

A woman is seen from behind, holding a string of colorful balloons (purple, yellow, green, and white) in a grassy field. The scene is bathed in the warm, golden light of a sunset, with the sun low on the horizon. The woman's hair is blowing in the wind.

*Finding Healing  
in the Arms  
of Your Savior*

RETURN  
TO  
JOY

BEV DESALVO

FOREWORD BY LINDA DILLOW

If you're struggling to rediscover your joy, read this book! Bev DeSalvo shares her own journey with poignant honesty, and she invites you to retrace your past in order to move into radiant hope. Bev gently guides the reader out from under the shadow of false shame and misplaced guilt and into to a place of embracing tears, practicing forgiveness, and dwelling in the place of God's light and hope. You'll benefit greatly from the powerful Bible study that accompanies each chapter. Buy one copy of *Return to Joy* for yourself and ten more to share with a small group of women who long to be free of the past in order to live triumphantly in the shelter of God's love.

CAROL KENT

Speaker and author of *When I Lay My Isaac Down*

A fervent follower of Christ, Bev DeSalvo takes you by the hand and guides you on a journey from brokenness to joy. With a passion to lead others to wholeness, Bev walks with you on the road of brokenness she herself has traveled. Steeped in Scripture and accompanied by meditative questions, this book will challenge you to lay aside the wounds of your past, embrace the healing and freedom found only in our Divine Nurturer, and return to a joy-filled journey. I pray that *Return to Joy* blesses you as much as it blessed me.

CYNTHIA HEALD

Author of the Becoming a Woman Bible studies

If you feel as though you'll never be happy again, this book is for you! Allow Bev to tenderly take your hand and show you how to find the path back to joy. No matter what hurt or trauma you've experienced, joy can be yours!

BECKY HARLING

Speaker, John Maxwell Certified Coach, and author of *The 30-Day Praise Challenge* and *Rewriting Your Emotional Script*

Many who have suffered through trauma are on a “healing journey.” Yet God has more for you than healing—He invites you to travel the broken road to intimacy. Bev’s powerful story testifies that God can work through your greatest pain to bring you into an intimate relationship with Him, your Creator and Lord.

DR. JULI SLATTERY

Cofounder of Authentic Intimacy

*Return to Joy* is a journey of hope and healing. Bev DeSalvo shares honestly about the sexual abuse of her childhood. She then invites Jesus into the depth of her pain, and His healing love produces a deep passion for Him. All her wounds cry, “Alleluia!” In the midst of suffering comes a depth of worship that is contagious. I have ministered in conferences and prisons for many years and have been waiting for this book. It is a powerful gift to those suffering pain and seeking peace.

LINDA STROM

President and founder of Discipleship Unlimited and author of *Karla Faye Tucker Set Free*

Bev DeSalvo honestly shares her journey from childhood pain and abuse to the healing arms of Christ. *Return to Joy* is a story of courage and hope. This book will take you to the feet of Jesus, where you will receive a garment of praise for a spirit of heaviness.

TERRY MEEUWSEN

Cohost of *The 700 Club*

*Return to Joy* is a helpful resource for Christians who have been wounded through childhood or adult trauma or loss, particularly if they wish to experience greater intimacy with God. De Salvo takes seriously the impact of such wounds

and does not offer easy solutions. She does, however, offer concrete suggestions for a step-by-step process that can lead individuals into emotional and spiritual healing.

HEATHER DAVEDIUK GINGRICH

Professor of counseling at Denver Seminary

What a gift Bev has given us in *Return to Joy*. The unvarnished view into her deepest hurts, the wisdom gained through pain, the secret to unfettered joy. Read this book and join others in studying it together. It will enrich your life.

JENNIFER KENNEDY DEAN

Executive director of The Praying Life Foundation and author of *Live a Praying Life* and other books and Bible studies



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BEV DESALVO

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The brave men and women who shared your stories. Your pain is being used by the Holy One to bring hope and healing to others.

The precious women of Temple Bible Church, past and present. You have been my spiritual family, and I thank God for you.

The two special women who walked the grueling healing journey with me, Linda Dillow and Kris Hungerford. Thank you for being God's loving arms to hold me when my life fell apart. My heart is forever bound to yours, tied with a divine knot.

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The talented people at NavPress, especially Don Pape, Caitlyn Carlson, and Karen Lee-Thorp. God has used you to bring my dream to reality, and it has been a great joy to work with you.



## Foreword

WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME you read a book that was authentic, shocking, and hope-filled? You are holding such a book in your hands.

*Authentic.* Bev DeSalvo is one of the bravest women I know. Bev had correct biblical answers for others until her own hard questions began to surface and her neatly packaged world began to fall apart.

She says things a Christian leader doesn't say and admits to weaknesses senior pastors' wives never admit to. Bev's authenticity is refreshing!

*Shocking.* I grew up in a dysfunctional home, but life with my abusive alcoholic father was mild compared to Bev's distorted, dysfunctional home. Sexual and emotional abuse burned lies like these in Bev's heart:

- I am unwanted and will never belong to anyone.
- I can't trust God or anyone else because no one protected me.
- If people really know me, they will hate me.

*Hope-Filled.* My heart fills with hope as I read *Return to Joy* because God gave me the great privilege to walk with Bev through

her healing. I watched her grow as a worshiper and embrace God as her Abba. She had always loved Him, but I saw her fall in love with Him. As she forgave the most difficult things to forgive, as she learned to fight against the enemy in practical ways, I marveled. The lies the enemy branded on Bev's soul have been replaced with God's truth. It is beautiful to behold!

I remember when Bev said to me, "*Linda, Satan desires to use my pain as a barrier to keep me from trusting God and others. But when I bow my pain to the Holy One in worship, He will use it as a magnet to draw me to His heart.*"

This book will fill you with hope because you will see step by step how Bev faced her fears and moved from a "polite" relationship with God into captivating intimacy with Him. And you will learn how this precious woman who couldn't trust in relationships moved from "light" friendships into deep, intimate friendships.

Whether you come from a wonderful Christian home or a not-so-wonderful home, this book will challenge and encourage you! I already have a list of ten friends who are receiving *Return to Joy* as a birthday gift!

*Linda Dillow*  
Author, *Calm My Anxious Heart*

*Introduction*

## The Journey into Broken

Not to us, O LORD, not to us,  
but to your name goes all the glory  
for your unfailing love and faithfulness.

PSALM 115:1

ONCE UPON A TIME, my life appeared to be almost perfect. I had been married to the love of my life for twenty-four years, had a married daughter and a son in college who both loved the Lord and enjoyed being with the rest of the family, spent time with great friends who loved to spend time with me, took exciting ministry trips to places all over the world—what more could anyone want? I was happy, or so I thought. I rarely cried or felt depressed—and yet something was wrong. No matter how wonderful everything appeared to be on the outside, a part of me felt lonely and afraid.

As director of women's ministry at the church where my husband is the senior pastor, I had the privilege of leading over sixty leaders in a thriving ministry. Hundreds of women were involved in vibrant and enriching activities. I had daily quiet times, counseled women, and taught Bible studies. I had all the correct biblical answers . . . until my own hard questions began to surface and my neatly packaged world began to fall apart.

I've always been fearful of deep intimacy, for reasons I'll go into later—and yet I've also had an unquenchable yearning in my soul for something more in life. But I made every kind of excuse to avoid dealing with my wounds. *Counseling is too expensive.*

*Working on this will be painful and take too long. People may think I'm weak.* I was appalled at the thought of becoming vulnerable and needy.

And then the Holy Spirit began wooing me down a broken road. Crushed with grief, I walked a path toward healing filled with the potholes of my past and obstacles of hopeless despair.

Even though I am a Southern woman through and through, God took me to Colorado for counseling. For three days in a row, three excruciating hours each day, I met with Kris, a biblical counselor, and my new friend Linda Dillow. It was horrifying to open up my box of pain alone, much less in front of them. The first memory, the one I had guarded for over forty-five years, slowly unfurled. Curled up in the fetal position in the arms of women I hardly knew, I wondered, *When will this be over?*

By the end of the last session I had decided I would never put myself in a grueling situation like that again. As the three of us walked down the hall to schedule my next counseling session via telephone, I concocted a lie so that I could politely bow out. "Before I make any more plans for counseling, I need to talk to my husband," I told them confidently. But I didn't want to ever set foot in that dreadful place again.

Within a few weeks, however, more memories began to surface. My seemingly perfect world began to crumble. I became engulfed in heavy sorrow . . . so much so that I felt like I was going to die. The only place I knew to turn was back to Linda and Kris. Their support over the following years, along with the encouragement of a few other close friends and family members, was a crucial part of my healing journey. Without them, I can't imagine what I would have done. So, like Abraham, I stepped out in faith onto a broken road and went without knowing where I was going (Hebrews 11:8).

We all have broken places, and we all have a compelling desire within our hearts for healing and wholeness, but it takes incred-

ible courage to begin walking the broken road to intimacy. This is where all walls come down and you can enjoy an intimate relationship with God and others. Taking those initial steps can be so frightening and painful that we usually quit before we have a chance to find restoration. The lies in our head tell us, *This road is too hard and too long. I'll never make it to the end.* However, there is One beckoning us: Draw near. Trust Me, and you will find that the journey will be worth it. You will find rest and comfort in My embrace.

## MAKING THE JOURNEY

This journey may sometimes feel winding and hard. If you choose to come along, you may find yourself asking the question, *Where am I going?* Together with our Savior we will walk through the Valley of Weeping and into the Gateway of Hope. We will come to truly know and understand the Father in the Secret Place, Jesus along the Bridge to Romance, and the Holy Spirit as we find comfort Under His Shadow. We will learn to fight against the lies from the evil one as we descend into the Shadow of Darkness, and we will find healing in the Place of Forgiveness. In the Garden of Gethsemane, we will come out of our hiding places and find hope in community—and ultimately, we will find ourselves in the Shelter of the Most High, where we will learn to rest.

In this book, we will face hard questions together. Each chapter includes a weeklong Bible study to help you engage more deeply in your journey toward healing and find hope and insight through daily time with the Lord in His Word. This study can also be used in a small-group context, and I have provided a facilitator's guide at the back of the book to lend insight and perspective about how to lead this material in community. Great healing can happen when we come together and realize we are not alone on this broken journey.

Even though the road is uncertain, the Father promises that He will ultimately lead us into His loving embrace, where emotional and spiritual healing take place. He has healed my broken heart, and it is my prayer that you, too, will find healing in your Savior's arms as you begin walking the broken road to intimacy.

The LORD directs the steps of the godly.

He delights in every detail of their lives.  
Though they stumble, they will never fall,  
for the LORD holds them by the hand.

PSALM 37:23-24

CHAPTER I

## WHY THIS JOURNEY?



ONE OF MY EARLIEST MEMORIES was when my mother hurled a peanut butter jar across the room at Dad in anger. I remember his face turning red and his eyes narrowing into an all-too-familiar look of rage as he screamed at her, “I’m going to kill you!”

I was the fourth of five children with an abusive father and an emotionally distant and manipulative mother. My parents had screaming fights that frequently became violent. Naturally I was petrified each time one of these violent outbursts occurred. Because of my gentle temperament, I tried to be the “peacemaker” in our family. Even though I was a small child, I became an expert at reading body language, and I did everything within my power to encourage harmony. Putting on a mask and making people laugh became a way of life for me. I took on a huge burden that was impossible to carry and should never have been my responsibility in the first place.

My father may have been short in stature, but he made up for his size with his physical strength and commanding influence. I was terrified of his temper, but my mother was not. Her strong-willed determination never allowed anyone to get the best of her.

She and Dad seemed to be having a contest to see who could scream the loudest and insult the other with the harshest words.

Dad had a mental condition called borderline personality disorder, which is characterized by long-term patterns of turbulent emotions that result in chaotic relationships. He struggled constantly with inappropriate anger and extreme jealousy that escalated into physical fights on many occasions. He vacillated between idealizing my mother or me and my siblings one moment and then abruptly shifting to fury and uncontrolled violence over a minor misunderstanding the next. I lived in a constant state of terror, knowing that Dad could go ballistic in a flash, screaming curses and physically abusing anyone who got in his path.

Running to my hiding place one evening, I could hear my dad screaming, “Who saw Satan destroy my slippers?” (Satan was our German shepherd.) Gripped with fear, I crouched in the corner of my closet, waiting for the explosion and trying my best not to breathe for fear that Dad would hear me.

On another day I heard the thunderous blast of a gun. Dad had become outraged when my sister, who was eleven years older than I, came in after her curfew. In a moment of insanity, he picked up a gun and fired a shot above her head. Somewhere inside me, a tiny voice whispered, *Is this normal?*

In the midst of all the craziness, I have a few good memories of my dad. I was two years old when my baby brother was born, and my father helped more with caring for me. Rocking in Dad’s lap while watching television became a nightly ritual. But I was taught very little about real love—love that is safe and supportive. Instead, as I became my dad’s favorite, a trauma bond formed. This type of bonding occurs when one person exerts control over another, causing the other person to feel intimidated, confused, harmed, or diminished in some way. At times I felt like I was on a roller coaster, doing almost anything to stay in my father’s good graces. I experienced glorious highs

when the agony of his wrath was temporarily relieved. During these precious moments, I thought, *Is it possible that he really loves me? Maybe I can keep him happy if I try really hard.* But of course those feelings of euphoric relief never lasted. Without fail, Dad would blow up over some trivial incident and I would come crashing down emotionally. This insecure attachment made it hard for me to be able to hold on to love or have healthy boundaries. I desired comfort from others but avoided intimacy because I was deeply afraid of being hurt.

As bizarre as it sounds, my mother considered Dad's outrageous behavior normal when it was directed toward someone other than herself. In fact, his temper was her most powerful weapon against my siblings and me. When she was upset about something, she would convey it to my father in a way that could make him morph into a madman. He would come ranting into my room, ready for a fight, and my heart would pound as I waited for the back of his hand to smack my face.

When we disagreed with my mother in any way, she would shut down emotionally, but her silence spoke louder than words. Then, like a surprise thunderstorm that comes rolling in, some small incident would set her off. Without warning, she would barge into my room in a screaming rage and then slam the door as she left. As soon as I breathed a sigh of relief, she came storming in again. In the midst of her outrage, I stared blankly at her face without speaking a word.

Without a doubt, my mother wound was my deepest heartache. My greatest desire was to have a mother who treasured me. While Mom did a good job providing meals, clean clothes, and the basic essentials, she demanded my undivided devotion and was jealous of my relationships with everyone else, including my dad. She constantly tried to pit all of us against each other.

Mom's erratic behavior caused me to become extremely anxious about pleasing her. The only way I could fall asleep at night

was by fantasizing about Mommy, the mother of my dreams, coming to my rescue. In my mind, Mommy held me in her loving arms and kissed my tears away. When I was naughty she gently disciplined me, but never without holding me and assuring me of her love. I wasn't invisible to her. Mommy was the most wonderful mother in the world. But while daydreaming provided some comfort, it never lasted.

I should have known that something even more tragic had happened to me because there were too many perplexing things that didn't make sense. Unfortunately, when that's all you've known, it's hard to know what is normal. But a few years ago I began to remember some unspeakable sexual things that were done to me when I was very young by someone who should have protected me. My mind had fractured into pieces that carefully guarded the horrific secrets so that I could survive. I grew into a woman with a mature body . . . but there was a huge wounded part of me that never grew up.

The trauma of my childhood caused me to experience what I call I-want-to-die kind of pain. Unfortunately, some of you know exactly what I'm talking about. The first time I remember wanting to die was when I was about ten years old. I can't remember what happened to cause my devastation, but I was without hope. Sitting in the tree house that I inherited from my older brother, I prayed, *Please help me, God. Nobody wants me! Everyone would be better off if I was dead.* I had seen some poison in the garage and wondered how much it would take to kill me and how much it would hurt. Would I go to hell if I drank it? That was the first of countless suicidal thoughts I struggled with over the following years.

I attended church only on very rare occasions as a child, so spiritual things were confusing to me. When I was about seven years old I prayed: *God, I'm really afraid to die because I do lots of bad things. It's okay if You don't want me. I understand.*

When I was nineteen years old, however, I was invited to attend a college outreach where I heard about someone who loved me so much that He was willing to die for me. This was what I had been longing for all of my life—someone who would love me unconditionally. I believed that I was a bad girl, damaged beyond repair, so this seemed like an irresistible offer—but terribly risky at the same time. I desperately wanted to trust Him, but I was terrified that I'd be hurt again. Despite my apprehension, I very cautiously entered into a relationship with Jesus Christ, and miraculously, He accepted me with all of my doubts and concerns. Unfortunately, I brought along with me the baggage of my broken childhood.

Thrilled and yet puzzled to be a new Christian, I felt like I was a black sheep—in God's fold but different from all the rest. I had no idea how I was supposed to act. Desperate to understand, I began pouring myself into studying God's Word. I read everything I could get my hands on and gained a lot of head knowledge, but there was always something missing. No matter how much success I achieved, or how many people told me they loved me, I still felt lonely and unlovable in the depths of my heart. I believed with my head that Jesus' blood covered my sin, but in my heart I felt dirty because of the awful things that had been done to me and the awful things I'd done as a result.

## JOY STOLEN

The strongest force in the first two years of a child's life is the desire to experience joy in loving relationships. Finding comfort from a nurturing caregiver in the midst of pain brings restoration to a child's emotional balance, and the child is able to get down and play as if nothing painful ever happened. Psychologists call this returning to joy.<sup>1</sup>

I never learned how to return to joy when I was hurt as a child. For many of us, lack of nurturing continues to impact

our ability to hold on to joy. Why is it so hard to move past our pain? Why do we sometimes struggle to change our thinking as we mature and move further from our abusive pasts? Here is the truth: As believers, we have an enemy far more powerful than those who have hurt us.

One of the biblical names given to Satan brings greater understanding of his true nature. He is repeatedly called the evil one (Matthew 6:13; John 17:15; 1 John 2:13-14; 5:18-19). This evil one deceptively uses all of the harsh things in our lives to destroy our innocence and define what we believe about ourselves and others. He brands lies into us that act as a barrier to keep us from trusting anyone, especially our heavenly Father.

Carefully consider the following “big little lies” that I’ve struggled with to see if you can identify with them:

*I am a detestable piece of trash.* Actually, that is the cleaned-up version. Whenever I did something that upset my mother, she would blurt out an expletive. In time, I believed that she was upset with who I was rather than what I’d done. Hearing this over and over again made me feel like I was worthless. Has anyone ever made you feel like rubbish? Even if those exact words weren’t used, being ignored or treated as if you have no value can cause similar thoughts to penetrate your mind.

*I am unwanted and will never belong to anyone.* I felt like something was terribly wrong with me because my parents didn’t seem to want me. I developed an orphan mentality, identifying with real and fictional children who had no parents or parents who didn’t want them. I was lonely and afraid and felt like I didn’t belong to anyone. Have you ever felt like you didn’t belong? You may have grown up in a loving family, but Satan can use many different methods to make us feel lonely and isolated.

*I can’t trust God or anyone because no one protected me.* I couldn’t understand why people who should have loved and protected me hurt me instead. More importantly, I wondered where God was

when those bad things happened. Because of this I became strong and independent. I was afraid to need or want anyone because it was excruciatingly painful when they let me down. Are you afraid to trust others because of painful experiences in your past? Have you ever wondered where God is when bad things happen? Satan is the victor when we lose trust in God and the safe people He brings into our lives.

*If people really know me, they will hate me.* Since I had been prematurely awakened sexually, I had no healthy boundaries, which allowed people to take advantage of me. As a result, I lived a life of duplicity. I was a good girl who tried to please everyone, but I also had a hidden side that lied and did sexual things to myself and others. I believed that if anyone knew the real me, they would be disgusted. Have you hidden your true self in shame because of sinful actions done to you? Have you ever wondered why you acted out sexually? Satan uses sexual trauma to make us believe shameful messages about ourselves.

*I need to hurt myself.* From the time I was a small child I believed I deserved to be punished. As a result, I began peeling my fingernails into the quick until they bled. It sounds absurd, but this soothing pain was strangely comforting. At times I still struggle to keep from hurting myself. In a way, I am addicted to pain like an alcoholic who craves the numbing effect of a drink. Are you ever tempted to hurt yourself in some way, like cutting or starving yourself? Do you feel that you need to be punished for something you've done or something that was done to you? Self-inflicted pain may bring comfort for the moment, but it never lasts.

*I hate myself and want to die.* Over the years I have thought of hundreds of ways to take my life. In this state of irrational thinking, I honestly believed that everyone would be better off if I was dead. Have you experienced I-want-to-die kind of pain? Or perhaps you simply wish that Jesus would return today. This is

one of Satan's greatest lies: that we can't experience supernatural healing until we are in heaven.

I've shared my story with women of all ages around the world, and even though their experiences have been different from mine, all of them can identify with some of these lies. In fact, one college-aged woman admitted that she grew up in a loving Christian home, yet she could identify with every one of them. This tells me that Satan is crafty but not creative. He uses different methods but always with the same purpose: to keep us from trusting God and other people.

### AVOIDING THE JOURNEY

We all have experienced painful things in life that cause us to struggle with lies about God, ourselves, and others. Perhaps you think that your pain is nothing compared to mine, but pain is pain. Unfortunately, merely coping with the pain will never be enough, and avoiding God's invitation to the broken road will result in even more pain.

Even when unrecognized, emotional trauma can create lasting struggles in an individual's life. My siblings tried various methods to deal with their pain. My oldest brother tragically snuffed his pain out. Raging with uncontrolled jealousy, he murdered his wife and then committed suicide. Because he left no note, our family was saddled with gut-wrenching questions. What could have made him do something so violent?

My older sister spewed her pain out on others. Haunted by borderline personality disorder and alcohol addiction, she became a troubled woman with rage-filled insanity. We never knew when, where, or how her anger would erupt, but we knew it was inevitable. She died a few years ago from cancer and alcohol-related problems.

In my lifetime I have tried a variety of methods to deal with pain. I have tried to fight against it, stuff it down, snuff it out,

use it, abuse it, kill it, sleep it away, sweep it out, shop it up, and soothe it with relationships. About the only thing I didn't do was feed it. Instead, I have a tendency to starve my pain. When I'm upset I lose my appetite and begin to lose weight. Feeling the bones in my chest and having my clothes fit loosely feels right in my skewed thinking. But because I want to take care of God's temple, which is my body, I now work hard to maintain a healthy weight. All of these coping methods are only temporary fixes and can never bring true healing.

Even professional counseling, as critical as it was, simply helped me know a little more about why I was struggling—I still didn't know how to fix it. My response? I stuffed all my pain down inside and lived my life behind a mask. After all, a good Christian isn't supposed to feel sad, mad, or bad, is she? In order to keep this facade up I had to protect my heart from being hurt by people. But a hardened heart meant that I couldn't experience true intimacy with God.

Hiding our emotions will never work—they always find a way to come out. Sometimes these responses can be delayed, for months or even years after the event. Here are a few ways trauma might manifest itself:

**Physical problems.** Research has established that living in a constant state of anxiety can impair the development of the brain and nervous system. As a result, the body can be affected in various ways, including eating problems; sleep disturbances; sexual dysfunction; stomach problems; low energy; and chronic, unexplained pain. As a child I experienced stomach problems that developed into a debilitating colon disease that required four surgeries. I've also had TMJ (jaw problems), depression, stress-induced tachycardia, and sleep problems. Have you struggled with any of these symptoms and wondered where they came from? Unexplained fatigue, headaches, or stomach problems could be the result of unresolved trauma.

**Emotional problems.** Trauma can create a loss of faith that there is any safety, predictability, or meaning in the world. This can result in depression, anxiety, panic attacks, attachment problems, compulsive and obsessive behaviors, the feeling of being out of control, anger, emotional numbness, and withdrawal from relationships. Do you struggle with any of these? Have you ever felt like you couldn't connect deeply with others or that you needed to control everything around you? Our ability to cultivate healthy relationships depends on our having first developed those kinds of relationships in our families. I've had a deep fear of intimate relationships for most of my life and have kept most of my friends at an emotional distance. I was surrounded by wonderful people but became uncomfortable if I began to "need" someone. Even though I had many friends and enjoyed frequent lunches and social engagements, I was lonely on the inside.

**Spiritual problems.** Evidence suggests that trauma can lead to loss of faith in God, anger toward God, fear of spiritual intimacy, and a lack of desire to be involved in religious activity. Have you been confused about the way you perceive spiritual things? Do you feel like your heart is hardened toward God at times? This was true in my life. Even though I longed for true intimacy with God, He seemed to be elusive and out of my reach. I had desperately studied the Word of God but was afraid to get too close to the God of the Word. I read through the Bible many times and prayed through the Scriptures that talked about drawing near to God, begging Him to help me. Sadly, I couldn't comprehend verses like James 4:8 that said, "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you" (NASB). I felt like something was wrong with me because I didn't feel close to Him.

## JOY IN THE JOURNEY

I have always believed that there was a very real person behind the words on the pages of Scripture but have been afraid to trust God

completely. It wasn't until I opened my sealed box of pain and looked intently at the truth inside that things began to change. Acknowledging the truth of my past was the first step toward healing. It awakened a deep longing within me to know and be known by my heavenly Father. I was now ready to move beyond theology and experience a true encounter with Jesus.

In order to feel safe with God and step toward an intimate relationship, I had to set out on the toughest spiritual journey I've ever been on. This meant that I had to break down my protective wall and search diligently for Him like I'd never searched for anything in my life. A priceless treasure waited for me in the end. I was thrilled when I finally experienced the comfort I had been longing for in the embrace of the Holy One. I have found healing, wholeness, and deliverance in God's presence.

As I ache with those of you whose hearts have been broken, I wish I could put my arms around you and whisper, "Shh. Shh. It's okay. You are loved." There is One who can help you return to joy, and He is very near. The Holy One loves you more than you can imagine and desires for you to begin walking the broken road so that you can find comfort in His loving embrace.

You will make known to me the path of life;  
In Your presence is fullness of joy;  
In Your right hand there are pleasures forever.

PSALM 16:11, NASB

# WHY THIS JOURNEY? STUDY

## DAY 1: THE JOURNEY

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1. Read Psalm 16:11. Personalize it here by restating it in your own words. Make it about God and you personally.
2. Think back to a time in your childhood when you were wounded. Was there someone to help you return to joy? Describe what happened and how you felt. What happened if there was no one to do this for you?
3. Read John 15:11 and describe what God desires for you.
4. Think about your present life. How would you describe your joy tank? Is it full, empty, or somewhere in between? Explain your answer.
5. If you had been granted one wish as a child, what would you have chosen and why?

6. What would you choose if you were granted one wish today? Why?
  
7. Read Deuteronomy 11:18-23. Describe how your family practiced or ignored these spiritual life lessons.
  
8. How has this affected you personally?
  
9. Make a list of the baggage you carried into your relationship with Christ and ask God to show you where it originated. Record your thoughts here.
  
10. What do Psalm 25:4 and Proverbs 20:24 say about the journey toward healing?

## DAY 2: JOY STOLEN

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1. Read John 10:10 and write it in your own words so that a child can understand what it means.
  
2. Are you experiencing the abundant life that Christ offers—or the devastating results of the evil one? Explain your answer.



3. What has Satan taken or tried to steal from you? What methods has he used to do this?
  
4. Has your joy been stolen? What does John 16:22 say about this?
  
5. Can you identify with any of the lies listed on pages 6–7? List the ones you have been tempted to believe.
  
6. Think back to the time when each of these lies first seemed true in your life. What was the source of this lie? (Explain what happened to make you believe the lie.)
  
7. Use three words to describe how these lies make you feel.
  
8. What did God promise in Isaiah 28:16? Who is this cornerstone?
  
9. What do you want your foundation to be: God's truth or lies from Satan? Explain your answer.

**DAY 3: AVOIDING THE JOURNEY**

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1. Can you identify with any of the methods of coping with pain listed in this chapter? Explain your answer.
2. Are there any other ways that you have dealt with your pain? Describe what happened. (Coping mechanisms can be things like entertainment, work, church activities, relationships, sex, vacations, and projects.)
3. Spend some time reflecting on Psalm 116:1-2 and ask God to help you believe that He loves you in this way.
4. Read Psalm 51:6 and 1 Corinthians 16:13 in the New Living Translation. Use these verses to write an explanation that a child could understand about the importance of living a life of truth.

**DAY 4: STARTING THE JOURNEY**

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1. Have you lived a life of truth, or have you worn a mask instead? Explain why you made this choice. What was the result?
2. How do you feel about taking off your mask? Describe your feelings here.



3. Jesus cautioned the Jewish leaders about the dangers of pursuing knowledge about God instead of a relationship with Him. Read John 5:39-40 and describe the warning that He gave.
  
4. Are you reading the Word of God but afraid to seek the God of the Word? Be honest and describe your answer here.
  
5. In light of this chapter, how can you personally apply Ephesians 4:25 and 1 John 2:21?
  
6. If you attempt to keep your pain stuffed down by living behind a mask, it will eventually bubble up. Have you experienced any physical, emotional, or spiritual problems as a result of this? Describe what happened.

#### **DAY 5: JOY IN THE JOURNEY**

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1. Read Jeremiah 31:3, John 12:32, and James 4:8a. What do these verses tell you about drawing near to God?
  
2. What is your honest reaction to this truth?

3. Are you satisfied with where you are in your relationship with the Holy One? If not, how would you like for it to change?
  
4. Read Deuteronomy 4:29 and 10:12-13. Use these verses to explain how to “find God” so that a child can understand.
  
5. Walking the broken road to intimacy is not an easy journey. Are you willing to make a commitment to push through the pain so that you experience God’s comfort? Explain your answer here.
  
6. Write a prayer telling the Holy One how you feel about this and ask Him to help you. Remember that you can be honest with Him because He knows your heart and loves you just as you are.
  
7. Spend time before the Lord, reflecting on Psalm 106:44-45. Record your thoughts here or in a journal.

