stop trusting people, assuming they will hurt us, reject us, or betray us. We stop taking risks in community, and we begin growing roots of bitterness. We become full of unforgiveness, and we drink its poison.

We let our pain tell us false stories about other people's motivations, and we act on our assumptions. This leads to ghosting, friendship breakups, conflict, divorce, and empty seats at family get-togethers. We start blaming others, and we start blaming God for our pain and for not taking it away. Before we realize it, we've become the father we despised, the boss we'd hate working for, the friend we're annoyed by. Our marriages experience mutual destruction, our friendships are damaged by deep-seated insecurity, and our kids are handed wounded patterns with their breakfast. We pass the baton of hurt on to our children, who pass it on to their children and their children's children. We see history repeat itself, and what we see, we don't like.

Pain can be ravaging our lives, and still we fail to pause for repair, reach out for help, or travel back to the origin of our wounds. We try

to move on like that thing that happened didn't sting, *but it stings*. Like that cut only needs a Band-Aid, *but it still bleeds*. Like that run-in didn't tear us apart, *but it did*. You can say, "It's nothing," for fifty years. You can make it small, but it sure is pestilent. You can ice it over with gin and tonics. You can stuff it away for safekeeping and try to forget it's in there. But the thing is, wounds that aren't healed continue to wound and wound and wound.

I don't have to be a psychologist or have lots of letters after my name to understand pain. I've learned from the school of life. I grew up in a hippie commune, a school bus, a houseboat, and a famous café with quirky, hurting, religionless folk. I was raised by a wild and crazy alcoholic mother who left me alone all too often while she chased her longings. Every once in a while she'd bring those longings home, and what I experienced wrecked me. My dad was nowhere to be found for years, and his absence left a hole in my heart that found me chasing my own longings. The pain that was handed to them was passed on to me. Absence and neglect, abuse and addiction, secrets and silence, instability and feeling all alone in the world taught me grit, resilience, and survival techniques, sure. But let's be real, mostly it taught me what pain feels like.

I bet you know pain too.

I have learned that if our wounds go unhealed, they will collide with others' woundedness and cause more wounds. We are in desperate need of a new kind of collision.

And I have found that healing collision possible in Jesus. So I want to tell you about this Jesus I have been colliding with, the One who is healing me, who wants to heal you too.

Jesus doesn't run away from pain—He runs toward it. When you look at Him in the New Testament, you see that every time He collides with someone, they are left more whole than broken. In my own agonizing pain, I invited a few friends, who then invited a few more friends,

collide

and I have since witnessed firsthand thousands of women colliding with Jesus and experiencing the healing they've longed for. I have been inviting people to collide with Jesus now for more than twenty-five years, and I have seen the power of what happens in a person's life when they receive permission to be real about their pain and then take it to Jesus. He is, after all, the One who can handle it and heal it. So let me grab your hand, and let's go to the One who can do something about all this pain. The more you and I collide with Jesus, the more whole we become.

This story is for you if you have been wounded and long for healing. If you were expected to move on but you never did . . . if you had to be the parent but you were the kid . . . if you got hurt loving someone who was supposed to love you. If you're triggered by a knock on the door, by the mention of a name, by the mean girls who happen to be adults, I see you.

This story is for you if you think God wants nothing to do with you because you are too messy for Him. If you feel broken and want to be put back together again . . . if you hoped you'd be in a better place by now but you just aren't . . . if you *still* feel angry, bitter, and disappointed . . . if you cry at Christmas and you don't know why . . . if you wonder where God has been in all your pain . . . this book is for you. And as frightened as I was to write these pages, they are for me too.

I invite you to run into the One who brings wholeness to all this woundedness. The One who changed me and changes me, and who can change you too. When He collides with us, we are never the same, and neither are the people we run into.

So if your past is still haunting your present . . . if you have been in self-protective mode for way too long and it's hurting you more than protecting you . . . if you wanted your story to write differently than it has . . . I did too. Let's write a new one.

Willow Weston

part 1

running away from pain



hiding in closets



One ordinary Wednesday, I got a knock on the door that sent me into total panic. I looked through the peephole, and as though I were in grave danger, I grabbed my baby girl, sprinted up the stairs, and hid in a closet.

Now, I need to hand you just a wee bit of context so you don't assume that I panic *every* time someone shows up at my house. Countless teens have practically grown up in our home. Kids walk in without knocking and open our fridge without asking. We have hosted a million events with Mentos-and-Coke tricks, toilet paper shenanigans, Nerf gun wars, and chubby bunny competitions.

Our house is *that* house.

We've had cooking classes instructed by my amazing food blogging friend Sarah, theology nights taught by our genius friend Johnny, and milkshake and movie nights instigated by our old roomie Ron. We've hosted bridal showers, puppy parades, kidney donor celebrations, and

collide

The Office Olympic parties. (There was also the classy versus trashy party that got me in big trouble, but we can talk about that another time.)

People show up at our door in need all the time. There was the jilted bride, the man who cheated on his wife, the orphaned college kid, and the suicidal grocery checker. We've opened our rooms to college interns, traveling missionaries, people trying to put their marriages back together, and lost souls with no family to take them in.

It's a revolving door, so a knock doesn't usually phase me.

You should also know that I am a functioning woman. Like, I shower. I make decisions. I lead people. I can control the remote, but I can also let someone else control it. I do everyday things without getting spooked by spiders, clowns, or dirt. I have friends I've had for decades, and I don't try to one-up them with how much sex I have, how big my diamond is, how front-row my T-Swift concert tickets are, or how small my appetite is. Mainly because I don't have most of those things, but still. Like, I'm not the chick-looking-all-calm-but-I've-come-up-with-four-ways-to-kill-you-in-my-head. I do yell a lot in pickleball. It's the best part of my game. I can be very feisty, that's true.

But I'm not a crazy mom. Well, not exactly. I mean, I did ask my husband to return to the hospital about two minutes after leaving with our newborn. I yelled, "Go back!! We have noooo idea what we're doing!" And I meant GO BACK.

This running into a closet dealio happened when Hurt knocked on my door. I had just quit my full-time ministry job and was trying to rock the stay-at-home-mom life. Everyday life looked like potty training and blowouts, breastfeeding and nipple cream, Target runs and nap time. It also looked like me going to bed every night wondering if I had done enough, taught enough, been enough. Maybe you do that too?

Yeah, I mean, I fretted that I might mess up my kids. (And you might be thinking, *Yeah, chick, you will. You're hiding in a closet with your baby.*) But from the moment I got pregnant, I longed to give my kids what I didn't get.

Maybe that's why I signed up for every mommy-and-me class, volunteered in my kids' classrooms, made homemade baby food, and read a million parenting books. Maybe that's why we went to the zoo, the children's museum, the aquarium, and church. Maybe my longing to give my kids what I didn't have is why every single night I sang songs and prayed prayers and said good night to everything and the moon. Maybe it's why I lay in bed with them when they were scared, held them when they cried, and invited them to feel all their feels. Their pain, their anger, their worry—all of it mattered.

That day at the front door, all my old emotions came flooding back. You'd think a serial killer was on my porch, or a religious guy selling me his heaven, or an ex-boyfriend begging me back. But nope. There, on the other side of the door, wearing denial like the tattered Hawaiian shirt on her back, stood my *mother*, showing up to be super grandma.

The moment I saw her, I ran like heck.

I ran like we all run. We get as far away from pain as we need to so we don't have to face it *or* feel it. We attempt to escape our own baggage, our own anxiety and emotions, and, well, our own issues because maybe, just maybe, they will all go away. Maybe if we get away from our reality, it won't be real. Maybe if we run for the hills, that person can't hurt us again. Maybe if we stuff down how we really feel, the peace we long for will finally show up. Maybe if we hide, our struggles will stop knocking.

Bella and I hid on the floor of that cramped closet together.

When you're hiding in a closet shushing your baby, there are a few things going on.

collide

One: You're waiting for something bad to happen, and you are embarrassed your baby is seeing that you are a fraidy-cat, because nothing bad *is* actually happening.

I mean, for the love of all things holy, pull yourself together, Willow. (My self-talk has always been soooo helpful.) This isn't what mature thirty-year-old Christian moms do.

Two: You are horrified that you may be a wreck of a mom and may have lost all sense of logic. You remember that your infant is not psychoanalyzing you because she doesn't have that capacity . . . yet.

(Noooo, that comes in college, when you'll have to pay for tuition *and* therapy.)

And three: You just hope your little one won't start crying and alert your mother that you are actually inside, hiding from her.

My mom wasn't going to walk in and "hurt" me, I kept reminding myself. *What kind of mom will I be, and how will this hurt my daughter if this becomes our story?*

By now, Mom had been knocking for a while. I held my baby girl in my arms, hoping to wait her out. The knocking finally stopped, and breaking through the panic and paralysis, I heard something else: *This is an invitation into further healing.*

I knew this voice. It was God. I didn't have to come out for Him to find me. He met me right there in the closet. He was right. I needed more healing. With just one knock on the door, I could be triggered right back into being that little girl, full of fear, hiding to protect herself. God had already done so much healing in me since I handed Him my life, but here I was, needing Jesus to run into my mess, again.

Again?

Again.

Every closet is an invitation. Every trigger, every broken heart, every lie uncovered, every altercation, every walk-in absent of peace

is God's request for our presence. It is there that God invites. His love can't bear to watch us shaking in the pain of old wounds, hushing our baby, inflicting new wounds. His love won't leave us there. It's often in these stuck places that we experience a real and personal, living and compassionate God, showing up and helping us get unstuck.

So I looked down at my sweet, precious Bella and chose to be brave for the both of us. Still uncertain and shaky, I held my baby girl in one arm, took a deep breath, and stretched for the door with the other. With all the guts I could muster, I walked out of that closet in search of help.