

Patti Giebink, MD

*with Kimberly Shumate*

# UNEXPECTED

AN ABORTION DOCTOR'S JOURNEY TO PRO-LIFE

# CHOICE

Dr. Patti Giebink's *Unexpected Choice* is one of the most captivating, inspiring, and eloquent books I've read in a long time. As a former abortionist, Patti is uniquely qualified to speak to the topic most don't want to talk about. It's a deeply personal journey that sheds light on both sides of the abortion issue. Every teenager and adult will find invaluable guidance within its pages. I laughed. I lamented. I learned. But most of all, I praised God's grace!

DAVID STEVENS, MD, MA (ETHICS)

CEO emeritus of the Christian Medical & Dental Associations

Author of *Jesus, MD, Beyond Medicine*; coauthor of *Leadership Proverbs*

During my early years at Live Action, I dreamed of people like Patti stepping away from the abortion industry. Now, in *Unexpected Choice*, we are privileged to read the heart-wrenching and beautiful real-life story of transformation, from abortion clinic worker to pro-life advocate. The world needs more women like Patti. I pray that this book will inspire a new generation to follow her example of leaving the abortion industry and redeeming lost years by sharing a message of life. If you've picked up this book, there's a reason you've been led to it. Buy it now and never look back.

LILA ROSE

President and founder, Live Action

One of the greatest moments of ministry in my life was when our dear friend Patti Giebink stood before 70,000 people at The Call Nashville and began to confess and

weep about her experience as a former abortion doctor. The crowd began to chant, “We love you! We love you!” I felt at that moment that God gave America ten more years of mercy. Now, we get to hear her compassionate and loving heart and story in this book. It’s a story of redemption and forgiveness which we all so desperately need. “Patti, we love you!”

LOU ENGLE

Lou Engle Ministries

As an OBGYN colleague, I have the highest respect for Dr. Patti Giebink and her dedication to women’s health. *Unexpected Choice* chronicles her journey from abortion doctor to pro-life advocate and addresses important questions for anyone trying to understand what motivates most physicians who do perform abortions as well as those who don’t. Patti’s ability to deftly articulate both sides of this issue makes this book a must-read for all who want to understand the phenomenon of elective abortion. I highly recommend it.

DONNA J. HARRISON, MD

CEO, American Association of Pro-Life Obstetricians and Gynecologists (AAPLOG); board-certified OB/GYN

Dr. Patti Giebink’s motto while working as an abortionist for Planned Parenthood was “Keep women safe.” She soon learned that what they wanted from her as a doctor was “two hands and no conscience.” But through the prayers of a secret intercessor and an inspired visit to a church in her new town, she began to see God more clearly—as a

lover of life. Dr. Giebink and coauthor Kimberly Shumate have joined the battle for the hearts and minds of those still blind to the truth—that abortion hurts women. In my own work with former abortionists, I have seen the power and beauty of these journeys. In the book *Unexpected Choice: An Abortion Doctor's Journey to Pro-life*, you will see it as well.

FATHER FRANK PAVONE

National director of Priests for Life; president of the National Pro-life Religious Council; pastoral director of Rachel's Vineyard

*Unexpected Choice* takes us on Patti's unfiltered journey from happy delivery room with parents celebrating their baby's birth, to the place where she performed abortions for Planned Parenthood. It's a transparent, gut-wrenching, and sometimes graphic account of the lucrative abortion industry with examples of disinformation commonly provided to pregnant women. It also debunks the myths used by abortion advocates while offering a compassionate look at the fear attached to unwanted pregnancy. Patti explains that using just a few different words when speaking to women facing a hard decision can empower them with an unexpected choice—life for a baby, and freedom from the guilt, shame, and grief that accompanies abortion.

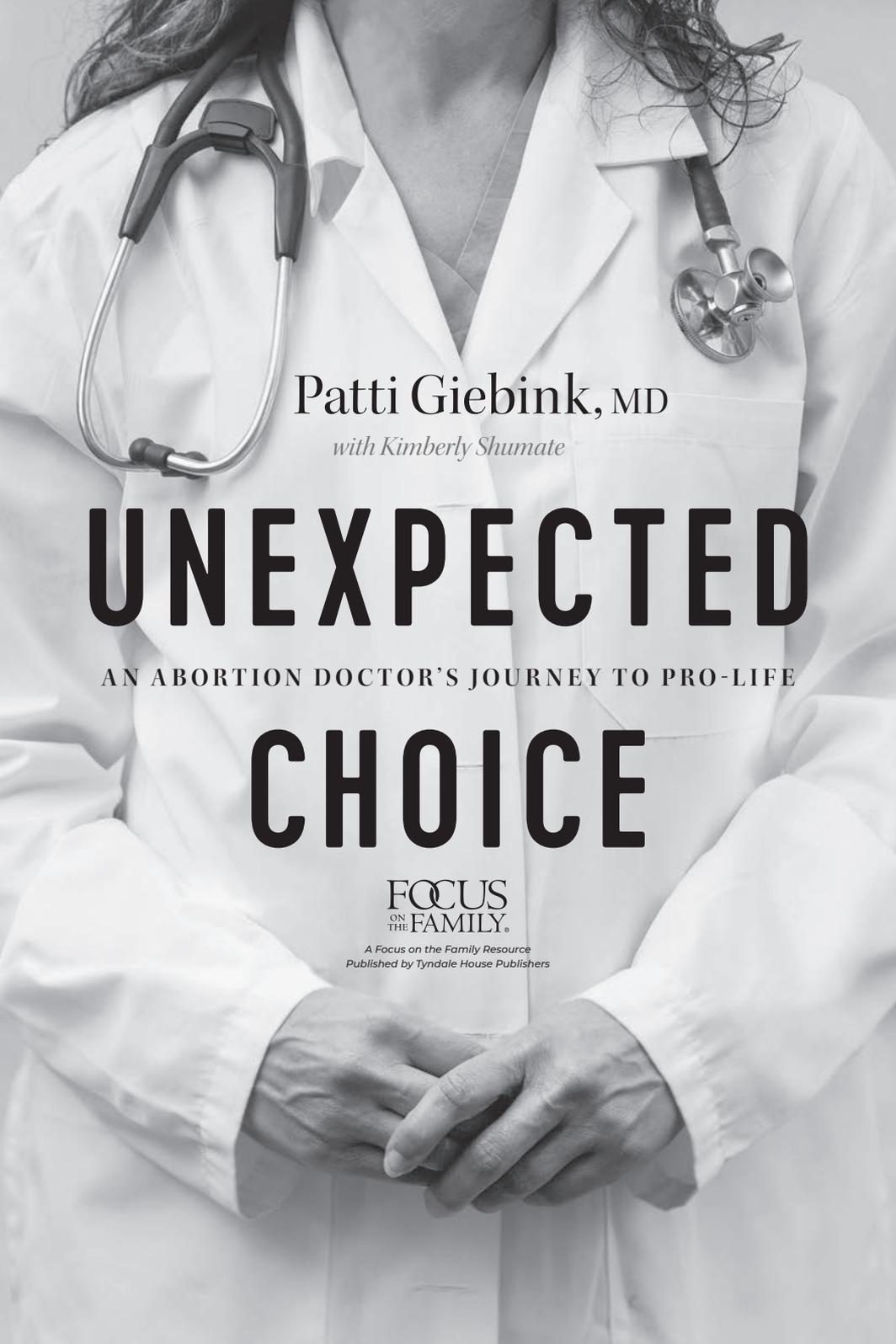
DONALD THOMPSON, MD, MPH & TM

Former director of Global Health Outreach (GHO)



*Unexpected Choice*





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FOCUS  
ON THE FAMILY®

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# INTRODUCTION

LOVE. YOU MIGHT SAY IT'S WHY YOU and I are here—living, striving, dreaming. It was love that moved God to put us here. And though God's compassion is beyond our ability to comprehend, His reason for making us is simple. *Love.*

Unlike our love that can so easily change, God's love remains strong and steady, overflowing like a river that refuses to run dry. He is the unending source of life that watered the seed of creation. His love made us; therefore, we are irrevocably part of it. We search for it. Look past it. Deny it ever was. Yet, it still *is*.

God loves us so much that He uses others in conjunction with seemingly serendipitous circumstances to bring us closer to Him—always closer. And that is what God has done with me in my journey from performing abortions as part of my career as a doctor to eventually changing my viewpoint about life.

My life has been one of determined purpose, and my passion has always been caring for others. My youth and young adulthood were spent in classrooms, lecture halls, and residency to practice medicine. I was a teacher, a fitness

specialist, and finally a physician committed to saving lives and doing no harm—an oath I promised to keep. My father was a doctor as well as two of my siblings. Health care was in my blood, and it led me to serve around the globe in countries such as India, Cambodia, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Lebanon, and the Arabian Peninsula. I've lived in dusty camps, sweltering villages, armed-guard compounds, and third-world hotels. Each place held new adventures, unique experiences, and disturbing images often at the doorstep of someone else's life and death.

But my years at home in the US introduced me to people who broadened my perspective even further. It was in a little church in South Dakota where God revealed my own faults and inadequacies and equipped me for a plan greater than my own expectations could have prepared me for.

Education, medical practice, professional ethics, personal morals, *faith*—they are all related. At least they are to me. And the tough topic of abortion intertwines with all of these subjects. Abortion is hard to talk about; it divides families and friends, and it's emotional, just as the journey we're about to travel together will undoubtedly be. I'm certain reading this book will be challenging for some of you. But sometimes the difficult roads help us look back and see the mistakes we've made as well as a new way to move forward—in the flesh and in the spirit.

In 1996, as the only abortion doctor in South Dakota, moving forward in my day usually meant putting on a bulletproof vest each morning and packing a sidearm before I headed to work. It meant I was part of an “active case” file with the FBI due to hate mail, the target of inflammatory

## INTRODUCTION

messages on picket signs outside the clinic, and the recipient of death threats from people I had never met.

But when it comes to abortion, *is* there a safe way to move forward? I'm not only talking about physical safety, but also emotional, mental, and spiritual safety. Are there instances when abortion is acceptable, even medically beneficial? Or is every life—no matter how small or compromised—unconditionally viable and valuable? I'll let you decide. I only ask that you keep an open mind as we traverse the troubling and sometimes devastating landscape of the human condition.

It's fascinating the lengths our mind and memory will go to protect us. We can block out the past in order to cope in the present. But God reveals truth gently, sometimes incrementally, for us to look at, digest, and finally come to terms with it. This story is part of the truth that God gently led me to, and it's something I've suppressed for years. But I know *now* is the time to tell it.

Along the way, I've learned that redemption comes with God's gift of healing. Redemption is the reason for writing this book. As a former abortion doctor, I can't help but determine that my past had a black mark before meeting Jesus. It was lived and recorded and can't be reversed. But Christ's forgiveness covers all of it.

My history isn't remarkable: I'm only one of thousands of doctors who have performed abortions. In retrospect, the truly remarkable thing is that God was there with me through it all, even though I didn't always know it. His stubborn affection for me was never determined by my ability to be perfect. His forgiveness wasn't dependent on my

questionable decisions and flawed execution. His awesome grace never hinged on my aptitude as a doctor or my willingness to do what seemed right at the time. God's redemption never winced, scowled in disgust, or turned its back on me. In the shadow of what I have done—as unthinkable as it is—God himself is “guilty” of an undeniable action: He loved me too much to let go.

And He loves you in that same way, as He loves all life. Love—it's who God is.

As a doctor who has seen more suffering than I ever thought I would; as one who has lived on both sides of this difficult abortion divide and spent years transitioning from one camp to the other, my prayer is that you'll discover the same reconciliation and peace that I've found. I pray that love prevails in your life and that my own unexpected choice will help you see life clearly—as I do now.

CHAPTER ONE

# COMING CLEAN

*The awareness of our own depravity is the root of perpetual tenderness.*

JOHN NEWTON

I WAS IN MY BODY—I ASSUMED IT WAS MY BODY. Those were my feet; my legs were striding in a way I recognized. My arms swung in a synchronized fashion. But my body felt so alien and altogether stolen as it carried me in a direction I didn't want to go.

Was it the lack of sleep the night before that had set my stomach churning? Maybe it was the rush of chilly air from the vents of the convention hall now swirling over me, or the runny morning omelet that produced this ill feeling.

I dodged clustered tables filled with glowing faces. Here on the last day of a Christian conference I had driven six hours to attend, I was expecting to feel reflective, grateful, and maybe even a little reluctant for it to end. But terrified?

I admit that the prayer and biblical teachings still had

a foreign feel to them, a mysterious and illusive quality that I hadn't completely figured out. How did an analytical physician accustomed to proven conventional therapies end up here?

As a doctor, my decisions and actions were solely based on test results, tangible evidence, reason, and resource. Now the emotional atmosphere of this human "hug-fest" carried with it a strange sense of dread. Even fear. *Or is this what freedom feels like?*

My mind pleaded with my legs to stop, to turn around and return to my seat. But they kept walking straight ahead as the keynote speaker invited attendees to come on stage and share their thoughts in that final hour. Invisible arms gently guided me through the throng of tables, ushering me toward a frightening fate—to speak publicly, and about what, I wasn't even sure.

My thoughts suddenly drifted back home to a Christian coworker at the medical practice I shared at the Mid-Dakota Hospital located in Chamberlain, South Dakota. She was a fellow female OB-GYN who happened to be Catholic and pro-life. Her faith was unshakable, her convictions the foundation of her behavior and decisions. This made an indelible impression on me. She wasn't intimidating or pious, just enviable.

*What must it be like to have such faith that it shapes every choice you make, whether favored by all or none?*

On more than one occasion, I'd noticed her bravery as she voiced her opinion about life to colleagues during meetings and work-related groups. Her unwavering belief that life began from the moment of conception never seemed to be

influenced by peer pressure or the popular vote. She was fixed on where the line was drawn in the sand, and in the years I watched her, she never did cross it. Not once.

As I walked through the crowd on my way to the stage, I couldn't help but think she would be much better suited to make a proclamation of faith—if that's what this invisible force was leading me to do. I had been attending a little church since 2001, slowly finding my way to a God who was becoming more evident with every demonstration of His grace. With one foot still in the world, I was unsteady and sometimes unnerved by what He was doing in and around me.

Now it was May 2006, and I'd traveled with a couple of friends from Chamberlain to Minneapolis for this five-day Christian conference focused on healing and deliverance. The conference appealed to me: I truly wanted to help those who trusted me for treatment, and I was willing to explore new ideas. Judith was an elementary teacher, and Susan was a gifted lay leader from our church who'd invited us to the event. We'd climbed into the car to leave Chamberlain just as the sky gave off hints of morning with its pink-cruised edges. We were filled with excitement for what would certainly be a time of fun and fellowship.

The endless drive crossed much of the flat South Dakota prairie, and we didn't reach the metro area until the last hour of the trip. Ignoring the gratingly synthetic tone of the "GPS lady," I circumvented the busy downtown Minneapolis traffic, arriving on schedule for the conference's 1:00 p.m. start time.

Standing in front of the large church with hundreds of

other people attending the convention, I craned my neck upward to take in the building. Suddenly, I felt much smaller. And as we found our seats amid the great assembly, I surveyed the crowd. A symphony of handshakes, hugs, and introductions filled the air about me. People from various backgrounds were all eager to begin the workshops offered by Ellel Ministries International, a nondenominational ministry established and based near Lancaster, England. The founder, Peter Horrobin, was known worldwide and a respected leader in the religious community. What gems of wisdom or remarkable remedies would I discover worth taking back to my own practice? How did prayer affect healing, and could I apply it to the care of my own patients?

I was open and engaged. More than I knew.

After the afternoon's orientation, my friends and I checked into our hotel located close to the church. The next four days we listened to lectures and made new friends among diverse faith-filled men and women.

I could have applied the word *blessing* to those four days, though at the time that word was not a description I often used—I probably used the words *lucky* or *fortunate* more often. But it was a *blessing* to be in the midst of such uncompromising believers and absorbing the Holy Spirit, who was so present throughout the entire week. I felt full—in my mind and in my heart.

I was content, except for an unrelenting uneasiness that kept one hand gripping the chair I sat in. Images surfaced of the past weeks, months, years—a photo album of personal and professional memories of my previous life. And I was uncomfortable with what I saw.

In the process of remembrance, our mental pictures change as we change. They are liquid, moving, dispatching then rebuilding as we gain more knowledge. The way we view our lives is like a novel with shifting plots and subplots, where villains and heroes switch places, protagonists make hurtful choices, and antagonists find redemption by the final chapter. In my own mental storybook of decisions and practices, where was my line in the sand?

Was God rewriting me?

On this last day of the conference as Judith, Susan, and I were swapping conversations with new acquaintances, Peter invited attendees to come up to the stage and briefly talk about their experiences over the previous several days. Those with more willing souls than mine immediately formed a line, eagerly waiting their turn to share reflections about what they had learned. Revelations about God and prayers answered reverberated from the sound system.

I sat listening with my own sense of gratitude kindled by a deep warmth that took me somewhat off guard. It was like someone was speaking to me on a frequency only I could hear. No, *feel*. It was a feeling, but it spoke to me with an uneasy prodding as the line to the stage steadily grew.

What was it telling me to do? I knew I couldn't be hearing it right.

In general, I rarely spoke up in large groups. The fact was, I would sooner die than verbally address that packed room of faithful believers.

But as I sat rigid in my seat, I felt a cosmic shove—a not-so-subtle invitation to join in. My hands began to sweat, and

my lungs seized as I stood up and started walking. Nausea hit me as I took my place—the last one in the line.

“We’re running out of time, so we’ll hear the testimonies of the last few before we wrap things up,” Peter announced.

Now I was helplessly stuck, a prisoner of God’s almighty persuasion. Just then, a calmness embraced me like an old friend—a friend who’s always been there and always will be, who would do anything for you, even if you were exiled due to public disgrace. This friend would shield you from the stress of the most disturbing development—and that’s what was happening right then.

Since I was in clear view of the entire assembly, it seemed I was committed. Did I even know what I was going to say, or did the Influencer commandeering my trembling limbs have something of His own to impart?

The stage, the twenty or so tables that held eight to ten people each, the volunteers buzzing around—it all looked like a dream, kind of fuzzy and out of focus. I had met so many people who traveled from all over to be there, just as I had. But I felt certain that even those experts of kindness and mercy surrounding me must have their limits.

Suddenly, there were only two of us left in line. The woman ahead of me floated up the stairs confidently, then rested one hand on the microphone. She said she was a nurse in an operating room. My ears burned. With luck, the building would catch fire and the crowd would run.

Until then, no one had mentioned the A-word. All I wanted to do was sprint for the nearest exit. I tried to turn, to flee, but my invisible Friend kept hold of my hand as we stayed the troubled course.

*God, please don't do this!*

No one knew my story. I hadn't even thought about it . . . until now.

The Bible says that Jesus wants to heal us. "He was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities . . . and with his wounds we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5). But what would these godly people think if they knew what I had done? How could I just come out and say it?

The woman on stage spoke up.

"I'm a surgical nurse at St. Paul Ramsey Hospital," she said, sweetly. "One day, I noticed on my schedule that I would be assisting with an abortion. I went to my supervisor and told her that I couldn't do it, that it was against my morals. She basically said that I would assist in the procedure or look for another job." Her eyes pooled with tears as she continued, "So, I looked for another job."

*God, are you kidding? I can't do what You're asking me to do . . .*

By now, I realized that God had orchestrated this from the beginning. Planned it. Perhaps He was even enjoying it. And I was powerless to stop it. Swaying slightly, I gathered myself to step out from behind the curtain—a beige façade of safe anonymity.

When the nurse finished her declaration—a statement of what scruples really looked like—she made her way back to the stairs, passing me as I was half laughing and half crying. My polished veneer was about to lose its attractiveness. I wanted to keep my dark secret. To hide and pretend that I hadn't done anything wrong. And until that moment, I had convinced myself I was guilt free by simply not thinking

about my past. But to be truly healed and set free of something, you have to expose it to the light.

Because freedom lives in the light.

Peter's friendly wave reeled me up the stairs and onto the platform. I was less than brave—just reluctantly obedient. I looked out at all those faces, beaming with the glow of God's light. Three hundred and fifty people waited in anticipation as I thought for a minute I might actually pass out.

With one painful shudder and a sob that quickly followed, my eyes lowered and my mouth opened as if God Himself was speaking through me, forcing me to deal with my past. I don't think I said I was a doctor, or where I practiced. Not even my name. Just the depressing point I could no longer escape.

"I'm proof that God can redeem anyone. I used to perform abortions for Planned Parenthood." Then the tears rained down.

After a collective gasp, the room fell quiet. I could only imagine everyone trying to absorb what they had just heard.

There it was. The fatal shot. My hands had squeezed the lethal trigger. Unlike that surgical nurse, I saw things differently—at least I had until then. A tiny life nestled within a woman's womb was just a small collection of tissue, void of sensation, and nothing more. Not seeing. Not feeling. Not breathing.

Not human.

This unplanned confession left me feeling overwhelmed and ashamed. The conference-goers must have been horrified at what I had done! And so I left my gaze resting on the floor. Unexpectedly, I felt Peter Horrobin's arms wrapping me in

an all-consuming, all-forgiving, Father-God hug as I broke down completely.

*God, forgive me. If You can, just forgive me.*

Afterward, women walked up to me and held me, as if to soothe my sorrow with a balm of understanding. Some revealed that they'd had an abortion. To my surprise, we shared the same pain, guilt, sadness, isolation, and fear of others discovering our offense. They thanked me for speaking out, for talking about a subject so taboo that it's rarely discussed from the pulpit.

Instead of condemnation—the judgment I expected—all I received from these people was overpowering love.

*How could this be—love for someone like me?*

Yes, I wanted to grow my faith. Yes, I'd traveled all that way to expand my point of view and to learn how prayer and healing related to my job. That's what I had in mind. But God seems to always reach further than our own expectations. He knows the way, the challenges, the fear, and the outcome. All we are required to do is trust and show up.

---

That afternoon, the drive home was spent ignoring the “elephant” in the car. Judith and Susan were generous that way. Weird how my confession carried with it a pact of non-disclosure. But what can you really say about abortion? It's so offensive to some, so sensible to others. For a long time, I had neatly tucked my involvement with it into the back of my brain, disregarding it, trying to forget it. And that's what

I did again when I got home from that conference. If only God's memory was as short as mine.

I didn't tell anyone back at my little church in Chamberlain about what I'd said in Minneapolis, or what I was internally coping with. That would come later.

Looking back, I have no regrets about coming clean. Yes, it was painful, but it was also freeing. I had finally exhaled that toxic breath inside of me, and now it was out, all the way out, leaving room for God's holy oxygen to fill me with forgiveness, for myself and for others.

I suspect we've all had, at some point, a crisis in our faith walk when God convicts us of something we're hanging on to—whether for days, years, or decades. God might point to a habit, a lifestyle, anger, or a grudge. By a test of our conscience or a circumstance beyond our control, God reveals it to us, guides us to remorse and admission, and then His forgiveness enables us to heal and move forward. The conviction of what I'd done, and the divine amnesty that followed gave birth to a ministry God had prepared for me well in advance.

Who can say how many plans in the grand design have been squandered because of our fear to trust God or our pride that says we know best? How many wounds have we incurred and injuries have we inflicted due to our shortsightedness as we fail to see things from a higher perspective? What is the final cost of our self-significance, and who pays the price for it?

I believe that hurting people can be miraculously healed. And I trust that seeking Jesus for healing can only benefit the person asking the Great Physician—the One who makes us clean.

**A SAFE PLACE TO PONDER**

“[Jesus’] way is in whirlwind and storm,  
and the clouds are the dust of his feet.”

NAHUM 1:3

*Lord,*

*You said that in this world there will be trouble (John 16:33).  
But You understand that being human is hard, and that we all  
make mistakes. Thank You for overcoming the world and for  
supplying all the grace we need to heal from our past. I know  
that You are the Great Physician, and that Your remedies cover  
a multitude of sins—too many to count. Place in me a spirit of  
forgiveness—for myself, for those who have yet to confess their  
secrets, and for those You will heal through my transparency.*

*In Jesus’ name, amen.*