

RISING ABOVE

THE *HURT*

A Journey from Pain to Praise



Austin Gardner

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to the most wonderful family in the world. In the most trying of times, they continue to shine through as my rock and my shelter. I can truly say that Betty, my wife, is my best friend. Yet I share this same close friendship with my four children and their families as well.

I dedicate this little book to you and am so happy to publicly share that I love you more than words could ever express.

From my cancer bed (twice) and near-death struggle with Covid-19 to my very deepest hurts, you have always been there. Thank you so much.

Love,
Dad (and Husband)

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Preface: Still Sitting There?

“And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God.” (Acts 3:8)

The lame man lay at the temple door, requesting financial assistance. Peter and John had neither silver nor gold; however, they offered him something better: healing. God healed the man immediately. Now, I have several questions for you: Do you think that man went home and sat in his usual place? Do you think he spent time whining and complaining about his lost years and all the time he suffered? Or, perhaps, did his family say, “Sit down. We’re about to eat,” and he instead chose to eat standing up (much to their surprise)? Is it possible his family tired of his numerous invitations to jog or hike with him? Perhaps they said, “Sit down and rest,” to which he answered, “I’ve sat and lain around long enough; I will use the time I have left to run, jump and praise God.” In looking for this man on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, keep an eye out for footprints—not butt prints. He had sat long enough.

I ask these questions to get your mind churning about how you will spend the rest of your life. Will you nurse your hurts from the past or swim in the wonders God gives you right now? Will you live in the past or enjoy the present? You undoubtedly have been hurt, but you don’t need to live there. This book calls on you to move from Hurting Street to Halle-lujah Boulevard. I am not questioning if you have been hurt; rather, I’m

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merely saying that *thinking* about your hurt will not help you right now.

In looking forward, allow me to provide you with a plan to find the strength to rise above what happened to you, rising above the hurt and adversity. Come with me and enjoy what God has in store for you right now.

“Adversity is like the period of the rain ... cold,
comfortless, unfriendly to man and to animal; yet from
that season have their birth the flower, the fruit, the date,
the rose and the pomegranate.”

*Sir Walter Scott*¹

¹ Mark Water, *The New Encyclopedia of Christian Quotations* (Alresford, Hampshire: John Hunt Publishers Ltd, 2000), 20.

Introduction

Consider this note your invitation to go on a forgiveness journey with me. I do not write this booklet to correct or teach you so much as to take you along on the journey God is still taking me on.

I got hurt and immediately drew up into myself. I am not sure you have ever been in a place like that, but I rapidly took my hurt and made it my entire world. Selfishness dominated my life. Everything I heard, saw, thought, or even remotely sensed was about me and how it affected me. It shook me to the very core. I no longer even knew who I was. My pain became my identity.

I read or listened to every book about forgiveness I could get my hands on. I knew what I needed to do but didn't know how and wasn't even sure I wanted to forgive. It was so much easier preaching it than living it.

In my hurt, I turned my offenders into monsters, criminals, and enemies. I refused to see things from their point of view and forgot that they were God's children. I forgot they were people, too.

I cried out to God for vengeance, wanting God to prove I was right. I wanted Him to protect me and do something great in my life. God was doing something great, just not what I had wanted. He was going to change me.

I invite you along for the journey knowing how much the journey costs and how much it hurts. The journey isn't pleasant because it goes against self, so against what I wanted, but it gets to what God wants.

On this journey, we must decide whether to stay where we are or

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move forward. Have we reached the pinnacle of our lives? Do we want to live hurt, bitter, defensive, and insecure? I do not think that we do. It is time to get up and move on.

It is time to move into the future. We can even rewrite our history. Instead of making it about how we have been hurt, we can see how God has been at work in our lives. I decided to grow and go, not stay and suffer.

In my journey, I must tell you, the desire to disappear from this planet was great, and I begged God to take me. I tried to pray like George Muller that God wouldn't get me out of the situation until He had accomplished all He wanted in my life through His trial. I have cancer, so that would have been easy enough, but I learned that you must stay in the fight and grow to where God wants you.

I knew that no matter how unfair it felt, my accusers were in page after page of any and everything they could dig up about me. There were seeds of truth that the Holy Spirit brought to mind. My loud, hyperbolic manner of speaking, seeing things only my way, and desire to cause everyone to line up with what I felt to be true had unintentionally hurt many of the people that I thought I was training, teaching, or coaching. I had to change to mature into what God was trying to accomplish in my life.

Acknowledging my own mistakes didn't change what others had done. I didn't have to let my past define my present or future. I failed; they hurt me, but sufficient to the day is the evil thereof. Forgetting those things behind me, I decided to press towards the mark of God's high calling in my life.

Getting on with my life was the advice I needed. Hiding out and isolating myself was not the solution for me, and it will not be for you, either.

One study that meant the most to me was about Joseph. He asked his brothers, "Am I in the place of God?" They might have meant it for evil, but God meant it for good. I must trust God with what is happening in my life.

I wanted to laugh again. I wanted to enjoy life instead of just enduring every day I faced. God will take all that has happened and use it to conform us to the very image of Christ. How can I reject the Maker's hand? I must trust Him.

Introduction

It is time to cast all our care on the Lord. He cares for us. It's time to quit carrying it and realize He loves us wholeheartedly. We are the apple of His eye.

I started a journey of forgiveness and realized I would be on this same trip for the rest of my life. I have yet to arrive and still have a long way to go. Thank God that He loves me by who He is and not what.

I will keep learning. I will turn all this hurt into a blessing. I will help others in the same way that God has helped me. I will work on my interior man and bring my thoughts into obedience or to the captivity of Christ.

So, in this little booklet, I want to share with you the journey God is taking me on. I do not presume to teach but to share. I see myself as a fellow traveler, not a guide. The Holy Spirit will guide you as He has me, and I pray that this little booklet will bless you.

W. Austin Gardner

Chapter 1:

Time to Move into the Future

When people have been hurt, abused, or slandered, they must let go of the pain and bitterness and move on with the understanding that holding on to the hurt and anger will not change the situation. Thus, letting go of the past and focusing on creating a better future are essential.

Starting with a clean slate is crucial. So let's forgive whomever we must forgive. Let's forgive anything hanging so heavily over our heads.

“But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” (Matthew 6:15)

“The word forgive in the Bible means to dismiss or release someone; it is to send away, give up, divorce, or release from legal or moral obligation. To forgive means to move away, separate, leave, and depart from. It means to cancel or remit.”¹

While we cannot change what's happened in the past, we *can* decide how to react to those events. So from a healthy perspective, a person who forgives, lets go of the pain and bitterness, and moves on will find victory. Don't let your past destroy your present and future.

As believers, we are commanded by God to forgive all wrongs against us. From a biblical perspective, forgiving means releasing the hurt, the bitterness, and the hatred. It means canceling and moving away from our initial feelings.

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It is time to abandon your past. Release the hurt and the bitterness and move on. Rewrite your story. Instead of dwelling on how you suffered and how your offender hurt you, consider how God is using what happened to mold you into the champion you are becoming right now. So forget everything behind you and reach out, stretching for what's in front of you. If you need to look back, only do so to gain strength for the journey ahead.

Learning to forgive those who have wronged you as you move into the future is a powerful way to start fresh and reclaim your life—however daunting this may seem.

TAKE TIME TO REFLECT ON THE SITUATION.

By taking the time to acknowledge and accept your pain, reflect on the situation and attempt to forgive, you can better understand the power of forgiveness as you move into the future.

Stay close to your family and friends; these strong connections are crucial to help you process your feelings.

You'll also need to make a *conscious* effort to forgive. Fully commit to letting go of the anger and resentment and start moving forward.

You can stay here—nursing the hurt—or choose to find the strength to rise above hurt and adversity.

“Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before. I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 3:13-14)

“When circumstances become difficult and you are in the furnace of testing, *remain where God has put you until He tells you to move*. Faith moves in the direction of peace and hope, but unbelief moves in the direction of restlessness and fear.”²

1 William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 156.

2 Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Obedient*, “Be” Commentary Series (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1991), 23.

Chapter 2:

Time to Persevere and Have Grit

You can rise above the pain, using it for self-motivation toward success and victory. In channeling the hurt into something positive to become stronger and overcome challenges and obstacles, it is critical to understand the power of perseverance and not let past bitterness define the present or future.

Warren Wiersbe wrote a book entitled *The Bumps Are What You Climb On: Encouragement for Difficult Days*. Please don't get me wrong, I realize what happened to you was so much more than an insignificant "bump." I know life has thrown major curve balls your way, but I *also* know you can learn from what happened, using it to triumph over the past and empowering yourself for the present and future.

Those past battles will give you the strength you need to rise above the hurt and adversity. Though I hate to hear it when *I* am hurting, let's consider the popular old saying: "Whatever does not kill me makes me stronger." Yes, you *choose* what you will do with all that has happened. Don't be like Naomi in the story of Ruth, who said she "went out blessed and came back empty." Naomi—so hurt and defeated—changed her name to Mara and told everyone; it meant she was bitter. Naomi blamed it all on God. Little did she know she was so close to God's great blessings. Ruth, meanwhile, would find a kinsman redeemer and all would work out.

The story was in fact so much bigger than the horrible losses Naomi had suffered. More than that, Naomi (Mara) had yet to learn the story wasn't about her; it was about God. God brought Naomi home so that

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Ruth would accompany her before marrying Boaz and joining the lineage of Christ.

Naomi had suffered for sure, losing her husband and both of her sons. She lost all means of taking care of herself. She had lost everything, but God stepped in with a brilliant plan to accomplish His purpose and care for Naomi when she hit rock bottom.

Could it be that God is at work in *your* life? He has a plan for his honor and glory, which will also bless and care for you; you may just need to hang on a little longer and trust God.

So don't give up; the time has come for you to go deep in your walk with the Lord. Get in the Word of God. Ask him to grow you and work on you. Making a firm decision not to complain, place blame, or make excuses for your attitude or actions, you will instead get up, hang in there, and wait on God to move. Victory is yours for the taking. You just need to get up and go get it. This is not the time to quit.

“We overcome the problems we face because God works in us, through His Spirit, when we seek Him in prayer. This is also how we can overcome our weaknesses and become more like Him.”¹

So, don't just sit here and nurse your hurt but instead decide to get up and find the strength to rise above pain and adversity.

“And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.” (Luke 9:62)

¹ John D. Barry and Rebecca Kruswijk, *Connect the Testaments: A One-Year Daily Devotional with Bible Reading Plan* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012).

Chapter 3: Time to Make Positive Changes in Your Life

It is essential to stay positive and motivated to change your life for the better, and to take action with steadfast energy is vital. Stay focused on the goal and determine to achieve it.

Have you ever paid attention to the attitude God wants us to have? You are to rejoice in the Lord always, and again, I say *rejoice*.

I once knew a great preacher named Grant Rice who was always rejoicing in the Lord to such a degree that it in fact got on my nerves. I was always determined to hear him say something different. Whenever he called me, I would ask him, “How are you doing?” His response?

“I am rejoicing in the Lord!” He said this each and every time we talked.

One day when I called him, I could detect from his “hello” that he was feeling under the weather—and thus, eagerly awaited a complaint that would surely slip from his lips. Yet to no avail. As always, I asked, “How are you doing?”

He promptly responded with “I am rejoicing in the Lord.”

When I said, “I can hear you’re not feeling well. I thought you might not say that today.”

He replied, “Hey, just because I’m sick and things aren’t going my way doesn’t change the fact that I am rejoicing in the Lord.” He was always a pleasure to talk to.

I invited him to host a preacher’s conference at my little church and was so excited to have this great man with me. As he had mentored so many and helped form so many churches, I assumed many preachers

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would attend the event. Yet that wasn't the case. Only one or two showed up, except for those from our church. I was so disappointed. When I tried to explain myself and offer up excuses, he said, "God knew what he was going to do today. You did what you could. It is not on you. Let's rejoice in what the Lord is doing." I couldn't believe it. How was it possible to maintain that attitude all the time, no matter the circumstances?

A few months/years later, I heard that his wife—appropriately named Joy—had died. I called. He answered, and I asked tenderly how he was doing. He responded (of course), "I am rejoicing in the Lord."

I inquired, "Brother, aren't you sad?" "Yes, I am brokenhearted," he replied. When I asked how it was possible to still rejoice in the Lord during this difficult time, he replied, "I am rejoicing in the Lord and who He is, not in the loss of my wife. God hasn't changed just because *my* circumstances have." I couldn't believe it then and I can still hardly believe it now. Yet he had the right attitude, a biblical attitude.

I know you know we are to live in faith, always believing. Even when we pray and ask God for something, we are told to immediately say "thank you" because we trust our Father.

Are you ready to move from "complaining" and into "praising"? I have complained as much as anyone, but the Holy Spirit reminds me this action is like praising the devil and accusing God of not treating me right. I know this is not your intention, nor is it mine. Let's move on to faith and praise, rejoice, and leave the complaining behind us.

Believers should not live like victims. We are victorious in Christ and humble in that we recognize the story is not about us but rather about God Himself, leaving ourselves in His hands. We cast all of our cares on Jesus because He cares for us. Give Him your burdens and walk away, trusting Him for the freedom He offers.

"Man is fond of counting his troubles but he does not count his joys. If he counted them up as he ought to, he would see that every lot has enough happiness provided for it."

*Fyodor Dostoevsky*¹

Time to Make Positive Changes in Your Life

“Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things *are* honest, whatsoever things *are* just, whatsoever things *are* pure, whatsoever things *are* lovely, whatsoever things *are* of good report; if *there be* any virtue, and if *there be* any praise, think on these things.”

(Philippians 4:8)

No more whining and nursing our hurt. We will get up and go on, finding the strength to rise above hurt and adversity.

1 Mark Water, *The New Encyclopedia of Christian Quotations* (Alresford, Hampshire: John Hunt Publishers Ltd, 2000), 536.

Chapter 4: Your Past Does Not Define the Present or Future

“It simply means that we break the power of the past by living for the future. We cannot change the past, but we can change the meaning of the past.”¹

Understanding that the past does not define the present or future is essential. It is crucial to embrace change, using it as an opportunity to learn and grow while realizing that creating a better life and using the pain as a catalyst for change is possible.

Joseph had been a prisoner—but not for life—and became a prince instead of a prisoner. His past didn’t define him, nor did it limit him. He used every step of the way to prepare for whatever God had in store for him, defining his past rather than letting his past define him. He examined it and saw God caring for and prospering him rather than all the abuse. What will *you* decide to see?

They had falsely accused Joseph and threw him into prison. Though this happened to him, it was not who he was. He wasn’t guilty and never let those false accusations define him. Choosing not to sulk in the corner, he became the keeper of the keys, the second-most important man in the prison. What will *you* do with your past?

You can use your past as motivation to grow and change, to help you find the strength to rise above hurt and adversity. Peter denied the Lord under severe pressure. At least in his heart, he feared for his life, dreading what might happen if they associated him with Jesus. He denied Jesus three times, but that was not who Peter was. His sin and failure didn’t define him.

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Your sin and failure need not define you. In fact, they *don't* define you. Jesus said, "Sufficient to the day is the evil thereof." Today is enough to deal with. All you can do is obey God today and decide that He is at work in your life.

Joseph realized that what men meant for evil, God meant for good. He saw the positive and blessed the Lord, he focused on God and not himself. Much of the problem lies in that we must consider the Lord rather than making ourselves the focus. Time to repent, see things how God does, and move on. We really can successfully navigate those bumps.

Recall how a butterfly no longer lives like a worm, transforming ugly into beauty. That is what you are called on to do right now.

We all make mistakes; it's part of being human. Our past need not define who we are in the present or future, however. For those of us who feel emotionally drained from the consequences of our past actions, understanding the power of forgiveness can transform our lives. Let's consider how to forgive and move forward.

You're not a prisoner to your past. While you can't change it, you can use it as a tool to shape your future. Acknowledge that you've grown from the experience and that it's shaped you into a stronger person.

It's also important to take ownership of your feelings and responsibility for your actions. Don't focus on blaming others or yourself for whatever's happened in the past; instead, focus on what you can do now to repair the situation and how you can use this for growth.

By understanding the power of forgiveness and seizing control of whatever lies ahead, you'll stop allowing your past to define your present and future. You are not a victim of your past; you are the master of your future. With the right attitude and understanding, you can create the life you want and deserve.

"Therefore if any man *be* in Christ, *he is* a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." (II Corinthians 5:17)

1 Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 89.

Chapter 5: Don't Isolate Yourself

“For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord’s.”

(Romans 14:7-8)

According to the HALT (Humane Alternatives to Long Term) Solitary Confinement Act, “Studies have consistently found that subjecting people to segregated confinement for twenty-two to twenty-four hours a day without meaningful human contact, programming, or therapy can cause deep and permanent psychological, physical, developmental, and social harm. People often have more difficulty complying with prison rules *after* being placed in segregated confinement.”¹

When we get hurt, we isolate ourselves: not wanting to see or talk to anyone. We feel like the world—everyone—has hurt us. Somehow, we assume the world and ourselves are better off if we never speak to another human being—or even die.

This is a non-biblical way to think and respond. Perhaps it’s the natural thing to do when facing difficult situations, but God made us need each other. First is our relationship to the Lord; we must then realize that we do not live or die to ourselves.

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I know you are hurting and may wish your offender dead. You feel like no one understands you. Yet isolation is not the answer.

Isolation leads to loneliness, which can spark depression, anxiety, etc. Perhaps you feel like you don't need anyone's help, that you can handle it alone. It's even possible you feel like no one cares enough to help. You might claim you're not trying to be alone; rather, everyone else has left and abandoned you.

*“The Myth of Self-sufficiency. We all have burdens, and God does not intend for us to carry them by ourselves in isolation from our brothers and sisters.”*²

Isolation can lead to negative thoughts and feelings such as self-doubt, hopelessness, and despair, which can become cyclical and self-reinforcing, making it difficult to break free from the cycle of isolation and negative thinking. You know what I mean by “negative thinking”; woe is me, no one loves me, everyone hates me, I think I will go eat worms. Those words were written in a children's song back in 1863 and can accurately describe how we feel.

The sense of isolation and loneliness you feel in these moments is sometimes overwhelming, but it's important to remember that you are not alone. It takes courage and strength to break free from patterns of hurt and pain, and it's important to recognize this.

Seek support from your family and close friends and embrace the future. In choosing to let go of the past, it's important to recognize that you are the one in control of your life and that your future remains unwritten.

1 <https://abovethelaw.com/2021/04/solitary-confinement-the-cruellest-form-of-punishment/>

2 Timothy George, *Galatians*, vol. 30, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 413.

Chapter 6:

Learn and Grow in the Lord and Your Life

“And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.” (II Corinthians 12:7-10)

Yes, it happened, and it hurt. Joseph’s brothers sold him into slavery that summoned thirteen years of suffering. Naomi’s husband and two sons died way too soon. King David ran for his life, hiding in caves for nearly ten years. Paul was inflicted by a thorn in the flesh that tormented him.

We can sit here and nurse our hurt, or we can learn from it. Nothing has happened that will not lead to our good and His glory. We both know that.

Jesus wants you to enjoy your abundant life. While you are hurting, I want to encourage you to dig deep into the Word of God. Spend time in the Book of Psalms. Pray the Psalms. Make the Psalms yours. Then pray it back to the Lord. Here is an example of how to pray Psalm 1:

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“Blessed *is* the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight *is* in the law of the LORD; And in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. The ungodly *are* not so: but *are* like the chaff which the wind driveth away. Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. For the LORD knoweth the way of the righteous: But the way of the ungodly shall perish.”
(Psalm 1:1-6)

Now, take the Psalm and make it your prayer. It will go something like this, perhaps. There’s no “right way” to do this except to echo the Word:

God, I know you bless the man who decides not to hang around with lost people in search of their counsel. I will not listen to their opinions about what I must do right now. I will not stand around with sinners or those who disobey you. Right now, I decide to not allow myself to develop the critical spirit of the scornful. I ask you to help me with this decision. I ask you to bless me, as I choose to only listen to wise biblical counsel. God, I will receive my joy and delight from the time I spend in Your Word. I will constantly think about and discuss Your Word. It is my plan to go to bed thinking about You and Your truth and to wake up doing the same. Prosper me as you promised in Psalm 1. I know that the ungodly, those not saved and who do not love You, will be blown away. I know they have no way of succeeding when they stand before You. You know my path and even the paths of my offenders. I trust You.

Learn and Grow in the Lord and Your Life

This is just the sort of thing you might pray, thus drawing your heart into the things of God. It will change your way of thinking.

As you pray, be grateful to God for all He is doing in your life. Worship your Creator and your Savior.

Pay attention in church, knowing that God may speak to you through the messages your pastor is bringing. In your personal time with God or public worship and Bible study, stay attentive to learn if God is speaking to you.

Get out and serve others; spending too much time nursing hurts and focusing on ourselves only hurts us more.

Keep a gratitude journal, thanking God for all He does. He'll give you the strength you need to rise above the hurt and adversity.

“There are no easy roads to victory. It takes faith and courage to face the obstacles of life. And the spoils of victory do not go to the weak or fainthearted. The victory goes to those whose faith exceeds the obstacles. Those who dare to dream the impossible dream, who reach for the unreachable—they are the real winners.”

*Edward E. Hindson*¹

¹ Edward E. Hindson. *Courageous Faith, Life Lessons from Old Testament Heroes.*

Chapter 7: Find Joy and Laughter in the Face of Challenges

“Pain is inevitable; misery is optional.” God never intended for you to be free of pain, but He never intended for you to be filled with misery.”¹

God wants us to enjoy life and promises each of us one filled with abundance. It is in fact possible to find joy, happiness, and fulfillment despite challenges and difficulties, even in the presence of hurt and pain.

I know it is difficult to find laughter in all that is happening, as I have been there as well, and would never tell you to do something I have not also worked on in my own life. I know that when you're emotionally drained, it's difficult to see the silver lining.

Don't sweep your hurt and feelings under the rug or pretend they don't exist. Acknowledge that you're feeling drained, and take steps to manage your heart and emotions. Spend time with people who make you laugh, engage in activities you enjoy, and take time to engage in a calming activity, such as reading or taking a walk.

Forgiveness isn't just about letting go of pain and hurt; it's also about understanding the power of acceptance. It's about understanding that things don't always go our way, and that's ok.

Ask yourself, “What can I learn from this?” Rather than staying stuck in a cycle of anger and resentment, focus on what you can glean from the experience. Maybe you've learned to become more resilient or better communicate with others.

It's time to find joy and laughter again. Start by looking for small mo-

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ments of joy in your day-to-day life. Seek out things that make you smile or laugh. Spend time with people who make you feel good, and take part in activities that bring you joy.

Stop dwelling on the negative and search for the path to growth.

“God used Ruth to turn Naomi’s bitterness into gratitude, her unbelief into faith, and her despair into hope. One person, trusting the Lord and obeying His will, can change a situation from defeat to victory.”²

Get out with your friends, enjoy life and laugh again. Although this might feel forced at first, the laughter will eventually come.

Practice gratitude, an important attitude that can help us find joy even when facing difficult circumstances. By focusing on the things you are thankful for, you can shift your perspective and see the good in life, helping you feel more content and joyful, even when the going gets tough.

“In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.”
(I Thessalonians 5:18)

1 Adrian Rogers, “[How to Find Joy](#)” in *Adrian Rogers Sermon Archive* (Signal Hill, CA: Rogers Family Trust, 2017), Jn 15:11.

2 Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Committed*, “Be” Commentary Series (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1993), 38.

Chapter 8: Use Your Adversity as a Stepping Stone

“No faith is so precious as that which lives and triumphs in adversity.”

C.H. Spurgeon

“The measure of every man’s virtue is best revealed in time of adversity—adversity that does not weaken a man but rather shows what he is.”

Thomas à Kempis¹

With the right attitude of growth and courage, you will recover from tough experiences and use them as opportunities to learn and develop.

You and I aren’t the only ones facing adversity, no matter how much we believe we are. No temptation or testing occurs that is *not* common to man. To be honest, our suffering is a natural phenomenon.

Rather than asking “Why me?” Let’s decide that it is normal to face problems in life. Let’s refuse to turn our hurt into self-pity. “Oh, why me?” is a question we should refuse to ask. Let’s decide how we will apply what’s happened to us, not asking, “Why?” but instead “What can I learn from this? What is this adversity preparing me for?”

So let’s change our mindset right now, making a firm commitment

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to view whatever happened not as a roadblock or adversity but rather a lesson the Lord is allowing us to learn. This adversity just may in fact be the test for all we have learned in our Bible study, prayer, listening to what the Bible preaches, etc.

Rather than giving up or whining, we will look to see how God will use this problem to help us reach His ultimate place for us.

You can ask yourself, “What did I do wrong? What could I have done better? Did I react correctly when this first happened?” and answer accordingly, “I know I didn’t. I know there is so much for me to learn.”

“If anybody walked a rocky road, Joseph did. He was pampered by his father, hated by his brothers, sold for a slave, falsely accused, put into prison, forgotten, and apparently forsaken. But the bumps on the road helped him to climb higher, and one day Joseph became the second in command of all Egypt. Moses had a similar experience, and so did David, Daniel, and Paul. Here were people who did not complain about the road; they accepted the difficulties of life and used them as stepping-stones to the top of the mountain.”²

You will not make actual progress until you accept what is happening. Know that God loves you and hasn’t abandoned you. Nothing is happening to you that God hasn’t first seen, approved, filtered, and allowed.

Joseph is a good example. His brothers sold him into slavery, but he kept seeking out God’s intentions. God blessed him in everything, even when he was falsely accused and thrown into prison. All along the way, Joseph continued to faithfully believe and anticipate what God would ultimately do. Finally, God’s will became clear to him after he waited patiently for thirteen years.

So honor God with what is right in front of you. Take it a step at a time. Know that you do not see nor understand why this is happening—nor should you. You can trust that God will do right.

Find Joy and Laughter in the Face of Challenges

“Beware of succumbing to failure as inevitable; make it the stepping-stone to success.” Oswald Chambers³

1 Mark Water, *The New Encyclopedia of Christian Quotations* (Alresford, Hampshire: John Hunt Publishers Ltd, 2000), 20.

2 Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bumps Are What You Climb On: Encouragement for Difficult Days* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002), 12.

3 Martin Manser, ed., *Christian Quotations* (Martin Manser, 2016).

Chapter 9:

Acknowledge and Accept Your Pain but Then Cast Your Burden on the Lord

Acknowledge the pain and suffering caused by the abuse and slander; accept the hurt and allow yourself to process it. Realize that these experiences do not define who you are and that you have the power to rise above them.

Once you acknowledge and accept the hurt, do not stay there and nurse it. Get up and cast all your cares on God.

“Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.” (I Peter 5:6-7)

Step one is to humble yourself. Stop thinking you have the right to determine how your life should go and realize that God is in control with purposes you do not understand—and that he loves you very much.

So we humbly say to God that He is our Lord and Master. We tell Him we are the clay in the Potter’s hand. We want Him to form us and our actions per His will.

That is why we will always look to Him in everything that is happening.

“Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; And lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, And he shall direct thy paths. Be not wise in thine own eyes: Fear the Lord, and depart from evil.”
(Proverbs 3:5-7)

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We trust the Lord with everything in us—no matter how difficult—and decide not to do what we think or what someone else taught us. Instead, we watch for Him to perform His will in our lives, trusting He will show us the way.

“Those who focus only on themselves are the most miserable of people. The persons who turn their pain to helping others can redirect and conquer that pain.”¹

“Trust in the LORD, and do good; *so* shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed. Delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart. Commit thy way unto the LORD; Trust also in him; and he shall bring *it* to pass. And he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday. Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him: fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass. Cease from anger, and forsake wrath: fret not thyself in any wise to do evil. For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth.” (Psalm 37:3-9)

We trust the Lord. We know He does right, so we live our lives honoring and obeying Him. Trust God and do right. We find our delight not in our wants and desires, but in the very will of God. When I align myself with God’s will, I will desire godly things and reap exactly what my heart longs for, the glory of God.

So now I simply decide to trust God with what He wants to do in my life, trusting Him and knowing He will do what is right. We can just rest. We rest and we wait.

Don’t get angry and upset, feeling confident that God will work in your life. Remember, His goal is that you conform to the image of Christ.

So yes, it hurts sometimes. It hurts a great deal, but we know the result is far worth it.

Personally, I have been battling kidney cancer for over ten years now.

Acknowledge and Accept Your Pain but Then Cast Your Burden on the Lord

After my first surgery and the removal of my kidney, we expected all to go well from that point forward; yet nine years later, the cancer came back with a vengeance.

My medicine caused tremendous discomfort, but as far as we knew, it was the sole solution to shrink the tumors and extend my life. I also received palliative care.

Finally, after a second opinion, we learned surgery was in fact a feasible alternative. I was on the operating table for over 10 hours and lost three additional organs in the process, but when I came to, the doctor confirmed I was cancer-free.

Yes, it hurt. I still battle some discomfort, but was it worth it? Yes, one hundred times yes.

Your pain is worth it, even while you're still fighting.

So I know you are hurting. I am sorry. Yet now is the time to accept your pain and all the hurt associated with the same, casting it all on the Lord because He really loves you. He hurts when you hurt. He has not abandoned you.

God cares for you and feels your pain. He patiently waits for you to turn to Him and cast it all on Him. Let him work in your life. He will make this burden a blessing before it is over.

1 David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, vol. 29, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 65.

Chapter 10: Engage in Lifelong Learning

Embrace the hurt, abuse, and slander as part of your life and who you are and move beyond them. Acceptance does not mean you are okay with the hurt, but you will accept it, learn from it, and move on.

The apostle Paul never felt like he had arrived; he constantly sought to serve Jesus and continued growing in grace.

“Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended.”
(Philippians 3:13)

God started the work in us and will perfect it in us. He will not fail; nothing happens by accident. Given the words of Apostle Paul, I don’t believe I have reached full maturity yet. He was determined to do all in his power to continue growing to maturity.

The Apostle Peter provided a growth plan for all to follow, saying great and precious promises accompanied the same.

“Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make *you that ye*

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shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins.” (II Peter 1:4-9)

Notice that God made us partakers of the divine nature. We are in Christ, and He is in us. We are new creatures with a new nature. Can you believe that? We must live out who we are.

Because we have such great promise, we should desire to grow. God saved us. We are no longer slaves to the corruption of this world and have achieved victory. So now we should act with diligence to add to our faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, patience or endurance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and charity.

This resembles a repetitive growth cycle wherein we add to and continue repeating each step all along the way in life. If we do these things and work at them, we will be fruitful in the knowledge of Jesus Christ; if we don't, we will forget what Jesus has done for us.

We must continue learning and growing for the duration of our lives, knowing the day we arrive is the day we die. We will make mistakes and fail, but we will get up, learn our lessons, and move on. We learn to put our wants into practice. We are not to seek information, but transformation.

We learn from what we see, hear, and read while also learning from *experience*, a harsh teacher, but theory never truly becomes ours until we experience it. The hurt we have endured is the greatest lesson before us. We're to take the lesson and learn.

Then prepare yourself for more, as God is growing you into the image of Christ. To do that, you can never get settled and relax. In the never-ending school of life, you learn and learn some more—and then do great things through Christ, who strengthens you.

Chapter 11: Transform Your Pain into a Blessing for Others

“Blessed *be* God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ.” (II Corinthians 1:3-5)

God is our constant source of comfort via the Word, prayer, biblical preaching/study and even Christian counselors. We are learning to grow in grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Take note of this question: Do you find comfort from the Lord amidst tribulation? If not, are you in the place you need to be for the Lord to work in your life? Are you living in rebellion against Him, knowing your thoughts and attitudes are inappropriate?

Now notice how He comforts us so that we can comfort others with the same comfort He gives us. We suffer, He comforts, and then *we* comfort. He has trained us to perform the ministry.

Now, another question: Will you humble yourself under the hand of God and recognize yourself as His servant? Will you tell Him to make you and mold you into whatever He wants you to be? Are you ready and willing to take your training, and His comfort, to act as a blessing to others?

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You probably don't want to hear this. After all, it means your suffering was never about *you*. Yes, your suffering is God preparing you for ministry.

"It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes." (Psalm 119:71)

"Many thousand recovered sinners may cry, O healthful sickness! O comfortable sorrows! O gainful hope! O enriching poverty! O blessed day that ever I was afflicted! Not only the green pastures and still waters, but the rod and staff, they comfort us. Though the Word and Spirit do the main work, yet suffering so unbolts the door of the heart that the word hath easier entrance."

*R. Baxter*¹

Yes, we've experienced pain and hurt. We've felt betrayed. Perhaps we're dealing with health issues with respect to our parents, spouse, children, or even ourselves. But remember, God is preparing us to serve Him by serving others in great need. Our suffering will help us grow if we simply humble ourselves before God and allow Him to do His work.

Finally, a last question: Are you ready to allow God to inject additional suffering into your life to ultimately foster your ministry? The more you suffer, the more He comforts you and the more ministry you have. Are you prepared, accordingly?

Others may suffer, do not know the Lord, or are perhaps not as mature as you, and have never endured such deep hurt. So become focused. What can you learn from what you've gone through or are even going through now? Write down what God is teaching you, as you will go on to teach the same to someone else.

You may need to make a phone call, or visit, preach a sermon, or write a book, but never waste your suffering. Realizing how God wants to use your hurt and suffering, you will find purpose and unearth something beautiful, not only fostering your healing but inspiring others as well.

Chapter 12: Work on Your Interior

We've reached the end of our brief journey in this book, though there's more to come later in a follow-up book for sure. I am thrilled you have journeyed with me up until this point and now want to challenge you to focus on personal, interior growth.

It is time to trust again. You can start by trusting God to guide you and then know that He is at work in your life through the process we have discussed.

Practice love again and drop your guard, making yourself vulnerable. I know you are terrified to do so, but it's simply a must. Don't give up. Don't run and hide. Seize control of your life and watch what God has in store. Set your eyes on the Lord Jesus.

“The secret to climbing higher is to look away from yourself and your difficulties and look by faith to Jesus Christ. He knows where you are, how you feel, and what you can do. Turn it all over to Him and start walking by faith. The very rocks that seem like barriers to human eyes will, to the eyes of faith, become blessings.”²¹

True and lasting growth requires us to work on the interior: the heart, mind and soul. We sow the seeds of change and nurture within ourselves, leading us to be all God wants us to be. It is not enough to change our behavior; we must cultivate and genuinely change our hearts to grow, learn to be still, and listen to the Lord God of heaven.

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The inner work of the heart involves a willingness to be open and honest with ourselves. It means uncovering the depths of our feelings and understanding the source of our pain and suffering. Heart work means facing our fears, insecurities, being brave enough to take risks, and grow despite our fears. It means being willing to fail, to make mistakes, and then learn from them.

Learn to recognize when your thoughts or emotions are holding you back, then work at replacing them. Take the initiative and move forward, not waiting for the “perfect” moment or circumstances. Start small and make gradual changes; eventually, you’ll see progress.

We’ve found ourselves emotionally drained and powerless for far too long and are now ready to change, yearning to understand the power of forgiveness and how to leverage the same for positive momentum in our lives.

Externals leave us empty and unfulfilled, no matter what we accomplish. Heart work, on the other hand, produces profound and lasting transformation. We must delve deep into our thoughts, feelings, and beliefs and understand how what we think shapes our actions and behaviors. We must be honest with ourselves and confront our fears, insecurities and past traumas.

We want to develop empathy and compassion towards others, thus promoting kindness, tolerance and acceptance, essential qualities for personal and societal transformation.

Another vital benefit of heart work is the subsequent ability to develop a growth mindset. Embracing a mindset that views challenges and failures as opportunities for learning and growth allows us to step out of our comfort zones and take risks. It encourages us to persevere despite setbacks and obstacles and view failures as valuable lessons rather than reasons for self-doubt or shame.

Working on the heart requires us to be our authentic selves. It means embracing our uniqueness, strengths, and vulnerabilities, and aligning ourselves with our values and beliefs, empowering us to make decisions accordingly despite any challenges. Authenticity allows us to live real and fulfilling lives, freeing us from the need to conform to expectations or seek external validation.

Work on Your Interior

Finally, working on the heart requires us to cultivate gratitude and a sense of purpose. Gratitude is about recognizing and appreciating the blessings and abundance in our lives. It helps to shift our focus from what is lacking to what we *have*, from our hurt to His abundant blessing. It fosters a positive outlook and promotes well-being. A sense of purpose gives us a reason to strive for something greater than ourselves, providing us with a sense of direction and adding meaning to our lives. It ignites our passion and fuels our motivation.

I am hoping this little booklet has served as a “preview” of sorts, warming your heart for a new book coming soon. And remember: always rejoice in the Lord, no matter the circumstances.

About the Author



Austin Gardner is a writer, coach, and mentor to young men serving in ministry. He shares his experience as a pastor (28 years) and church-planting missionary (20 years). His goal is to conduct leader training for multiple church planting missionaries.

Austin started two churches in the United States and many more in Peru, and those he has trained and worked with have gone on to start additional churches on a global scale.

Austin shares his experience via his online presence ([Society of Mentors/Sociedad de Mentores](#)) while also serving as the founder and president of [Alignment Ministries](#).

Austin and his wife Betty will be married 50 years in August 2023. They have four children (who also faithfully serve the Lord Jesus Christ)

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as well as 20 grandchildren. His family thrives in the ministry, even during their overseas work as missionaries in Peru.

Traveling and working with missionaries worldwide, Austin has in fact preached in over 50 countries and enjoys every minute of his work.

The LORD bless thee, and keep thee: The LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.

Numbers 6:24-26

RISING ABOVE

THE *HURT*

A Journey from Pain to Praise

Consider this note your invitation to go on a forgiveness journey with me. I do not write this booklet to correct or teach you so much as to take you along on the journey God is still taking me on.

I got hurt and immediately drew up into myself. I am not sure you have ever been in a place like that, but I rapidly took my hurt and made it my entire world. Selfishness dominated my life. Everything I heard, saw, thought, or even remotely sensed was about me and how it affected me. It shook me to the very core. I no longer even knew who I was. My pain became my identity.

So, in this little booklet, I want to share with you the journey God is taking me on. I do not presume to teach but to share. I see myself as a fellow traveler, not a guide. The Holy Spirit will guide you as He has me, and I pray that this little booklet will bless you.



Austin Gardner has been a pastor, church-planting missionary, mentor, and counselor for nearly fifty years, dedicating his life to serving others. A devoted husband of fifty years to Betty, a loving father to four wonderful children, a doting granddad to twenty grandchildren, and a soon-to-be great-granddad to one, Austin has forged an unwavering commitment to helping others live their best life.

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