

Healing Wounded Heart

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3 Steps to Healing a Wounded Heart

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Dear Reader,

For years I struggled with anger and resentment over the circumstances I'd been dealt in life. It was an anger that permeated every cell of my body. I was miserable! Daily, I fought to fix what I thought was broken. I was certain the only way I could be happy was if my situation changed. However, it was only when I stopped fighting that things changed.

Now my life is filled with incredible joy. Step by step Heavenly Father lovingly showed me that I was actually the one who needed to change. The beauty is that once I was willing to follow Him with all my heart, He took care of the rest.

I wrote this book for other people who are just like me, struggling for some elusive peace and joy in their lives. I promise you it's possible. My prayer is that you will relate to my experiences and find hope in yours. Real hope!

I married the man of my dreams. He was good looking, kind, had a great sense of humor and loved to help around the house. As we gradually added four children to the mix our joy increased. Along with that joy the challenges also increased, but we worked together at handling the normal struggles of raising kids and making ends meet. All in all, my life was very good. Until it wasn't.

For some unknown reason, about 14 years into our marriage, my husband started having seizures. Seizures are terrifying to witness, but the effects of them are even worse. Between the medications and whatever was happening to his brain his personality started to change. My sweetheart became a zombie, no longer interacting with our children or me. He was unable to hold down a job. He didn't participate in any decision making regarding our family and to make matters worse, he didn't recognize the impact his condition had on our family. I knew he didn't have seizures on purpose, but that didn't keep me from feeling the anger.

At first, I took on the responsibility of "fixing" his condition with intense determination. I was a strong woman—I'd done hard things before—certainly I could find a solution, an answer to why these seizures were happening and then they could be fixed. But over time I learned that I was never going to discover the reason. Apparently, this was something even I couldn't fix. This reality made me angry and resentful not only toward my husband, but toward God. I felt like I was being punished and I didn't understand why. Intellectually I understood that bad things happen to good people all the time—I'd already dealt with some pretty difficult things in my life, but I just couldn't accept this. I'd had such a wonderful life—why did it have to turn so sour? I'd felt I'd been the victim of a huge bait and switch scam and somehow if I fought hard enough it would go away. But it didn't.

I pled for years for God to take the challenge from me, but those prayers seemed to stop at the ceiling. There was even a period of time I wished for my husband to die, feeling it would be easier than living with him in his oftentimes zombie-like state. I'd offer prayers where I almost demanded God to see things my way. I'd explain that I saw absolutely no purpose in what was happening therefore the seizures needed to stop.

I was raised in a home where my father was very authoritative and didn't show much love. Whenever I had a request I was usually told no with no explanation. If my desires didn't fit in with what was convenient for my father it simply wasn't important. As a child we tend to form our opinion of who God is from our fathers. Therefore, I came to assume that God handled my request in the same manner. I continued to pray because I'd been taught it was important, but I honestly never expected much more than I received. However, there must have been enough of a glimmer to keep me going.

After our kids grew up and moved away I kept myself busy with work and all sorts of projects to make the best of the situation, but nothing really helped to relieve the constant resentment. Several times I toyed with the idea of divorce, but I never felt I could leave my semi-disabled husband. It felt morally wrong. Besides, our financial situation was so bad there was no way we could support two households. Most of the time we couldn't support one! Anyway, I'd promised God I would stay. Even my anger

toward Him wouldn't allow me to go against that promise. Somewhere along the way I started to focus more on what I could to make things better rather than thinking nothing could change. My first step was...

Gratitude

I believe gratitude is the first step in any healing process. It's probably more important when you think you have nothing to be grateful for. I spent years focusing on what I didn't have. In the scriptures we are told we need to be grateful for all things, but I couldn't fathom how I could be grateful for a husband with a difficult disability. There's a law of thought called the Law of Opposition that teaches us that every situation has good and bad in it. Since it's a law we are guaranteed that it's true. The following story is an example of what I mean.

One day my husband and I decided to take some time to attend the temple. The temple is a place where people in my church leave the cares of the world for a couple of hours. We do this by dressing in white in preparation to receive special instruction and to worship God. It's something we are counseled to do often by our leaders, however, it was something I'd struggled with over the years to make a habit.

I'd often hear people say how they loved the Spirit they felt in the temple, but that wasn't usually my experience. Don't get me wrong—the temple is beautiful and peaceful, but during the services my mind would always wander and I'd think about all the other things I could be doing or I'd simply fall asleep. Often times it was an exercise in frustration. However, we are taught that when we need extra help and inspiration the temple is the best place to be. So, in my desire to have a better attitude toward my husband I hoped attending the temple would help me in my efforts. I ached to feel His Spirit this particular day.

I prepared by fasting and praying. I asked God to please help me have a good experience and to bless me that I might feel of His love. It was one of the rare times I looked forward to going.

Everything was going as planned until we got into the room where the men and women sit separately. Before I even had a chance to sit down, I noticed commotion on the other side. I knew in that instant my husband was having a seizure. I made my way over to the disturbance where my suspicions were confirmed. I identified myself and a few men helped me and my incoherent husband out of the room.

I was humiliated. Every time my husband had a seizure in public my stomach turned into knots and I wanted to run and hide. Now, in the temple, it was no better.

We were taken to a first aid room where my husband was laid on a cot. Two people from security stayed with me to wait for my husband to sleep it off, so to speak. I knew from experience it was going to be a while. I apologized to both of them for the inconvenience

and disturbance caused. They both graciously brushed my concerns aside, however, their reassurance didn't ease my discomfort over the situation.

It took about 45 minutes for my husband to wake up at which time I went through my usual process of asking him some basic questions to be sure he knew what was going on. The gentleman that was with us accompanied my husband to the dressing room while I went to get changed.

Once in my little cubicle I sat down and cried. This was not what my time at the temple was supposed to be. I wanted to feel peace and love—all I felt was frustration that I'd never get away from this horrible situation that literally haunted my life. Why, Heavenly Father? Why couldn't I have that desired peaceful worship time?

As soon as I got dressed, I heard someone calling my name and knew my husband had had another seizure. It was common for them to come in clusters. The woman sent to fetch me confirmed my fears and led me back to the men's dressing room where my husband was unconscious on the floor with three men standing over him. Was this nightmare ever going to stop?

One of the men had been in the cubicle next to my husband and explained that he'd heard a thud and knew something was wrong. Unable to get the door open, he climbed over the divider to get my husband out. My humiliation increased as I thought of how this man had been inconvenienced. This sweet, wise man simply said, "It's not a coincidence I'm here. There's no such thing as coincidences for people who are trying to do what it right." That was a new idea to me.

This time when my husband came to they wouldn't allow him to walk, so he was wheeled out to the front of the building where I picked him up. By this time all I wanted was some frozen custard—my favorite comfort food. I determined it would be our next stop. However, within 5 minutes my husband had another seizure and I knew custard was out of the question.

That evening, full of self-pity I bemoaned the fact I'd missed out on the spiritual temple experience I'd prayed for. In that moment the Spirit whispered that I'd received exactly what I needed. Whenever I'm by myself and my husband has a seizure I feel so alone. That wasn't the case here. I'd been surrounded by loving, thoughtful people whose only concern was for my well-being and that of my husband. I was in the most peaceful place on the planet. Heavenly Father was letting me know He is fully aware of my needs and He's there for me. I now cherish the experience of that night.

It's often difficult to feel grateful for the challenges in our lives. Nonetheless, God commanded us that we must. He doesn't ask us to be grateful to feed His ego. Gratitude is the perfect first step to healing a wounded heart. I learned that an excellent exercise to help learn gratitude was a gratitude journal. The first thing was to write 100 things that I was grateful for. A hundred! Was that even possible?

I started off with my children. Despite everything, I had amazing kids who had weathered the situation with their dad really well. Then, even though my husband's health wasn't the best, I was in great shape—as a family we rarely even needed to see a doctor. Also, even though we'd had many years of unemployment we'd been able to stay in our home where I had a good support system. The more I wrote, the more things came to my mind.

Each day I was intentional in looking for blessings—those tender mercies that we often miss—and then I wrote them in my journal. The journal continues to be especially useful when I need reminders of the time God was there for me. This habit led me to something I never thought possible—trusting God.

Challenge

- Make a list of 100 things you are grateful for and then pay close attention to how your heart feels.
- Keep a daily gratitude journal for at least 6 months.

Trust

I was raised to believe in a loving Heavenly Father, but my life experiences didn't always support that teaching. I felt I was on my own in determining my own destiny and once I proved myself then I could turn to Him for help. I believed in the old adage, "If you want something done right, you have to do it yourself," not even trusting that God knew better than I did. I realize now that philosophy is flawed, but for years that was how I felt. I now know Heavenly Father wanted me to know I could trust Him and provided learning lessons to show me His love.

One such experience came on an ordinary day as I sat down to go over our budget and pay some bills. It was something I did on a regular basis, but for some reason on this day the reality of how much we owed on credit cards really hit me hard. For years I'd been in the habit of charging things when there wasn't enough in the checking account to cover the expense of a purchase. I never put anything extravagant on the card—at least not often. Besides, I always made more than the required minimum payment. Wasn't that enough? Evidently not. The reality of my habit hit me hard this particular day.

I ran through the numbers again and again. No matter how I looked at them it was obvious I had enough money in the bank to pay the bills, but I wouldn't have enough to pay for the necessities of the next two weeks like groceries, gas for the car and another obligation I couldn't get out of. Maybe this wasn't the best time to commit to the rash act of not using my cards? The response to that thought was a resounding no! Deep down I knew I had to change or things would only get worse.

Reluctantly I bowed my head and prayed, "Heavenly Father I've made a mess of things. I know I haven't been the best steward over our finances and I'm seeing the results now. I really want to do better. I commit right now that I'll never use credit cards again, but I need Thy help. We need groceries. Please help me figure out a way to keep my commitment to Thee and get the things we need."

With those words I paid the bills and then went on about my day. I decided it was a good time to clean out and organize my mother-in-law's closet. She was very aged, had Alzheimer's, and was living with us at the time. Although we had aids come in to help with her needs daily, they weren't the best at keeping her things neat and orderly.

I slid back her closet doors to find everything just tossed in on the shelves. As I started to tidy up, I noticed a small tin box, about the size of a recipe file that I'd never seen before. I thought it was just another one of her little things filled with meaningless trinkets she'd saved over the years. Imagine my surprise when I opened it to find the box filled with silver coins. Yes! Real silver coins.

I raced into the office to count the coins and look up the price of silver for the day. To my shock, I realized there was enough in there to take care of what we needed until the next payday. What a blessing!!! In that same instant I was reminded that it wasn't our money—it belonged to my mother-in-law, even though at this point she had no use for it.

I was sick at the thought of sharing my new find with my husband, knowing he'd tell his brother—the one in charge of Mom's finances—and then we'd have to share the money with all the siblings. If we did that there wouldn't be enough for us like I wanted. Was it really bad to not tell anyone? Who would know? I would! In good conscience I could not keep this money a secret. My joy immediately turned to frustration.

When my husband got home I told him of our financial situation and of the silver. I also told him I thought we needed to call his brother and ask him what he'd have us do with the money.

I was speechless when my husband told me his brother's response. He advised us to spend it wisely—that was it. The coins were ours to do with as we saw fit. I took them to a coin shop the next day where I cashed them in for more than enough to cover groceries, gas, and my obligation.

This is just one experience where God taught me I could trust Him. Recognizing this one helped me see other times when His hand was clearly guiding my life. Each time, my trust grows a little more. Now I've learned I can turn to Him more often and I don't have to wait until I get to the end of my rope.

Learning to trust doesn't always come easily, especially when we have experienced deep betrayal or hurt. It can take time, but when we are willing to take the first step, Christ meets us where we are and helps us through the process by increasing our ability. I promise you that it works and that He is there. Always.

I can only imagine what your response might be to the challenges I've listed below. I know there were years when the idea of reading the scriptures really turned me off. People promised me I'd find answers and comfort, but my mind was so closed I didn't allow them to speak to me for years. So, at the risk that might also be your response I ask you to trust me on this. This. Process. Works!

Challenge

- Pray that God will give you the eyes to see His hand in your life.
- Read scriptures specifically that will bring you comfort. Here are just a few of my favorites: Isaiah 49: 15-16; Psalms 23; Matthew 7:7-12; 1 Timothy 1:7; Proverbs 3:5; Doctrine and Covenants 6:36

Let it Go

Let it go! Don't you just hate it when someone tells you that?! It feels like such a flippant statement—like your feelings don't really count. I totally understand that. Besides, *how* in the world do you just let something go? When you've been hurt, or when your world has been turned upside by someone or something beyond your control, just exactly how do you let it go? The pain is real and feels like it's just a part of you. That's not something easily tossed aside, which is how that statement sounded to me. When everything in my world changed there was no way I could simply let it go.

After a few years of dealing with the seizures and unemployment, I began to identify with the situation. In my mind I was the woman married to the man who had uncontrolled seizures and there was a lot of emotion attached to that statement. It's not like I complained a lot—it was more like a badge of honor I wore. The fact that my children were grown and had moved away even changed the way I looked at myself as a mom. Not only was I angry, but I felt alone and forsaken. As strange as it sounds, because that was the way I saw myself, it made it felt threatening to give it up. After all, it was what I'd done for so many years I didn't know how to look at myself any differently.

However, after 29 years I'd had enough. I was exhausted from all the anger and stress. In desperation I crumbled. I knelt down and had a long conversation with Heavenly Father. Because I'd been working on being grateful and trusting God, this prayer was different than it would have been a few years before. I promised Him again that I would stay in the marriage, but admitted that I simply could not live the rest of my life with a heart filled with so much anger and resentment. I begged Him for help, some kind of relief, hoping that this time I'd receive an answer to my request. This was the beginning of the letting go process.

A few days later a thought came to my mind to start working on projects with my husband—specifically refinishing furniture. It was actually more than a thought. I heard the words, "Do it for Gordon." What? The last thing I wanted to do was spend time with my husband. However, I'd prayed for help and this seemed to be the answer. I had to admit, we did work well together on tasks and the idea of doing something creative appealed to me. I acted on the inspiration by signing us up for a class where we learned how to bring old furniture back to life. It was surprisingly fulfilling.

I was shocked that within a very short period of time my attitude toward my husband started to change. In fact, I felt like I was falling in love with him all over again. I looked forward to him coming home in the evenings and spending Saturdays searching for furniture to work on. We had fun discussing our plans and shared in the joy of finished masterpieces. I stopped finding fault with him and found myself less bothered by his seizures as I focused on the good things he did.

I was literally experiencing a miracle, but it wasn't the one I'd been asking for all those years. There was no doubt my heart was being changed through the grace of the Savior.

Friends even commented on how my countenance had softened and asked me what had happened. The only explanation I could give was that I stopped insisting that my life was terrible. I no longer identified myself solely as the woman dealing with an insurmountable challenge. In changing my request from, "Please fix my husband," to "Help me. I'll do whatever you say," I opened myself up to His healing power. I can now say without reservation that I am not the same person I was 10 years ago. My friends will tell you the same thing.

Over the last few years I have thought a lot about how I used to be. As strange as it sounds, I really was invested in being miserable. In my mind, in some weird way it made me noble. In reality that was far from the truth.

Christ teaches us that in order to come to Him with full purpose of heart we must let go of any ill feelings we have toward anyone else. I learned that letting go meant that instead of focusing on how miserable I needed to look to my Savior and desire to be identified with Him more than my pain. By doing so, I *allowed* Him to take the pain—for which He'd already suffered—away from me for. I had to make the choice to let Him in before He could work His miracles with me.

To say simply that to let go means to turn to the Savior doesn't seem to be enough. After all, I would dare say that you've done a lot of praying in your efforts to be released from your pain. I know I did. But I'd been so intent on the conditions of my happiness that I never once considered I could be wrong—that God had a better way for me.

So my final challenge to you is to ask yourself the following questions:

What exactly is causing your pain?

Are you identifying with that pain? For example, if you are divorced, when you think of yourself is it always as a person who failed in their marriage?

How would it look for you to identify more with the Savior and open yourself up to His love rather than with your challenge?

Lastly, I challenge you to ask God what questions you need to be asking Him rather than figuring you know it all, then be still and wait for the answer. Be still and know that He is God and is waiting to help you.

Although these steps may seem simplistic at first and maybe even impossible, they are based on universal laws of thought. If you are interested in learning more about these laws please click here for a free copy of

<u>The Jackrabbit Factor</u> <u>By</u> <u>Leslie Householder</u>

In this book you'll learn more about the laws of thought. They are laws as real as the law of gravity. When we understand them, our lives can change.

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