PRAISE FOR

THE MENDED HEART

Being hurt and heartbroken is a sad reality for most of us. But I’m so thankful for this treasure of a book written by my friend Suzie Eller. Page by page, Suzie will help you understand how God’s truth can heal your pain so you can move forward whole and healed.

LYSJA TERKEURST
New York Times Bestselling Author
President of Proverbs 31 Ministries

If you’ve ever felt too broken for God to fix, then The Mended Heart is for you. Suzie Eller takes you by the hand and guides you step-by-step toward the only Source that offers complete wholeness. Each chapter exclaims, “There’s no hurt God can’t heal.” Do yourself a favor—read this book!

MICCA CAMPBELL
Speaker, Proverbs 31 Ministries
Author, An Untroubled Heart

The message of The Mended Heart is especially uplifting. The author beautifully emphasizes the redemptive power of Jesus and his glorious triumph of overcoming the plight of this world—a much-needed message to those carrying the burden of their personal sufferings. As a biblical counselor, I repeatedly come face-to-face with clients bearing the weight of their own brokenness and in need of a “mended heart.” Readers who have ever known strife caused by adversity and worry will find this book to be an invaluable read as they discover the battle has been won by what Jesus has already done for us on the cross.

CHRISTINA CALK
Board Certified Biblical Counselor
Family Pastor at Praxis Community Church
*The Mended Heart* is part challenge, honest storytelling and deep, deep encouragement for anyone who has experienced loss, betrayal or pain. Eller acts as a gentle guide, shepherding you through your pain to find wholeness and purpose on the other side. Tenderly told, and filled to the brim with Jesus, this book will prove to be a blessing to many.

**Mary DeMuth**  
*Author, The Wall Around Your Heart: How Jesus Heals You When Others Hurt You*  
*Blogger at Your Life Uncaged, MaryDeMuth.com*

If you have experienced a broken heart due to pain, disappointment and hurt inflicted by others or because of your own wrong choices, read this book. In *The Mended Heart*, Suzie Eller reveals life-changing biblical principles and answers the tough questions we are sometimes afraid to ask. The “Just You and God” section will lead you step-by step on a journey to healing. Don’t miss this important book!

**Carol Kent**  
*Speaker and Bestselling Author, When I Lay My Isaac Down and Unquenchable: Grow a Wildfire Faith That Will Endure Anything*

“What You Don’t Have to Do,” the first chapter in Suzanne Eller’s *The Mended Heart*, hooked me. It wasn’t one of those books that gives simplistic formulas to solve all problems and makes us feel guilty because they don’t work. Eller writes with a warm sensitivity as she touches the wounded places. She writes with a compassion that helps us cope with the worst of pain—always reminding us that God’s love mends our hearts.

**Cecil Murphey**  
*Author or Co-author of more than 130 books, including I Believe in Heaven and I Believe in Healing, and bestsellers 90 Minutes in Heaven and Gifted Hands: The Ben Carson Story.*

In *The Mended Heart*, Suzanne Eller holds her readers’ broken hearts in tender hands as she layers on healing truths about Jesus, the Healer. She skillfully communicates both the realities of our hurts—whether self-inflicted or caused by others—and the undeniable Hope for living whole again. Hope with a name—Jesus. Don’t skip the questions and answers at the end of the book. Eller’s empathy and practicality shine brightly in these “Q&A” pages.

**Cynthia Ruchti**  
*Speaker and Author, Ragged Hope: Surviving the Fallout of Other People’s Choices*

Suzanne Eller, *The Mended Heart*  
I dedicate this book to my Savior, whom I rediscovered all over again in a small community prayer room in Fayetteville, Arkansas. His presence wrapped around me as I read and researched His story, and as I prayed that He might show me what it means to live in His mission statement so that we might be made whole. I celebrated His response to flawed and hurting humanity, and how knowing Him and being known is such a gift.

I want to thank Richard, my husband. Who knew that when you saw that girl sitting in her Mustang, her hair flying in the wind, that we’d still be on an adventure 34 years later? Thank you for understanding and championing this call on my heart. You encourage me and offer grace when deadlines loom. You are my friend, my love, and a man who knows Jesus well.

To Leslie, Stephen, Melissa, Josh, Ryan and Kristin, you are some of my greatest cheerleaders. I’m so grateful for adult children who not only love to spend time with their mom, but who also encourage me to pursue all that God has placed on my heart.

To my grandbabies: Elle, Luke, Jane, Audrey and Josiah. Having five grandchildren ages three and under is not only crazy fun, but it’s also a blast! Twenty-three years ago, when I heard the word “cancer,” I didn’t know if I would see my own babies grow up. To have your little arms wrapped around my neck is sheer joy.

And to my mom, Karen Morrison. I love you like crazy. Now we can have a lunch date!
I also want to thank Rachelle Gardner, my Books and Such agent. Thank you for partnering with me.

Thank you to Kim Bangs and Regal. How lucky I am that my editor and publisher are friends who pray for their authors, who continually encourage, and who show their love for Christ in their excellence and work! Special thanks to Kim, Jackie and Tasha, who selflessly work behind the scenes so that these words can reach as many as possible.

I also want to thank the women who served as a focus group as I penned these words. Thank you to Jennifer, Jill, Julie, Gloria, Sarah, Tracie and Amy. You didn’t blink when I scrapped the first three months of work to start fresh. You simply jumped on board and started over with me. Thank you for reading each chapter, for being honest, and for sharing those “a-ha!” moments when the text touched you personally, as well as those “oh no!” moments when I needed to dig in a little deeper.

Last, I want to thank you, the reader.
When you show up on my blog (www.tsuzanneeller.com) or on Twitter or Facebook, or you send an email, it tells me that all the words written in a little coffee shop didn’t just disappear into thin air. I love that we pray, explore God’s grace, and discover healing together. What a privilege!
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Suzanne Eller, The Mended Heart
As a young mom, I wore fear, worry and anxiety around me like a heavy old robe. I had three young boys and battled a disease that left me exhausted and constantly frustrated. Even so, I enjoyed sweet times of fellowship with God. I pursued Him, ran after Him with a passion and zeal. I pulled myself out of bed in the mornings before the boys got up so I could have some time in the Word, time in prayer and time to listen to what the Lord had to say to me. He really was my greatest treasure, even though up to that point my life was nothing like I thought it would be.

I struggled more often than not. I hated my fears and insecurities; I wondered if I’d ever get free from the past pain that plagued me so, or if God would ever deliver me from the sickness that sapped me of my strength. I finally cried out to God in the most reckless way, “Lord Jesus! I can’t pursue You more than I do right now with three little kids and this wretched disease! I pray. I read. I journal. I spend time with You. But when I get up from this place, my life seems no different. I still battle the same fears and insecurities. What am I missing, Lord? Where’s the victory?”

I waited.

Then He spoke to me:

_I get that you love Me. But you don’t seem to understand that I love you. So from now on—until I tell you differently—every time you’re about to say, “I love You, Lord,” I want you to turn it around and say, “You love me, Lord.” Say it now._

Suzanne Eller, The Mended Heart
Shocked and surprised by this revelation, I whispered under my breath, “You love me, Lord.”

He whispered to me again, *Say it again.*

“You love me, Lord.” I repeated this statement several times and had to admit, something about those words seemed both foreign and familiar—foreign because I’d put more emphasis on my walk with God than on His walk with me; and familiar because I realized that He designed me for Him, to be loved by Him, to walk with Him, so that living in response to that love would become the most natural, supernatural thing in the world.

Scripture tells us that God loved us first. While we were yet sinners, He died for us (see Rom. 5:8)—that it’s not about how high we can jump, but that He stooped down to make us great (see Ps. 18:35). And that “it is for freedom that Christ has set us free” (Gal. 5:1, emphasis added).

We’ve all been bruised and battered by this life. People hurt us and we make our own bad choices; and, for far too many, that’s where the story ends. But it doesn’t have to be that way. There’s a way to get unstuck, a way through the valley and to the other side.

God extends His hand to you on this journey and, if you trust Him, He’ll do such a deep work in you that you’ll barely recognize yourself once the story is over.

My friend Suzie Eller has written a book that invites you to take those steps toward healing today. She’ll hold your hand, speak life to your soul and remind you of many important things, like:

You are not alone.
You don’t have to earn God’s love.
You don’t have to run anymore.

Suzie will teach you the wonder of a changed perspective—how when you shift your focus from what you do to what Christ has
already done, that’s when the healing begins. His finished work for you is enough to save you, and heal you.

Suzie is a wise woman of God with oodles of life experience. She oozes the love of God because she walks intimately with Him. Her greatest passion is to see others healed and restored and mobilized to be and do everything God intended for them, because that’s what God has done for her.

Listen to this friend of mine. She speaks with wisdom and authority and compassion. Your healing journey truly is about to begin.

May God surprise and bless you with rich and deep revelations of His love in the days to come.

Susie Larson
Radio Host, Author, Speaker
PART 1

What Jesus Has Already Done for You
Jesus’ Mission Statement

“The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me,
Because He has anointed Me
To preach the gospel to the poor;
He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted,
To proclaim liberty to the captives
And recovery of sight to the blind,
To set at liberty those who are oppressed;
To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD.”
Then He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant
and sat down.
And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him.
And He began to say to them,
“Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

LUKE 4:18-21, NKJV
Introduction

“I am anointed to preach the gospel to the poor, to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, to give sight to the blind, and to set at liberty those who are bruised,” Jesus said in the most magnificent Mission Statement ever conceived. And He fulfilled it perfectly, exquisitely, completely.

Jon Coursen

Whenever I meet a woman with broken places in her heart and being, I almost immediately begin to wonder what she will look like in the hands of our Savior.

What will He do in those broken places?
In what ways will His touch change the direction of her life?
Who is she destined to be with a heart made whole?
Considering the possibilities excites me. For Jesus came to heal the brokenhearted! In fact, our healing was part of His self-proclaimed mission statement (see Luke 4:18). He stood in Nazareth—His boyhood hometown—as He proclaimed those words. The crowd looked at Him and saw a carpenter’s son. Some questioned. Others walked away. Yet those who dared to believe discovered that knowing Jesus transformed their lives.

Those who accepted Jesus’ proclamation as truth put their feet on a new path. Even though Jesus’ mission statement was a fulfillment of the teachings they had studied all their lives, it challenged everything they had ever been told. This
proclamation was hard to grasp, because it led them away from a tradition-based religion to the premise of an intimate relationship. It challenged the idea that they had to earn or work their way into faith. Instead, they were asked to accept that they were on God’s mind to such a degree that compassion came in the form of a Savior who was willing to shoulder a burden they—and we—weren’t equipped to carry.

Jesus stood in front of the crowd that day prepared to embrace a cross that would remove our sorrow and replace it with peace. This obedient sacrifice placed Jesus’ feet on a road that led to suffering for Him—but had a destination of healing, restoration and redemption for each of us.

Jesus’ message needed to be spoken then, and it’s just as powerful today. It’s a message that, if you embrace it, will challenge you to seek beyond what you see and feel, to find the Luke 4:18 thread running through your faith and inside of you.

Years ago I spoke at a small church. Afterwards two women approached me. They could almost pass for twins, except for the scars borne by one.

“She rescued me,” the younger sister said. “She drove through the night, even after I told her to stay away. She made me leave with her. I would be dead today if she hadn’t.”

This woman had filled her broken places with a man who fractured not only her heart, but also her bones. Even after her sister whisked her away in the dark of night, she didn’t know how to begin to heal. She wasn’t sure if God even knew that she existed.

“Can we pray?” I asked.

She knelt eagerly, pressing her forehead into my knees. She wrapped her arms around my legs before I could kneel beside her. Years of loss, pain, and a chasm so wide she feared there was no way back bled through her tears.
It is in moments like this that I realize how human I am, and how little I truly have to offer.

But God.

As we prayed, I placed my hands gently on her head and asked God for what felt impossible in the natural. I cannot explain the presence that filled that small space. It was a tangible, almost overwhelming compassion of a Savior for His beautiful daughter.

Now, this might be the point where you say, “My life doesn’t look like that. Perhaps this isn’t the book for me.”

There is brokenness that is easy to see, like that of a woman marked by abuse or of an addict perched on a sizzling sidewalk. But brokenness has many faces. It’s found in the heart of a 30-something woman who thrusts a photo of her handsome husband and a little girl with a sweet baby-tooth smile into my hands and whispers, “I just can’t keep feeling this way. I want more for them. I need more for me.”

It’s found in those who have been abused by a church doctrine or by parents who mixed Christianity with harsh or damaging theology. It’s the mark on the heart of a mother who held her young daughter in her arms as breath left her child’s body. It’s found in the woman whose life turned upside down when her husband left her.

Brokenness can result from discouragement and unmet expectations—in plans that fly far astray from the way you thought they would go; from events you didn’t see coming and couldn’t prevent even if you did; from the choices of your past—or the choices of others that brought pain into your life. We could focus on how the brokenness came to be, but what might happen if we turned to the promise found in Luke 4 instead?

Every story is unique—and each story, including yours, is important. In the pages of this book, we’ll meet women who
arrived at brokenness from vastly different starting points. But brokenness does not have to be the end of any of our tales. When we couple our stories with the Jesus Factor, we are offered the beautiful gift of a mended heart.

Now, when Jesus shared His mission statement, those standing in front of Him were familiar with the origin of the words (see Isa. 61:1-2), but they didn’t necessarily know how to apply them. Their parents and grandparents and great-great-great-grandparents had talked about the Messiah who would one day arrive. But they were looking for a King, not a heart surgeon.

They were awaiting a sword-carrying, chariot-driving God of power and might who would rescue them from the nations that oppressed them and avenge them of misdeeds done to the nation of Israel. They didn’t recognize that the prophecies actually depicted a Savior who came specifically to open blind eyes, set prisoners free, mend broken hearts and the bruised spirits of His sons and daughters, and bridge the gap that divided man from the freedom of an oh-so-personal relationship with their Creator.

Though they didn’t quite grasp it, Jesus fully understood who He was and why He had come—and who was on God’s mind when He sent Him.

Maybe you’ve been searching for healing for a long time. You recognize brokenness because you feel it. Perhaps you have come to identify yourself as broken, or maybe others have tossed about that word when they describe you. Put yourself in that hopeful crowd. Hear what Jesus is saying to you. Those words spoken in the synagogue in Nazareth have your name on them. You can never be so broken that He can’t put the pieces back together. Your broken or wounded places may have caused you to feel “less than”—but to our heavenly Father, healing your heart is the very reason Jesus was sent. God’s promise of healing is for you if you’ve been asking these questions:
What’s wrong with me?
Why can’t I get past this?
God, do You even see me?

When you realize that Luke 4:18-21 is for you, it creates a brand new set of questions. But we’ll look at only one at this point of your journey:

What miracle does my God desire to perform in me?

I believe in miracles, because I am one. Jesus transformed me from a fractured, insecure, hurting young woman into a strong woman of faith, a mom, a wife, and a grandma to five beautiful babies.

Long after my initial encounter with Christianity, my Savior has been my Refuge and my Healer in those times when life has hit so hard that it feels as if my breath has been taken away. He’s a Rock so secure that I am able to stop running from brokenness and instead run toward my God and all that He has in store for me.

When we grab hold of Jesus’ personal mission for us, something profound begins to take place. We become an integral part of the good news. The apostle John says this:

Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written (John 21:25).

Yes, there are 66 books in the Bible. But the story of God’s people is still being written. As we walk with Him, we become the new books that might never be canonized but that proclaim the power of Jesus for others to see. What a beautiful story these living books tell—and what a wonderful gift they are to those who hear them! When we’ve experienced brokenness, and Jesus
has healed our hearts, we can’t help but come alongside others who are walking where we once walked, joining an army of strong women of faith to tell the world that there is a place beyond brokenness.

May I share something with you as we start this study together? Sometimes miracles are instantaneous: The person who could not walk suddenly leaps to her feet and dances away, all her troubles behind her. But for most of us, it’s a process.

Embracing Jesus’ mission statement might require going against your feelings. It’s a trust walk—both on days when you feel it and on those days when you trust God despite your feelings. It’s not always easy, but things of great value rarely come without personal discovery, exploration, insight and renewed direction.

Even as God works in you, you will still be human and fallible. You won’t please everybody with your progress or the rate at which it takes place. At the end of it, you might not even look like a perfect church girl (which is okay—it’s not all it’s made out to be). But along the way you’ll realize that you matter to God and that your existence impacts others, and you will no longer reside in the broken places, because you’ve found something much richer.

This is no less a miracle than the person who is healed instantly.

So, my friend, let’s do this. Let’s begin to soak in the truth that Jesus started your healing long ago, when He proclaimed His mission with you on His heart. The first step in this process is to establish a solid foundation—to understand what you don’t have to do, because it’s already been put in place just for you by Jesus.

Note
What You Don’t Have to Do

When the Greeks looked at a building’s blueprint, they pictured the building whole and complete. . . . The Hebrews looked at the same blueprint more practically. They envisioned the process of building from hard hats to hammers, from scaffolding to skylights. “Ah,” the Hebrews said. “This is perfect.” The Hebrews and the early Christians understood perfection as a process, not a product.

KENDA CREAMY DEAN, THE GODBEARING LIFE

“Our A and B, and C will happen.”
“Stay on track.”
“Try harder!”
“Pull yourself up by your bootstraps.”
“What’s wrong with you?!”

Have you heard any of these? Maybe you’ve even said them to yourself as you tried a hundred times and failed. Sheer willpower may have worked for a while . . . and then unraveled. Perhaps you look like you’ve got it all together, but the mess that is underneath is still there.

The reality is that most of us care very much about our well-being; so when people tell us to clean up our act and do better, it’s just a rehash of promises we’ve made to ourselves, like:
I will be content.
I will try harder.
I will get past this somehow.
I...I...I...

Your list is more personalized because you know yourself like no other. But can we put our lists aside for a moment? There is power in choices, but let’s begin by building a foundation on the choices we don’t have to make.

**The Jesus Factor**

Herod the king was distraught. A child had been born; his birth was heralded by the very angels (see Luke 2:13-14). Some said this baby was the Christ child, the long-awaited Messiah. Herod was a jealous man, so—even though he had absolute power and rule—in his insecurity he commanded a party of Magi (wise men in service to the king) to locate this child in order that his life might be taken. It is said that Jesus was born and weaned on the sounds of sorrow, for King Herod ordered the murder of every male child under the age of two in his attempt to do away with the Christ child. The news of this massacre could not have been held back from the ears of His parents, who had whisked Jesus away to safety. Scripture does not share what this young couple went through as they held their beloved child in their arms, keenly aware that others mourned with empty arms and shattered hearts because of their son.

It was a humble and tragic beginning to the earthly life and ministry of Jesus.

No wonder our heavenly Father looked down at the state of humanity and grieved. No wonder He sent His Son! This sorrowful entry underscored the theme of Christianity and the mission of Jesus: to save us from the grip sin had on humanity.
Do you want to know what else is tragic? When you are brokenhearted, the first instructions you are likely to receive are to do more, weep less, and be stronger.

But in reality, the most powerful act we can do is to rest in what He’s already done for us. It’s a foundation upon which all other change can be built.

Before you consider what you should be doing, or what you didn’t do, or what you may need to do, let’s fully explore what you don’t have to do.

You Don’t Have to Do This Alone

My two-year-old grandson, Luke, stands at the edge of the pool. He has on his floaties. An Elmo swim diaper. Sweet little yellow goggles that make him look like a frog. I stand waist-deep in water, my arms open wide.

“Come on, buddy. You can do this.”

He edges closer and peers in, then backs away. After several trips back and forth, he finally sits on the edge of the pool and dips his toes in the water. I slip next to him when he’s not looking and scoop him up and hold him close. Into the water we go.


He could fight me, but he trusts instead. After all, this is his Gaga. Over the next several minutes, Luke gains courage to go further and further, until finally he is jumping into my open arms. Any time he feels frightened, he whispers these words under his breath: “I got you, buddy. I got you.”

It is his assurance that no matter how scary things might feel, he is not alone.

The reality is that sometimes we sense God calling us into deeper waters as part of our healing process, but we find the
prospect intimidating. We aren’t sure how to take the next step, or what to do if we take a dive and sink to the bottom. We want to trust, but it’s downright scary.

The disciples felt that way too. In John 16:17-18, we see them congregating in a huddle to dissect something Jesus had just told them.

“In a little while you will see me no more,” He had said (v. 16).

This news stirred anxiety in the hearts of the disciples. Up until this time, whenever they’d had a question or needed assurance, they could ask Him directly. They were accustomed to standing back and watching Him work. They were key eyewitnesses to the power of Jesus. His words caused them to worry.

What will we do without Him?
Whom will we turn to when we feel weak or unable?
What if we can’t accomplish what Jesus says we can?
What if no one else sees in me what He does?

These men were focused on their imperfections and their potential to stumble—or to fall short in a big way. They could recount the times they had failed Jesus and one another. To be honest, for some of them, it was a mystery why Jesus had even chosen them. They were prime examples of human frailty—not anything special, at least as far as their culture or peers might define the word.

Jesus saw that they were brimming with worry: “Are you asking one another what I meant when I said, ‘In a little while you will see me no more’?” (John 16:19).

He gently assured them that even in the absence of His earthly presence, He would still be with them. Close as a whisper. They could ask for what they needed in His name, and they would receive it. He saw their insecurity, and then reminded them that His love and plan for them weren’t dependent on their efforts or worthiness, but on the Power that resided within them.
“In this world you will have trouble,” He said. “But take heart! I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

He steered their worried thoughts away from what they couldn’t do or hadn’t done and toward Himself, offering peace in exchange for their anxiety.

*I got you, buddy. I got you.*

Perhaps worry has been an integral part of your thought process for a long time. You may have come to believe that healing has something to do with what you bring to the table. Maybe, like my grandson Luke, you fear that jumping into the depths is just too big of a leap. You’ve listened to advice, and you’ve tried to get over it or pretend like it’s not a big deal, but none of that has worked. You’ve made choices and sacrifices so you can find healing, but you’ve been broken for so long that you wonder if God can do a miracle in you.

How does Scripture respond to these fretful thoughts?

“Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you” (1 Pet. 5:7).

*I got you, sis. I got you.*

Jesus’ message to His disciples, and to you and me, is that it’s not our strength or power that will transform us. Yes, we make changes. Yes, we open our scabbed and broken heart to His tender touch. Yes, we allow Him to move us in uncomfortable directions to discover new paths—and leave old ones behind. But we can stop stressing, because our healing is not solely—or even primarily—dependent on us.

It’s a partnership.

You and God—and He’s bigger.

Perhaps you’ve come close to taking a leap of trust, but at the last moment you backed away. Maybe you’ve even dipped your toes in, thinking maybe that was enough. God isn’t unaware of your fears or your failed attempts. He knows how scary this is
for you. But He’s asking you to allow Him to scoop you up and take you deeper, because there are things He sees that you don’t yet. There are qualities He desires to instill in you that you aren’t even aware of yet. There are elements of your faith, as you move from the edge of uncertainty to trust, that you have yet to explore.

Not too long ago, I stood in the pool again. Luke wore his floaties. He had on his Elmo swim diaper. His cute yellow goggles made him look like a little frog.

I held open my arms, and my two-year-old grandson jumped with glee into my arms. No reservations. No fear. This time I didn’t have to say it, because it was ingrained on his heart:

*I got you, buddy. I got you.*

As you begin to heal, your God is with you every step of the way. You are not alone, and you don’t have to do the work of healing alone.

Let’s look at the next thing you *don’t* have to do.

**YOU DON’T HAVE TO EARN GOD’S LOVE**

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him (John 3:16-17).

This passage is the most familiar Scripture of the Christian faith. In fact, it’s so familiar that the power contained within it can get lost.

*God so loved the world.*

Not just a little section of the world or one person over another. He chose from the beginning of creation to love all of us.
Sometimes believers try to compartmentalize this love, saying that God loves just those who look like them, or sound like them. That you have to be a certain way or live up to a certain standard before God loves you. But that’s not how it works.

When I was a teenager newly in love with Jesus, John 3:16 was the first verse I memorized. However, it took years for its truth to be engraved on my identity as a child of God. Though I loved Jesus with my entire being, the belief that exterior accomplishments or merits represented my worth infiltrated my sense of who I was. Perhaps my value was based on how well I performed according to certain standards, or on whether I attended church often enough, read my Bible enough, or stepped into my full potential.

While all of these are good things to do, basing our identity on them is contradictory to the teachings of Christ, who described faith as being in a personal relationship with Him. In fact, He said that loving God was the greatest commandment (see Matt. 22:34-38). Years ago, a friend helped me climb out of the religious pit that kept me striving to earn God’s love. He said, “Take your finger and draw an X in the air.”

I felt silly, but I drew a large imaginary X between us.

“That’s sin,” my friend said. “It’s what separates us from the destiny and heart of God. Good people with a heart to serve God—like the Pharisees, and later churches and denominations—built walls around that X in the form of a set of rules that they hoped would keep sin safely at a distance. When the next generation came along, they identified the wall of rules as sin, so they did the same. This created a maze of walls erected generation after generation, until the actual definition of sin became very murky.”

It’s no wonder Jesus quoted the words of Isaiah 61:1-2 when He stood in the temple that day.

By focusing on the question “Who are you, Jesus?” rather than talking about what the people should or shouldn’t do, what they
hadn’t done, or what they could do, He demolished the murky definition of faith as He shared a very clear mission statement that pointed directly at Himself:

- *I’ve* come to open the eyes of the blind.
- *I’ve* come to set the prisoner free.
- *I’ve* come with good news for the poor in spirit.
- *I’ve* come to heal the brokenhearted.
- *I’ve* come to break the chains of the oppressed.

No matter how you arrived at your brokenness, the power of the Cross is not found in what you do, but in what has already been done for you. This is not to say that you do not play a part. Jesus said, “I demand that you love each other as much as I love you” (John 15:12, *TLB*). Our role is to accept His love, and then to allow that love to lead us to love others. It’s a grace-drenched existence wrapped around relationship.

A small tattoo on my wrist in Hebrew script spells out “grace.” It is a visual reminder to me that, because of His sacrifice, there are no walls between me and God.

Any time I start to believe that I’m not enough, that I’ve fallen short, and that I’m not worthy of His love—or if I fall into the trap of trying to out-earn my Savior—this message shifts my focus from me to Him. It’s a reminder that it’s not my offerings that delight God, but my joyful acceptance of His love that brings Him pleasure (see Hos. 6:6).

A. W. Tozer put it this way: “What I am anxious to see in Christian believers is a beautiful paradox. I want to see in them the joy of finding God while at the same time they are blessedly pursuing Him. I want to see in them the great joy of having God yet always wanting Him.”

Maybe you are struggling with this message right now because of the giant X with all the walls around it that has been your theological foundation. Well, I have great news for you.
The simple gospel message of God’s love will not leave you unchanged. For when you return that love and begin to trust Jesus from the heart, you learn to listen for His voice. You sense when He is teaching you or redirecting you. You become fiercely aware of temptation—and when you feel the desire to give in or to allow idols of any kind to rise in stature in your life, you weigh those temptations in light of your love for your heavenly Father. This relationship without the maze of walls helps you discover your “true selves, [your] child-of-God selves” (John 1:12, THE MESSAGE).

You Don’t Have to Run Anymore

As a young girl, I went to the crowded state fair with my mother. A neighbor family joined us; altogether there were eight children under the age of 10. The chance of losing a child along the way was high! My mother instructed me (I was a dreamer, and the most likely to get sidetracked and lost): “Suzie, if you get separated from the group, don’t go down a different fairway or run in a different direction. Just stop and wait for me. I’ll backtrack and find you. Just stay put.”

When you have experienced brokenness, you may feel that you’ve taken a wrong turn somewhere. Perhaps that sense of lostness has sent you down paths you regret. It may have caused you to lie awake at night while frenzied thoughts raced through your mind. You can rest now. Let Jesus take you by the hand. You can get off that wandering side road you took in search of something or someone who could possibly make you feel less pain. You can slow down the activity that tells the world you’ve got it all together, though your heart hurts so much that you can’t sleep at night.
Stop.
Right where you are.
You are found by Him.

One of the key truths we often ignore in our faith is that Jesus meets us where we are. A demoniac rushes from a dark and bleak cemetery, desperate for help. He is bound in chains and frightening to himself and to others (see Mark 5:1-20).

*Jesus meets him right where he is.*

A religious man named Nicodemus seeks Jesus under the cover of darkness. He is highly respected in his community, but his fears drive him to meet with Jesus in secret (see John 3:1-21).

*Jesus meets him right where he is.*

A woman kneels and pours perfume over Jesus’ feet, while others look on with disdain (see Luke 7:36-50).

*Jesus meets her right where she is.*

Through each of these interactions, a life is changed. One walks away in “his right mind.” Another becomes a courageous follower in broad daylight. Another realizes for the first time what it is like to be truly loved.

The more you understand Jesus’ mission statement and recognize that it is for you, the more you are free to simply sit in His presence, expectant that the person you always knew lived inside of you will emerge with His touch. This is when the miracle begins to take place. You understand that He’s “got you,” that you are not alone, that you are loved, and that you can stop running.

**Then You Take Heart**

Let’s go back to John 16:33. The anxious disciples were worried that they couldn’t do what they needed to do on their own.

Jesus told them, “In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”
Take heart.
Let’s pause for a moment to receive courage and comfort from a few facts. First, let’s recognize how strong you are.
Oh, Suzie, I’m not strong at all.

**Take heart**: to receive courage or comfort from some fact

Aren’t you? After all, you got up this morning, even though you may not have felt like it. You are seeking answers for yourself, and for those you care about. Each of these actions is a tribute to the truth that you desire nothing less than God’s best. You are aware of your fragile places, but that’s when the Jesus factor kicks in. You receive courage, for “when we are weak in ourselves, then we are strong in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ” (see 2 Cor. 12:9).

A foundation of healing is built on the promise that God will be your strength. He is in the midst of this healing process with you—right where you are.

*With all your baggage.*
*With your broken heart.*
*With your messy emotions.*
*With your faith and love for Him, in spite of the pain that just won’t go away.*

All that is required of you is to accept what He so willingly offers. Even if these are concepts you’ve heard your whole life, you may still be saying, “Can it really be so simple?”

The truth is that many of us, even though we can quote Scripture and unearth the Hebrew and Greek meanings of words and phrases, are still striving. We are so focused on what we haven’t done or what we need to do or the broken pieces that seem too fragmented to put back together that we’ve forgotten the power of
what Jesus offers. We can be immersed in Christian culture and forget what He has done.

But there’s good news. When we rediscover what Jesus offers, we join in with the multitudes of others who sing:

My chains fell off, my heart was free; I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.¹

Let’s Start Peeling Away Those Layers

A scene from one of my favorite movies, Shrek, offers some helpful insight into the way our perceptions and understanding of life change during the healing process. Donkey and Shrek are walking along together.

Shrek says, “For your information, there’s a lot more to ogres than people think.”

Donkey says, “Example?”

“Example . . . uh . . . ogres are like onions!” Shrek holds up an onion, which Donkey sniffs.

Donkey isn’t getting it, and he guesses three or four ways that Shrek could be like an onion. As Shrek starts to peel the onion, he says, “Layers. Onions have layers. Ogres have layers. Onions have layers. You get it? We both have layers.”²

Shrek was telling Donkey that there’s more to a person than what can be seen on the surface. When you are in pursuit of a mended heart, the Holy Spirit will gently peel away one layer of brokenness at a time. It’s a merciful and exquisite process that gradually reveals the healed and whole person you are meant to be.

As we dig into this process together, I invite you to make it personal, taking time to interact with God about the work He may want to do in each layer of your heart.

Even if some chapters don’t seem to apply to you, the underlying precept might. Maybe your husband didn’t leave you (like

Suzanne Eller, The Mended Heart
Carol’s in the next chapter), but you understand abandonment. Perhaps you haven’t lost a loved one (like Amber in chapter 4), but you know what it is to mourn what you cannot bring back. In each chapter, there will be those “a-ha!” moments when the Holy Spirit speaks just to you. Rather than try to write about every life event that can bring brokenness, my hope was to connect with the underlying need and then explore how Jesus’ mission statement meets that need.

As you go through this study, write in your journal. Underline in this book. Scribble your thoughts in the margins. Don’t be afraid to go deeper as the Holy Spirit leads. If a moment is painful, pause and let the pain be exposed long enough to sense Jesus’ touch in the midst of it.

As you respond to the questions in the “Just You and God” sections, be assured that there are no right answers. This is intended to be a time of simple intimacy with your heavenly Father as, one by one, layers are gently lifted and peeled away, and you discover together what is underneath.

**1. Read John 4:10 and Matthew 18:12-14. What is God saying to you through these verses?**

___________________________________________________

___________________________________________________

___________________________________________________

**2. What is the difference between focusing on your choices and accepting His choices made on your behalf?**

___________________________________________________

___________________________________________________

___________________________________________________

___________________________________________________

___________________________________________________

___________________________________________________

4. Write down Luke 4:18, but put your name in this Scripture. Place this personalized verse in a place where you will see it every day this week.

___________________________________________________

___________________________________________________

___________________________________________________

5. Read Galatians 5:1. “Work-harder” teachings are a “yoke of slavery” like the one described in this verse. What does Jesus offer in place of this burden?

___________________________________________________

___________________________________________________

___________________________________________________

6. One of the promises in Jesus’ mission statement is that He brings “good news.” After reading today’s chapter, the good news for you is . . . (finish the sentence in your own words).

___________________________________________________

___________________________________________________

___________________________________________________

7. In this chapter, you read about three things you don’t have to do. In fact, the more you don’t do these things, the more you live in Him. The more you don’t do these things, the more you build a foundation of rest. The more you don’t
do these things, the more joy you rediscover in your faith. Describe your response to this:

___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________

THE MENDED HEART PRINCIPLE #1: 

TAKE HEART

The power of the Cross is not in what you do, but in what has already been done for you.

PRAYER

Dear Jesus, You came to heal me! I freely step onto the solid foundation already built by You. I stop right where I am and lift my arms up to You. I embrace and accept Your gifts fully as I take heart in You.

MENDED HEART CHALLENGE

• Write down the three things you don’t have to do.
• Read that list daily.
• If you start to strive or hide or think you’re all alone, make a choice to rest in what God has done for you.

Notes

PART 2

Hearts in the Midst of Mending
Carol flipped open her phone to read a text message from her husband. Little did she know, her life was getting ready to fall apart. *I’ve taken all my things and I won’t be back. I’m done,* the message read. In that moment, Carol drew her first breath as a single woman and mom.

The days that followed were filled with questions:

*What now?*

*Why did he do this to me?*

*Is there hope for our marriage?*

*Where are You, God?*

The choices of her husband seemed to reinforce the message she had heard her whole life: “You aren’t really wanted.” Carol felt dinged and dented, and her future was uncertain. The words that flew back and forth between her and her husband were spoken from pain and were often meant to cut—and they did. There were moments when Carol had to remind herself to breathe, because she felt paralyzed by fear.

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*Suzanne Eller, The Mended Heart*

Piled on top of fear were regret and shame stemming from the word “divorced.” The only thing that brought Carol joy was holding close her 20-month-old daughter, who had no idea of the lives that were crumbling around her.

Carol and her husband were involved in their community. He was on staff at their church. She was in full-time ministry.

*How did we get here from there?* Carol often wondered.

The shattered pieces of her marriage seemed to be on display for the whole world to judge, and the faith that she claimed was tested. She often stood in the doorway of her baby’s room, where the most valuable gift she had received through her marriage resided. She focused on her child and talked herself into surviving one more day, reasoning that there must be a purpose for doing so. Her little girl was worth fighting for.

Except for her daughter, Carol began to isolate herself from other people. She had convinced herself that if no one could get to her, she would never be hurt again. But as time passed, Carol began to long for more. This desire started with seemingly insignificant moments, such as a sweet smile from someone she didn’t know, or the thoughtfulness of a stranger who held an umbrella for her as she wrestled with a stroller in the grocery parking lot.

These small kindnesses seemed to be whispers that God was there. They also forced Carol to smile back and say thank you because, after all, that’s what a Southern girl did.

Her hunger for more caused her to look for God in ways she had only talked about before her husband left. According to Carol, her faith had been an “always there” accessory, but now it was what helped her exist moment by moment. She struggled financially for the first time. She was working as hard as she could, but the money just didn’t stretch far enough. Diapers showed up from friends and strangers, even though she was too
proud to ask. Her daycare needs were met when it seemed impossible to do it alone. Each day, she turned more to the God she professed faith in and the promises she had learned since childhood. But even as she was making it, Carol still wondered if the pain would ever subside. She had read about healing in the Bible, but she didn’t know if it was for her. She didn’t have leprosy or a withered hand. There was no debilitating disease from which she needed to be cured.

In fact, no one could see how serious her heart condition was from the outside. She could play the part and say all the right words. She could be funny and brave and strong—except for when the lights were low and no one was watching.

When Carol looks back on that season of her life, she believes that God carried her during those first few months. Though she woke up each day with a hurting heart, something greater was sustaining her and protecting her.

WE CAN LOSE HEART BECAUSE OF PEOPLE

In The Mom I Want to Be, I referenced a story that took place over 20 years ago at a Turning Point conference. At that time I was working with teens, and my church sent me as a conferee. The facilitator flipped the lights off and a film started playing.

The movie was about a dysfunctional family in the midst of a meltdown moment. Mom and Dad were arguing. One child was screaming in defiance. Another hid around the corner in angst. Then I saw her. She was the peacemaker. Trying to make everything okay. Like a tightrope walker, she asked the screaming teen to stop yelling as she attempted to comfort her little brother. She was trying to keep the pieces from falling all around her, but she simply wasn’t old or wise or big enough.
I heard someone crying nearby, and I was filled with compassion for whoever was sobbing.

**Wow, that person must have been really hurt in the past to cry so publicly. Why isn’t anyone helping her?**

Then I realized that the sobbing person was me. I jumped up out of my seat, left the room, and found an empty stall in the women’s bathroom. I crawled up on the toilet seat and huddled, trying to stop the tears that seemed to have no end.

A pair of red shoes appeared, just visible under the door of the stall.

“Can I come in?” a woman’s voice asked.

“No,” I replied. “You can’t.”

“Are you okay?”

“I’ve been okay for a long time,” I whispered. “I don’t understand this. I’m here because I want to help others. This is crazy.”

The red shoes remained still for a few seconds, and then I heard these words: “Honey, sometimes God lets you remember for a reason.”

The sight of that little peacemaker in the movie had triggered emotions long healed. Perhaps that is the most powerful lesson I took away from that conference, and it’s one I still hold close today. We can become so whole (a wonderful gift!) that we forget the magnitude of what we have been given. God reached down to give me a glimpse into the brokenness I had once carried as a little peacemaker, and to remind me how much He had healed my shattered heart.

It had been a long time since I had felt such pain. It was heavy. It made me sad. It went deep into my being.

Many of us carry that weight of sadness as a result of the people factor in our lives. It may be our childhood, an ex, a parent or an in-law who inflicts the pain. The people factor impacts those who are rich, those who are poor, those who are married and those...
who are not. It reaches to the addicted, the hardened and the innocent. Whatever the specifics of the situation, the common thread is a desire to be free of that hurtful influence—not necessarily removed from the person, but healed of the pain associated with the relationship.

At another conference—one at which I was speaking—I mentioned my children-in-law and the blessing they were to us. Afterwards, many young moms privately sought me out, sharing how they longed to hear those same words from a mother-in-law, or how they had married their husbands only to discover that their new families played havoc on their relationships or sense of self.

Whenever or however it took place, when you’ve been hurt by the people factor, you just want to be whole and discover what God has for you—regardless of what another person has done.

What is the people factor in your broken places?

Are the people who once hurt you still calling the shots in your emotions or in the way you view yourself? Is an old wound damaging current relationships? Perhaps your offender has been out of your life for years, or is even deceased, but their actions or words continue to impact:

- How you interact with others
- Your identity
- Emotions that linger or rise up at the worst times
- Attitudes or behaviors that lead to unhealthy responses, such as enablement, people pleasing, consuming caretaking, striving, overcontrol, mistrust, lashing out, withdrawal, and more

If you are struggling with any of these symptoms, you may feel marked or branded or unloved or unworthy. You probably find yourself asking, “When will they release their hold on my life?”
The Jesus Factor

Former friends plotted together in secret places and in hidden meetings, hoping for the apostle Paul’s arrest—even his death. Scripture describes times when Paul was utterly discouraged. But he had a secret that he longed to share:

Remember, our Message is not about ourselves; we’re proclaiming Jesus Christ, the Master. All we are is messengers, errand runners from Jesus for you. It started when God said, “Light up the darkness!” and our lives filled up with light as we saw and understood God in the face of Christ, all bright and beautiful.

If you only look at us, you might well miss the brightness. We carry this precious Message around in the unadorned clay pots of our ordinary lives (2 Cor. 4:5-7, *THE MESSAGE*).

A jar of clay is common. If it breaks or is chipped, it’s not as significant a loss as it would be if a beautiful bowl or vase or lamp made of precious metals and jewels were broken. Unless, of course, there’s something special about that ordinary, damaged vessel that isn’t visible at first glance.

Paul was an ordinary man. His secret was that a Light blazed within him, shining through the cracks of his brokenness. This Light lit the way for others to follow as it filled the once-dark places that lingered in his heart. It revealed the glory of Christ in the midst of wretched humanity, and offered something of such great substance to Paul and those who ministered alongside him that they were “hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed” (2 Cor. 4:8-9).
I don’t know about you, but to me, being hard pressed, perplexed, persecuted and struck down sounds like a pretty bad day.

**kardia** [Greek] translated heart: the heart; mind, character, inner self, will, intention, center; the central or innermost part; the essential or most vital part of something.

But this Light helped Paul not to lose heart. Regardless of what other people did or didn’t do, the central or innermost part of his being remained unaffected. In fact, it blazed even brighter: “Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all” (vv. 16-17).

Paul understood all too well how much it hurts when a person rejects you, abandons you, says hurtful words, or simply doesn’t have what it takes to love you in the right ways. It’s interesting that he called his troubles light and momentary, because by most standards they were anything but.

People who had once called out his name in praise and threw their cloaks at his feet in honor (see Acts 7:58–8:1a) now plotted to take his life. He had been beaten, shipwrecked, imprisoned, hunted down and betrayed. He suffered loneliness, rejection and abandonment.

How in the world could any of this be described as momentary and light?

It was because Paul gave less weight to people than to the Messiah who lived inside of him.

Suzanne Eller, The Mended Heart
Freed from the Effects of Sin

Jesus had liberated Paul from a life of sin years earlier, and that same gift also offered power to overcome the effects of the sins of people upon Paul’s life (see Eph. 1:19-21).

Let’s let that soak in for a moment. Yes, Jesus took our sins upon Him at the cross, but it doesn’t stop there. That same act frees us from the effects of the sins of others upon our own heart.

That’s the Jesus factor! We can live free from the inside out, regardless of what people have done to our exterior. John Eldredge, in Waking the Dead, writes:

You get the picture. [Paul’s] life has been hard. It has been war. His vita reads something like out of Amnesty International. Somebody has been trying to shut him up or shut him down. He knows something; he has a secret to tell. So, how, Paul—how? How do we not lose heart? So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen (2 Cor. 4:18). . . . This wise old seer is saying that there is a way of looking at life, and that those who discover it are able to live from the heart no matter what.¹

People Lose Power

Our heart mends as our inner self—the central or innermost part of our identity—is wrapped around the Light inside of us, rather than around the people who have harmed us. This one small step changes the way we see things. We begin to differentiate between people and God.

This means that the words that were spoken over your life, the things that happened to you, the evil you endured, or the love gap that you feel—these are not your legacy anymore.
People may have hammered at your fragile clay exterior. They may have even chipped a few pieces away, or caused cracks that run deep. But inside of you is a bright, glorious Light—and because of that, it’s not what is seen or felt or experienced that defines you. You are no longer hemmed in by human limitations stemming from flawed thinking:

- When she changes, I’ll change.
- If only he would love me more, then I’d be okay.
- If that person hadn’t hurt me, I’d be happy.
- Because of what he/she did, I have every reason to feel this way.

Each of these approaches involves waiting for someone else to change, to fill you up, or to say they are sorry. Hoping that one person will give you what someone else didn’t. Looking for affirmation in other people or in the things you do. Hoping that your dad (or mom or husband or friend) will say those words that let you know your value. Hoping that something or someone on the exterior will heal you.

But what if that other person doesn’t change? What if he or she doesn’t hold back those unkind words? What if an offender is no longer in the picture, or your pain isn’t their priority? Real transformation begins as we place people in the proper framework of our healing.

In *The Mom Factor*, Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend state that it is our responsibility to grieve and forgive what we did not receive from people in the past so that we can be healed. This takes place as we open our hearts to receive what we did not get.²

I have friends who were raised by an alcoholic parent(s). Their stories vary, but the pain does not. Some had a parent who was up and down—one moment laughing, the next angry. For most
of these friends, their childhood homes were emotional roller coasters. Many of them became caregivers. They answered the phone and told lies to cover the fact that their parent was in the next room, blacked out, or that they had found him or her sleeping on the front porch that morning after an all-nighter and had helped them change their clothes and had put them to bed.

Many of these friends have recounted conversations held under the influence of alcohol. One friend described her mother’s suicidal threats, and how she struggled with both the fear and the hope that she would “just do it.” Another remembers vile and hurtful words, and how her mother remembered none of it the next day. If my friend tried to discuss it, she was expected to just forget it, for how could those words be held against her mom if there was no inkling of it in her memory?

When you have been affected by a parent who is an alcoholic (or neglectful or absent or disengaged or abusive), it can make you long so badly for a healthy parent that you feel pathetic. You aren’t pathetic, of course, for the desire to bond with a parent arises within the human heart from the moment a child enters this world. It’s a common human need. Because of this need, you might make it your job to fix your parent(s) to increase your odds. Or you confuse forgiving with taking abuse, and everything gets muddled, to the point that you both love and hate your parent(s). You pour out or hide their alcohol, take your punishment when you are found out, and pray for the day when your home life looks like the person’s down the street. Or you push against the abuse, all the while holding out hope that things will get better.

When none of this works, it leaves a bigger void.

Which leads to trying to fill that void. Some experiment with drugs or alcohol in their teens or later years. (The philosophy is that if you can’t beat them, you might as well join them.) Others
take a road as far away from their parent’s path as they can and try to fill their lives with good things, like hard work or achieving success or being perfect in every area.

But long after you’ve grown up, and even as you live a stable life, the people factor can keep you in a vulnerable place.

You observe others interacting with their families. You see a healthy and supportive mother or mother-in-law with one of your friends or a neighbor, while you’re taking care of your baby and tending your parent’s emotional needs. You see dads who say kind things about their daughters, while your dad’s words and actions (or lack thereof) cut deep.

The people factor has failed you.

What do you do? You can remain in the cycle of asking someone who is not capable of doing it to fill that void, or you can find what you need in a different place. One friend, who wishes to remain anonymous because of her mother’s continued addiction, says:

When I stopped looking for my mom to meet my needs, it helped me to see that she had never had her needs met either. My mom looked for help in a bottle, and the temptation was for me to follow. But Christ is my need-meeter. And when I began to look to Him to fill me up, I found that I could love my mom, and with some healthy boundaries have a relationship with her. But I was changed. I stopped demanding spiritually and emotionally and physically that she give me something she couldn’t give. I filled up with my Savior, and it absolutely released me.

When we stop asking people to be our need-meeters, we discover Paul’s secret for ourselves. People, whether through evil
or selfishness or simply their own brokenness, can harm us, but that doesn’t limit who we can be or what God can do in us. Even when people don’t change, or they fail to do what they should, or our best efforts to help them blow up in our faces, our value and worth and identity aren’t based on how they treat us. They may refuse to change, but that decision doesn’t stop us from growing and changing—and finding fulfillment in Christ.

As you release the people factor to hold close the Jesus factor—as you stop looking to mere humans to make you feel valued or worthwhile—you become free to place people in God’s hands as you find the love you have always desired. You are also free to reach out to healthy friends and mentors who can speak into your life. You can hear the words “I’m proud of you” from those individuals and accept the affirmation without looking over your shoulder, hoping to hear the same words from an addicted or broken parent or other person.

If you have been impacted by the people factor, as I once was, you are no longer just a child of a broken adult(s) or a broken person; you are a strong, talented, interesting child of God who wants better for yourself and those you care about. When you look to Jesus instead of people, you are able to be honest about the flawed people factor (it is what it is) while allowing the Jesus factor to show you how to give grace where it’s needed. You receive the wisdom to know what you can control and what you can’t. You learn to set boundaries when people’s intentions are harmful or their actions destructive.

Most importantly, the Jesus factor allows you to look at your own heart to see where God desires to effect change. You stop basing your wellness on whether someone else is changing, or on the pace at which they are dealing with their broken places.

The Jesus factor breaks the ties that bind us to another human being.
Scripture tells us, “Humans can reproduce only human life, but the Holy Spirit gives birth to spiritual life” (John 3:6, NLT).

This understanding realigns your identity from what mankind did to who God is and who you are to Him. Your heart and belief system will be fundamentally rewired as you start to give priority to these truths:

• No person is greater than your God (see 1 John 4:4).
• Your heavenly Father loves you unconditionally (see 1 John 3:1).
• Nothing can ever separate you from His love (see Rom. 8:38-39).
• Your name is written on the palm of His hand (see Isa. 49:16).
• Regardless of another person’s actions, you are marked with destiny (see 1 Cor. 2:9).

Therefore, Don’t Lose Heart

To lose heart: to lose one’s courage or confidence

Is Jesus aware of Carol’s or my friends’ or your broken places caused by the people factor? Maybe that’s a question you’ve wrestled with. To answer it, I could try to write a profound and deeply theological explanation of how God uses pain to teach us, or how our trials produce righteousness. Instead, I’ll tell you the simple truth.

Yes, He is aware.
In Jeremiah 8:21, God speaks through a young prophet, saying, “I hurt with the hurt of my people. I mourn and am overcome with grief” (NLT). In the next chapter, we see God weeping over the actions of an entire nation, saying, “Oh, that my head were a spring of water and my eyes a fountain of tears!” (Jer. 9:1). Through this passage and many others, we find not only that God is aware of the pain that people endure at the hands of others, but also that this grief was on His heart the day He sent Jesus to earth, with humanity—including me and you—fixed firmly in His sights.

God has never been an advocate of sin or its effect upon His beloved.

In Carol’s case, it was not His will that a marriage be destroyed by unfaithfulness or abandonment. His Word directs spouses to honor each other—to love as Christ loved the Church, with a pure and sacrificial love (see Eph. 5:25).

Nor is it God’s intention for children to be neglected or abused in any way by a parent. It was Jesus who called out to the little children to crawl up on His lap rather than be ignored or overlooked (see Matt. 19:14).

In hindsight, I know that He saw that little peacemaker who hid her baby brother in the closet when things seemed out of control.

He was with me when I ran away at the age of 13—and walked back in the pelting rain because I had no place to go.

He was not far away when I was a rebellious teenager, and He was a constant shadow when I was alone in a big city at the age of 17.

He was present when I stood in a small church and reached out for His love. He was there when I held my newborn in my arms for the first time, and as I prayed that God would change the next generation through me.

Our Savior grieves with us over the people factor; at the same time, He longs to partner with us as we enter a new chapter in
our lives. With the human factor alone, we can overcome a great deal. Through sheer determination and effort, we can climb over obstacles to stand stronger. But when we shift our identity from our relationship with a broken person to a God who loves us, who has always loved us, and who is deeply burdened over the sin of mankind and its effect upon His beloved children, that partnership leads to the Light Paul described earlier:

But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed (2 Cor. 4:7-9, emphasis added).

It’s the nots of that verse that lead to your mended heart. People become secondary to the love and plan that God speaks over you.

**YOU BECOME A BEAUTIFUL, CRACKED CLAY POT**

My friend Carol would love it that I’m calling her a crackpot. She’s a funny mess, and delightfully deep in her faith. She is absolutely a beautiful, cracked clay pot. It’s now been several years since Carol’s divorce. She says:

I may be hurt again. But I have come to know that God cuts such a profound path through my pain, that the dark times I walked through have given me an even deeper understanding of who He is and the way He loves me.

She still sees herself as broken, but she no longer feels like her life has been shattered. Rather, she is like a mosaic with a Light
shining from the inside out. In fact, when she shares her testimony, she holds up a clay pot, broken and glued back together, for the audience to see. It’s not perfect—or even beautiful by most human standards—but the Light filtering through the cracks is.

What does God want to do inside of you as you take the focus off of people and allow His Light to illuminate the cracks and chips of your life? Take a moment and point to where the breaking took place, and how, but then hold your cracked pot up to Him. What beautiful patterns are flickering in the dissipating shadows?

**JUST You AND God**

1. How have your interactions with hurtful people affected the way you see God, or the way you think He sees you?

2. In light of John 3:6, describe how a distorted image of God can keep you stuck.

3. Focusing on the Jesus factor instead of people will change: (1) the way you think; (2) the way you relate to people; and/or (3) the way you see yourself. Which of these do you sense the Holy Spirit leading you to alter with God’s help?
4. Write down the name of one person who has caused you pain. Are you willing to offer up your feelings about that person to Him today? Make it a prayer.

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5. Paul described his troubles with people as momentary and light, even though he had been hurt deeply by people. How did he live in the nots of 2 Corinthians 4:8? What does his example show you?

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6. Read Ephesians 1:18-20. What was the heart of Paul’s prayer? What is the truth he wanted his readers to grasp?

___________________________________________________

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___________________________________________________

7. When you held up the dings, dents, cracks and chips, did you note how they took place? Where and when they happened? Who was involved? Now, let’s look at the Light within. Let that Light shine fully through the cracks. How does that change what you see?

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The Mended Heart Principle #2:  
**Don’t Lose Heart**  
The Jesus factor is greater than the people factor.

**PRAYER**

*Dear Jesus, I open every door to the place where people have hurt me. Shine Your Light and let Your work begin. Today I will shift my focus to You rather than dwelling on people or the past. Thank You for filling my gaps to overflowing with You.*

**Mended Heart Challenge**

• Consider how much thought and energy you devote on a daily basis to thinking about people who have caused you pain.
• Prayerfully ask God to help you shift that focus.
• Praise God that He willingly took sin (even the effects of others’ sins) from you.

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**Notes**

When the Church Hurts Your Heart

Your life is also part of a larger movement, a mystical fellowship, the Kingdom of God advancing here on earth. That fellowship of the Ransom being Restored—that is an amazing fellowship to be a part of. To be sure, it’s messy. Have you noticed in Paul’s letters to the young church how often he has to intervene in relationships?

STASI ELDREDGE, CAPTIVATING

Religious abuse?

Those words knocked Amy off balance. Is that a thing?

Could it be that there were others? Enough of them for there to actually be a category with a name for what she had suffered? Amy was in her mid-twenties. When her therapist said those words to her, it was the first time she had ever considered the possibility. Over several weeks, Amy had painstakingly unfolded her story in the counselor’s office. The counselor spent hours listening, asking questions, and taking copious notes in order to get to the bottom of Amy’s debilitating panic attacks and anxiety. This was the first time the counselor had offered anything in the way of feedback.

The possibility that her brokenness was a result of spiritual abuse stunned Amy.
She longed to feel better. Despite the weekly counseling sessions and medication, her life felt out of control. She was confused by her behavior; it wasn’t unusual for her to drink until she blacked out, and sometimes she woke up in a strange bed next to a man she didn’t know well.

She hated her choices—and at times hated herself—but only ended up doing the same things over and over again.

As she had shared the story of her childhood with the counselor, one central character emerged: her father. He was a pastor when Amy was growing up—and he was full of rage. Most of the people in the church didn’t know that. No, the church people thought he was delightful. His smile and good-natured public persona belied the way he dealt with those close to him behind closed doors.

When Amy was 16, she wanted to go on a short-term missions trip. Her father disagreed with the location. Although her fear of him meant she rarely crossed him, this time Amy protested. She tried to explain that she felt God was calling her to this specific place. With a red face and veins bulging in his neck, her father backed Amy against a wall and screamed, “To you, and in this house, I AM GOD!” It was as if she had no feelings, thoughts or opinions.

As if she couldn’t think for herself, much less hear from God.

Amy grew up in a home long on religion but short on grace—at least as far as her dad was concerned. Losing her voice and personal power was the costly price of her religious upbringing, and later she discovered that this was a primary source of the fear that plagued her life. That fear led to destructive behavior, for when a man wanted something from her, she didn’t feel she could say no. She didn’t feel entitled to assert her own wishes or boundaries.

Drinking and drugs became Amy’s escape from her choices and the way they made her feel.2
WHY TALK ABOUT THIS?

I struggled with whether to include this type of brokenness in *The Mended Heart*. My desire is to build up the church and point others to it—not to criticize it or tear it down. Yet Jesus Himself often addressed the topic of religious abuse, and sadly you don’t have to go far to hear how someone has been wounded by religion or individuals in a church.

Perhaps one of the most confusing questions of all time relates to how faith in God, such a rich and beautiful gift, can be used to harm and hold back those whom Jesus desires to reach. History shows us time and again how religion, in the hands of broken human beings, can fall far from the original intent.

What exactly is religious abuse?

It’s the use of intimidation, guilt and fear to control and manipulate behavior in the name of God. And it can absolutely lead to spiritual brokenness. It distorts the way a person views God, or the way that person believes He sees him or her. It can lead a person away from faith, because the person feels that he or she can never earn a place in God’s heart.

But Jesus says, “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself” (John 12:32).

Oh, how spiritual abuse grieves our Savior’s heart, as it’s so opposite of what was intended on the cross! Maybe that’s why Jesus spoke to the topic of spiritual abuse (and those who practiced it) so often.

It’s why it’s important that we talk about it, too.

THE JESUS FACTOR

When Jesus spoke His mission statement in that Nazareth synagogue, it was shortly after He returned from one of the most intense spiritual battles recorded in Scripture. His public ministry
had launched weeks earlier with a grand display as God Himself declared from the heavens that this was indeed His Son (see Luke 3:22).

Then, rather than marching straight to a pulpit or establishing a church, Jesus followed the Holy Spirit into a lonely and bleak place for 40 days. There the enemy dangled temptations before Him, daring Him to demonstrate His power by producing bread from a rock or throwing Himself off a high cliff so that angels might save Him, and offering earthly reign if Jesus would only bow and worship him (see Luke 4:1-13).

We might underestimate the difficulty of this trial; after all, Jesus is the Son of God. But He was also fully human, and He experienced all that mankind might experience. He was hungry, exhausted and isolated—for 40 days. The biblical account paints this spiritual warfare as severe. Finally the enemy admitted defeat and slunk away, but Jesus didn’t gain the victory by means of His physical prowess, or even by outwitting and outlasting Satan. Rather, He vanquished him with the simple and mighty sword of truth.

Jesus won the battle by consistently referring back to the One who had sent Him and to the written Word, as if to say:

- I’m not here for a show of power.
- I’m not here for my own selfish ends.
- I’m not here to dazzle the world (or you) with my talent or supernatural abilities.

Instead, Jesus replied, “The Scriptures say, ‘You must worship the LORD your God and serve only him’” (Luke 4:8). In this snapshot, we view the heart of true Christian leadership. It’s the attitude of a servant who obeys the soft whisper of the Holy Spirit, even in the hardest of places, and who lives so that others might gain a glimpse of God’s glory.

- It’s submissive, but not weak.
- It speaks with authority, but in no way does it reflect a celebrity mindset, seeking fame or fawning.
In fact, if we were to sketch this leader, we would depict a dirty, hungry and unassuming warrior. Powerful in humility even when no human eyes are turned his way.

Stephen F. Olford, a twentieth-century Christian leader who positively influenced and trained many pastors, including Dr. Billy Graham, noted that Jesus walked into that battle filled with the Holy Spirit, and then walked out of the wilderness with a heart to reach those who were on God’s heart. He says:

There are five categories of people [the poor, the burdened or brokenhearted, the oppressed, the blind, and those who are in bondage or captivity] who must be reached redemptively, and this can never happen without the anointing. Indeed, more often than not, many preachers drive people away. This is a serious matter and demands careful thought and self-examination. Jesus always drew needy people to Himself: “The common people heard Him gladly” (Mark 12:37).

In Amy’s case, the gospel was overshadowed by a man who, instead of drawing his little girl to Christ, broke her heart and spirit. His authority was founded on his position as daddy, pastor and respected man of the cloth, but somehow, along the way, Jesus’ mission was removed from the message, and a little girl all grown up got lost as well.

**Spiritual Abuse Is an Old Story**

Jesus spent a great deal of time talking about (and to) the religious. They were the ones who received the boldest of instructions, encouragement and rebuke, whether He was speaking to His own disciples or to those who studied and taught the Law.
He spent most of His time hanging around synagogues, in homes, on mountaintops, in crowds, and in public places where the religious gathered. His insight and His words by turns inspired, convicted, astounded, confounded and angered His listeners.

God loves the sinner, but He also loves the church enough to call them from dark or unlovely places of thinking. One of Jesus’ most painful encounters came when two sects (different groups who loved the same God but held differing beliefs) cornered Him to try to trick Him with questions. When they failed, Jesus turned to the crowd, saying:

The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses; therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say things and do not do them. They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on men’s shoulders, but they themselves are unwilling to move them with so much as a finger. But they do all their deeds to be noticed by men; for they broaden their phylacteries and lengthen the tassels of their garments. They love the place of honor at banquets and the chief seats in the synagogues, and respectful greetings in the market places, and being called Rabbi by men (Matt. 23:2-7, NASB).

This is a brave speech. These religious men held high positions of authority both in the church and over those who attended. That power reached beyond the church into the halls of government.

Of course, not all of the Pharisees and scribes (those entrusted to hand copy religious documents) were self-centered, pompous and dangerous. There were godly men among the Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes and Zealots who wanted nothing
more than to please God, who loved their families and others, and who followed their traditions out of a desire to honor the commandments and the Law.

Unfortunately, those who had succumbed to power—or who had been raised to lead or oversee, but without the beauty of knowing and serving God—overshadowed those who had not.

In the present day, it’s not hard to see the far-reaching effects of religious power that has gotten out of balance. However, it’s very hard to convince someone whose heart has been marked by it to return to faith. This is exactly what Amy experienced, and it was even more confusing for her because her father was a pastor and everyone looked up to him. After years of struggling, Amy came to believe that she was the problem. After all, she was constantly berated and told that she was rebellious. Often, her father warned her that her lack of obedience was going to cause her to spend eternity in hell. His insistence on legalistic perfection was based on parameters set by none other than himself. Though Amy had always known that her father was difficult to deal with, when she began to understand the depth of the damage he had inflicted on her heart, she was furious.

She went down the path of bitterness for a while, until she realized that it was only leading her further into heartbreak.

**Our Very Different Experiences**

If you talk with a thousand people, you’ll hear a thousand different stories of their experience with church. It’s intriguing that, even within a specific congregation, one might describe the church as a positive, life-affirming experience, while another says it was damaging. As we look into the topic of spiritual abuse, it’s not about criticizing or blaming a particular denomination or
the Church as a whole, but about how we can recognize spiritual abuse and heal from it.

My story is the opposite of Amy’s. When I became a Christian, I didn’t know the story of Noah and the Ark. I had not been sprinkled, immersed, or baptized in any style. I hadn’t attended kid’s camp or Sunday School, though I did go to VBS (Vacation Bible School) on a bus when I was a child. When I became a Christian, the adults around me loved me in spite of my immaturity in the faith. They had no idea what was going on in my home at that time, and though as a teen I sometimes frustrated them, their consistent and faithful acts provided a sanctuary for me. I was drawn into Christianity by the presence of God and His Spirit, but I grew spiritually because of caring and well-meaning people.

I met Christians in that same church who didn’t live out their faith well. I watched each week as one or two members of the youth group teased a girl each Sunday. This girl was frizzy-haired and not pretty in the high school sense, and sometimes she spoke without thinking. I thought she was brave, because she came back every week, even though she knew what was coming. Church was a safe place where God showed up, but also a place where you might or might not fit in.

The pastor of that church was a godly man. He talked about Jesus in a way that I could understand, and if I close my eyes, I can still picture him standing behind the pulpit with a guitar, singing, “Oh, How I Love Jesus.”

Later, when two leaders in the church left their respective spouses and married each other, it split the church and fractured entire families. It broke that pastor’s heart, for the church was never the same after that.

The whole thing was baffling to me. I had thought that my new church family would be less dysfunctional than my biological family, and they were. People opened their homes to me. They
cared about me. They truly loved God. But they weren’t *perfect*. Sometimes—most times—they were human, to a fault. If I were a true skeptic, I would look at my early introduction to faith and cite all the bad parts as reasons not to believe. Yet the reality is that this thing called the Church isn’t perfect, and it’s filled with people who range from saint to sinner and everywhere in between.

But in the mix is Jesus.

The longer I call myself a Christian, the more I realize what a mess God has to work with at times (myself included), and why it is so important that He remain the apple of my eye. The Body of Christ, when it works scripturally, is a powerful force for change and a light that beckons us to know God, but it will never be ideal. It wasn’t without fault in Scripture, and it’s not without fault today. Even so, when we take our eyes off of one another and open our heart to a sovereign God, true community can take place.

We are able to give grace to imperfect people (thankfully!) and grow together.

But let’s acknowledge that it’s confusing when the church breaks your heart—or in Amy’s case, her spirit.

So, what does Jesus’ example teach us? Distorted religion can hurt your heart, but Jesus reclaims it.

**Turn Your Heart Toward Truth**

> “Turn my heart toward your statutes and not toward selfish gain” (Ps. 119: 36). *leb* [Hebrew]; inner man, mind, will, heart—my attention.

In the wilderness, the enemy desperately tried to distract Jesus from His mission. He tempted Him with power. With food
when His stomach was clenched tight with hunger. With illusions of glory. Satan reached into the core of every felt need that Jesus was experiencing and dangled temptation with a calculated goal.

Jesus didn’t deny that He was so famished that a loaf of bread would be a feast, or that there were times when He would have liked to check out of His suffering (and that to come) and allow angels to whisk Him away. Instead, in that oh-so-hard battle, He simply pointed to Scripture—to truth that even the enemy couldn’t refute.

Truth is our first and greatest weapon against spiritual abuse. Not too long ago, a friend shared that she was struggling with some things that were going on in the leadership of her church. As she talked it through, it wasn’t difficult to see that the rules and requirements and teaching were not just restrictive, but manipulative. In this particular church, faith became about pleasing or placating those in power, and Scripture was used to wreak havoc in families.

My friend had often mentioned her “prodigal son.” I thought they were estranged as a result of her son’s destructive choices, or simply because he preferred to keep his distance from the rest of the family. But she confessed that he had been cut off because he questioned the leader of this church, who declared this young man’s questions as sin. The family was asked to keep him at a distance until he showed remorse and came back “into the fold.”

The truth had been bent and twisted. Scriptures were taken out of context, and it all held my friend captive.

Ruth Graham, in her book *In Every Pew Sits a Broken Heart*, reminds us: “The premise for entering the church—for deciding to follow Christ—is admitting that we are sinners in need of a Redeemer, that we cannot make it on our own, that we cannot restore our own ruins.”

Suzanne Eller, *The Mended Heart*
Nowhere in Scripture is the premise for entering a church to lift up a man, or a woman, or to create a closed-in community with special requirements to fit in.

So, what is our truth?

When you follow Christ, there should be no walls that hold you in, isolating you from others who love Jesus.

Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many (1 Cor. 12:12-14).

Our relationship with Jesus is a personal decision, but it’s also a decision to join in with the millions across time—and across nations, races and creeds—who have professed that they believe in Him.

Thank God for beautiful and humble buildings where we congregate to learn and worship together. Thank God that people who want to worship in similar ways can find that congregation. But the true Church of God is so much more vast than this.

Abuse can go in two directions.

Christ is the head of the church which is His body. He is the beginning of all things. He is the first to be raised from the dead. He is to have first place in everything. God the Father was pleased to have everything made perfect by Christ, His Son. Everything in heaven and on earth can come to God because of Christ’s death on the cross. Christ’s blood has made peace (Col. 1:18-20, NLV).
A pastor or teacher’s role is to lead people to Jesus. It’s to join in with Jesus’ mission and to bring change and life and truth to a community of believers. It’s to shepherd.

Christ is the head of the church, and that is where we find our truth, but we also realize that pastoring is one of the hardest jobs there is, and many times a pastor or pastor’s family endures spiritual abuse at the hands of leaders in his church, or by members who are demanding or want to have influence in every detail of a church’s running.

In our call to honor Christ as head of the church, in no way is this an invitation to place a heavier burden on a pastor whose heart is to love those within his care. We are never to turn our own hearts to spiritually abuse anyone, but we should take special care not to spiritually bully those who have followed God’s call to ministry—or their family members. It’s simply to give us all a framework of truth on which to build.

Our authority is Scripture (see 2 Tim. 3:16-17). If a pastor or other religious leader demands that you worship or obey him or her, or if the doctrine they present is confusing and out of context, you have the right (and responsibility) to go back to Christ’s teaching. If what your leaders are telling you doesn’t line up with Scripture, you are free to leave and find a healthy body of believers with whom to worship.

No person (no matter who they are) should hold the power to keep you against your will in a denomination or church community, or to demand that you adhere to a certain set of beliefs that defy Scripture or that are a limited, out-of-context theology. They shouldn’t hold the power to make you feel “less than,” or to badger you into doing what they believe is right, or to pressure you to such an extent that you crumble under the weight of their expectations.
We gain confidence in this truth as we study Scripture for ourselves, seek godly counsel (not just from those in authority, but from those who reflect Jesus’ teaching), and pray for wisdom. This is not a call to engage in a battle to see who is right. This is about seeking the truth for the sake of our own healing.

My friend studied Scriptures that had been quoted to her in regard to her son, and she found them to be distorted. As she read the story of the prodigal son, she prayed that the Holy Spirit would bring this story to life. For the first time, she wasn’t counting on others to spiritually feed her or to be her source of scriptural truth and understanding. Instead, she began to talk with her Savior daily and get to know Him for herself. In a short amount of time, she discovered that the teaching that had been held over her head, and the heads of her family members, was unbiblical.

Like my friend, you are free to search out Scriptures and find a healthy body of believers with whom to worship and fellowship. If you fear the rejection of those who might not like what you are doing, then reassess the power they hold over your heart.

This Helps You to Redefine Church

As we search the Scriptures for the truth about what it means to be God’s people, we are free to redefine the word “church” to its original meaning, which is “belonging to the Lord.”

I am privileged to minister in amazing churches across the nation. I see so much good in these congregations as people assemble to teach and disciple and love one another; as they reach out to others in tangible ways, such as feeding the hungry, opening their homes to those who have no place to lay their head, and raising funds to adopt children with severe needs; and as they simply encourage one another with just the right words.
Every day I slip into a small coffee shop to work. This coffee shop is founded by a church and open to the community, and the conversations of people hungry to know Christ buzz around me as I work. I love it!

I rejoice in the Body of Christ as I see those who work selflessly—who tirelessly labor in ministry, only to be challenged by difficult or work-in-progress Christians—yet still love what they do.

The Church is a vast, living organism comprised of flawed human beings. People are drawn into the Church in a number of ways, but at the core is the unction to be part of a mission to disciple the nations and to love one another. As a member of that Body, I have a choice as I work alongside others who “belong to the Lord.” I can allow broken or work-in-progress or messy people to lead me away from the power and spirit of my faith, or I can see my own work-in-progress heart in the process. We simply will not find a church without varied personalities, or where there are never things that need to be worked out and prayed through.

The Church is a family. Every family I know, including my own, has to work through the good and the bad together if they want to create a thriving environment.

Separating those who were spiritually abusive from the good of the Church helped Amy find her way back home again. She says, “We need to learn to keep our eyes firmly fixed on Jesus, who is the author and finisher of our faith. A person or doctrine is peripheral to our focus on our Savior. That’s how a person can avoid having their faith shipwrecked.”

Amy was able to redefine her relationship with the Church to being known and loved by God—to belonging to Him.

Sure, we will have the privilege of working side by side with Type A (or if you are Type A, Type B) people, with procrastinators, with visionaries, with the bossy or timid or warm or kind
people who share our path as we follow Jesus—just as they have the privilege of working alongside us, with all of our quirks and personality traits.

We also have the freedom not to be entangled with or in bondage to those who have exchanged faith for false or harmful doctrine.

Years after that moment in the counselor’s office, Amy found a place of spiritual health, founded on truth and wrapped in mercy. She forgave her dad. She says:

As I prayed for grace and mercy toward him, the Holy Spirit began to reveal a truth to me. One that has helped me in so many relationships going forward. Hurting people hurt people. My dad wasn’t evil. I don’t believe it was his intention to hurt me. In fact, I believe the opposite is true. He was probably operating on what he had been taught. He was likely very concerned for my soul and trying to protect it the only way he knew how. The Church is full of people like my dad—the walking wounded. Just because someone is a follower of Christ doesn’t mean they are not deeply broken.

In Christ, we have hope for healing from spiritual abuse. Amy has discovered that it’s an active process that requires the hard work of dealing with the wounds received. It’s been almost two years since Amy’s father passed away. In the end, he held tight to his wounds and they consumed him.

Amy has compassion for her dad, and she believes that while a church should be a safe and loving environment, at the core it is simply a gathering of people who need Jesus. She’s careful not to hurt others, or to carry around resentment toward people who bear Christ’s name and don’t represent Him well, as these
actions just perpetuate the pain. She keeps in mind that none of us has control over other people’s choices.

“We just have control over our own,” Amy says. “I try to remember that it was the religious people of Jesus’ day who beat and crucified Him. May God grant us the grace to say about our religious abusers what Jesus said of His: ‘Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.’”

Today Amy leads a house church in Colorado. She loves nothing more than coming alongside those who feel brokenhearted following difficult experiences with the Church. She delights in leading them back to the heart of Jesus’ mission, pointing out that Jesus identified with the brokenhearted. She reminds all of us that in a Church made up of messy people, there is hope as we serve and love one another with humility, standing upon a solid Rock that will never give way beneath our feet.

**JUST You AND God**

1. In Matthew 23:1-4, we read about religious leaders who laid heavy burdens on people by asking them to do what they themselves were not willing to do. What other warning signs does Jesus describe in this passage?

2. Contrast the burden described by Jesus in Matthew 23:1-4 with the one described in Matthew 11:30.

Suzanne Eller, The Mended Heart
3. Jesus willingly walked into the wilderness because He was led by the Holy Spirit (see Matt. 4:1-11). As you read this story, what characteristics do you find in Jesus?

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4. If you have been hurt in the name of faith, let’s get to the heart of the hurt, rather than focus on the individual(s) who caused your pain. Read the following Scriptures. Which of these apply to you? Let it/them soak into those broken places in your heart. Write a prayer asking for what you need today.

- I feel that following Jesus is too hard—read Matthew 11:28-30.
- I don’t know if Jesus loves me—read Romans 5:8 and Romans 8:37-39.
- I want to make them pay for what they’ve done—read Romans 12:19.
- I’m such a mess. Is there hope for me? Read 2 Corinthians 5:17.
- I want to show Jesus’ love, but I don’t know what it even looks like—read 1 Corinthians 13:4-8.
- Do I matter in God’s plan for the Church? Read 1 Corinthians 12:27.
5. Maybe you’ve encountered people who weren’t Christians who were unfair, or who were heavy-handed in discipline and light in mercy. You don’t like it, but it’s not devastating. Often, our spiritual pain comes from the fact that we just don’t expect God’s people to behave as if they are without Christ in their lives. How does viewing believers who have hurt you as broken, a work-in-progress, or “messy” affect your view of what happened? How does it affect your view of the Church?

6. If a parent(s) presented an unbalanced (heavy on religion, void of grace) view of faith, or punished you in the name of religion, this can place your focus on earning, achieving and doing rather than on inner transformation. How does shifting your view from the former to the latter change the way you live out your faith?

7. In Amy’s case, forgiving those who had hurt her was key in renewing a healthy view of faith. What might it look like to forgive those who spiritually abused you?
The Mended Heart Principle #3:  
**Turn Your Heart Toward Truth**

We worship *among* imperfect people, but we worship *only* our perfect Savior.

**Prayer**

Lord, I was hurt in Your name, and I know that grieves You. If I have allowed that hurt to separate me from Your truth, turn my heart toward Your teachings and grace and truth. You will show me the way and I will run in it!

**Mended Heart Challenge**

- If a doctrine or teaching is confusing, dig deeper.
- If an individual demands worship or absolute obedience, redefine their role in your faith and life.
- Forgive those who have hurt you to release the burden you’ve been carrying.

**Notes**