

BAGGAGE

LEAVING YOUR PAST BEHIND

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Chapter 1

The Baggage That People Carry

Several years ago I was on a trip to England with my wife and two of my children. In preparing for the trip, everyone was given strict instructions: You have to carry your own baggage, so pack light. Of course when you are traveling with three females, the definition of “light” is very different than if you are traveling with three guys. A guy’s idea of packing is to throw a change of clothes in a bag, zip it up and walk out the door. Women, on the other hand, spend several days deciding which half of their closet to bring, then how to fit that half of the closet into two extra-large suitcases. Then comes all the extras—shoes, shoes, and more shoes, jewelry, makeup, skincare, hair straighteners, hair dryers, and hair product. By the time they get done, they need a football team to carry the load of baggage.

Just imagine if you carried that much baggage around with you every day. As you leave for work, you drag your suitcase out the door and wrestle it into the trunk of your car. On the way, you stop at McDonalds for breakfast, dragging the suitcase behind you as you get into line. At work that suitcase sits behind your desk and every time you get up, you trip over

it. At lunch, you slip it under the table next to you in the employee lunch room, but it's so big and awkward that no one can sit beside you so you eat alone, separated from the rest of your coworkers by that huge suitcase, that huge piece of baggage.

You would never consider doing that with real baggage, but many of us carry emotional baggage with us each day. It follows us to work, to school, and to church. It dogs our footsteps when we are having fun with friends or spending time with our family. Wherever we go, our baggage is always there ... in the way, hindering what we can do, getting in the way of our relationships, tripping us up when we try something new.

What is baggage?

The definition of baggage in Webster's Dictionary is very simple. It means a suitcase, a trunk, personal belongings, luggage or bags. So when we talk about baggage, we're talking about something you pack things into. Conceptually, baggage is defined as things, objects, circumstances, or beliefs that get in your way.

What are the things, the objects, the circumstances, the beliefs that get in your way? Is there something that comes to your mind every time you try to make a decision? Is there a situation that haunts you and never lets you leave it in the past? Are there things that you believe that hinder you from living a happy and fulfilled life? What has framed your mindset of how you view life? What experiences have formulated your

concept of who you are? What attitudes control your perspective of the future? What affects how you react to challenges or frustrations or new opportunities in life?

Where does your anger come from? Why are you so indecisive about making decisions? Where did your insecurity get grafted into your life? At what point did you decide to believe a lie and say, "That's me; I will live an insecure life. That's me; I will live an immoral life. That's me; I will live a deceptive life. That's me; I will live a financially poor life. That's me; I'll never have a successful marriage because no one in my family ever has."

Have you said to other people, "I'm just different. This is the way I am; I can't help it. I've always been critical and I always will be critical. I can't help myself."? Or are you a loner? "I don't like talking with people. I like being on my own. I just don't relate very well. Don't pressure me; don't crowd me on this; this is just the way I am."

Where did that baggage come from? Who built you that way? Where did you buy that? At what point did you make the choice to own those things and pack them into your bag? Do you want to carry it with you the rest of your life? The things you carry with you in your bag, whether it is a small, medium, or large bag, affects how you live and how you respond or react to life's circumstances.

When Jesus is invited into your life there usually is not an instant deliverance from every hangup you've ever had. Salvation is instant, but becoming like Christ is an ongoing process. Allowing God to change you is a process.

Four types of baggage people

There are four types of baggage that represent four kinds of people: the handbag person, the duffle bag person, the suitcase person and the trunk person. Not everybody has the same size of baggage because not everybody has the same amount of baggage. Some people carry a suitcase through life; others carry a small tote bag.

The Handbag Person

Handbag people have things that they have packed into their lives but those things are only a manageable nuisance. The handbag symbolizes the size of baggage a person is willing to carry with them everywhere. Handbag people are very mobile with their baggage. They take it with them to work, to school, to dinner, everywhere. Why? Because it's manageable. It's just a nuisance. It's not that noticeable to other people.

The handbag person says, "I have a little bit of an anger problem, but it's manageable. I have a little bit of a lust problem, but it's manageable. I have a little bit of a marriage problem, but I don't want to talk to anybody because it's manageable. I have a little bit of excess baggage when it comes to forgiving my ex-spouse or my father or my boss or my uncle, but it's manageable. I'm not dysfunctional about it. I can carry it around with me and every once in awhile talk about it. Every once in awhile it might come up but it's just a nuisance. It's a manageable thing."

The Holy Spirit never says, "Keep your problem. It's small

enough for you to manage, so don't worry about it. It's manageable." Never. The Holy Spirit does not deal with people by saying to them "It's okay; it's only a nuisance." Remember: what is a nuisance today can become a destructive power next year. What is only a nuisance handbag can become a problem next year. It can be a little problem that you can easily carry right now such as a little bit of anger, a small relational problem, or a small domestic problem, but it can become a stranglehold later on if you don't handle it when it's a small piece of baggage. Don't be the type of person who packs your baggage into manageable pieces and puts them in your handbag, neglecting to deal with those small problems until they become big problems.

The Duffle Bag Person

The next kind of person is a duffle bag person. Obviously this person has a greater quantity to carry. The duffle bag person packs things for special seasons of life and special events. They don't carry their problems all the time as they go to work, to dinner, or to school. Their baggage isn't an every day thing. They only have a seasonal problem. When special events arise, they have their baggage packed up and ready to go.

Maybe this is the baggage that comes out at a special event such as a wedding. Everyone else can be crying tears of joy as they watch the young couple get married. The bride is beautiful, the groom is handsome, the romantic music is playing and love is in the air. People are wiping away tears as

they listen to the heartfelt emotion as the young couple pledge their lives to each other.

Duffle bag people are wiping away tears as well, but for a different reason. They may be remembering their wedding day when they made those same vows, but their marriage failed and those vows were broken. The beautiful ceremony reminds them of their failure and ruined relationship. That baggage is sitting right in the middle of the stage affecting how they see the wedding.

The duffle bag can show up at Thanksgiving. Everything is fine until they see their father. All of a sudden the feelings they haven't experienced for a year burst to the surface and the anger and resentment spoil the taste of the Thanksgiving meal.

Duffle bags are the things in life that have never been brought to closure. That duffle bag surfaces at specific events: Thanksgiving, Christmas, birthdays, weddings, funerals, vacation spots, seeing a certain person. All the buried emotions drag that duffle bag out into plain view and ruin a time that most people enjoy.

The Suitcase Person

Suitcase people pack their baggage every once in awhile for a getaway. Why? Because they want to escape from reality and they're hoping to not bring everything back. They pack up all their feelings and all the stuff they're going through and go somewhere to get rid of it. They change jobs. They change cities. They change homes. They change relationships. They go somewhere to get away from it all. They might even change

marriages. They do whatever they can to get away from the feelings they have. They pack up those feelings and try to escape by changing their situations. They get on a plane, move to a new city, breathe a sigh of relief and think, "I'm in a new place where no one knows me. I left that baggage back in my old home so I can make a fresh start here." Then they open the front door of their new home and find that somehow, mysteriously, that suitcase has showed up and it's waiting on them.

You can change jobs, change marriages, change friends, change houses, change all kinds of things. You think that changing what is happening outside you will change what is happening inside, but it doesn't. The baggage always moves with you. Whether you move to another state or move to another home or to another relationship, that suitcase follows you. Every time you try to change your life in hopes to get rid of that meddlesome suitcase, you only end up facing it once again in a different place and a different time. Changing your environment doesn't fix the problem because the real issue is inside you.

The Trunk Person

Trunk people are meticulous about their life journey. They carefully pack away the memories, experiences, and hurts. They pack away everything that shapes their lives and lock it up and keep them stored away. That trunk is locked in the attic, out of sight and out of mind, but it never really goes completely away. They still think about it frequently, so they creep back up the

stairs into the attic, brush away the cobwebs and unlock the trunk. They open it up and begin going through the memories. There's the picture of the child who died or the spouse who left. There's the birthday card given by a friend who is no longer a friend. There's the finger-painting done by the child who has married and left home. There's the journal of dreams that will never become reality.

As they unpack the trunk, they unpack the emotions attached to each one of those memories and the hurt of the broken relationship, the loss of a loved one, the loneliness of the empty house come crashing in like an overwhelming flood. Life has changed and continues on, but the trunk person is still living in the past with its hurts and sorrows. They are unable to go forward into the future because that trunk ties them to the past.

Inside that trunk are the people they have never been able to forgive, the hatred they have never been able to resolve, the shame or guilt that overwhelms them, the feelings they hide deep inside. Every time they open the trunk, they re-live those emotions. Their friends tell them, "You need to get counsel. You need to let go of that." But they can't. So they slam the trunk shut and lock those memories and experiences safely away until the next time it is opened.

What's in your bag?

What baggage are you carrying? Baggage is any area in your life that is unresolved, that has been pushed deep inside and hidden, and is a hindrance to your spiritual life and

destiny.

Baggage can be emotional brokenness.

Baggage can be a deep wound that has never healed, a broken heart, a ruined relationship. It is that ache inside that is constantly there, draining the joy and peace from your life. I had a young man tell me, “I’ve carried a deep wound from a relationship that didn’t work out. I loved her and thought we would get married, but instead we broke up and I never let go of it. I’ve been afraid to date again, afraid to start another relationship. I need to unpack that bag and be healed from this and stop carrying that brokenness with me.”

Baggage can be a hidden sin or mistake.

Baggage can be a hidden moral mistake or a secret addiction. It is something you think no one will ever find out so you bury it, but it won’t stay buried. Every time it rains, you run out to see if it has been uncovered. Every time a stray dog wanders through the yard, you run out to see if it has been dug up. You live in fear of the baggage surfacing.

The best place to put this piece of baggage is at the foot of the cross of Christ, where Jesus offers full pardon and forgiveness. Psalm 86:5 says, “For You, O Lord, are good and ready to forgive, and abundant in mercy to all those who call upon You.”

Baggage can be a character flaw.

Baggage can be a character flaw—uncontrolled anger or a

critical spirit. You determine to control it by sheer willpower, but find yourself blowing it when under pressure and bursting out in harsh or critical words. The Bible puts anger in the same verse with murderer and adultery. That's pretty serious. We view murder and adultery as serious, but anger as just a minor flaw, a handbag issue. The Bible views anger as a destroying, uncontrolled passion in a person's life. It can drive your friends from you, ruin your marriage, ruin your family and ruin your job.

Baggage can be jealousy, resentment over other people having the things you desperately longed for but will never have. Maybe you always wanted to get married but spend every holiday watching your siblings laugh and enjoy their families while you show up to the family dinner alone. Maybe you always wanted children but find yourself going to baby shower after baby shower, smiling and giving gifts while inside you are quietly being eaten alive by jealousy over their happiness.

Baggage can be regret, guilt or shame.

Baggage can be living with regret over choices you have made or with the pain of past experiences. It can be nagging guilt and shame that torments you. A single mother can face that baggage every time they meet someone, "Welcome to the neighborhood. You have a beautiful daughter. Does she take after her father or you? Where is your husband?" The baggage comes out and the reminder that she made a mistake is thrown into her face. She can choose to respond from the grace of God

that has been poured into her life, “I don’t have a husband. Yes, I made a mistake and am now raising my daughter alone, but the grace of God has covered my life and my daughter’s life. Every day I have the opportunity to trust in His goodness upon my family. Can I tell you about the goodness of God in my life?”

An abortion brings baggage. Every birthday from the time that woman had that abortion until the time she goes to heaven, she remembers what should be a birthday and a happy day; instead it is a day of sadness. I’ve spoken with women about what they go through with this hurt. They can be godly Christian women who made a mistake, yet have found forgiveness in God, are happily married with other children and going on with life. It still grabs them once a year and shakes them, “Look what you did. What kind of a mother are you?”

If you are carrying regret, guilt or shame from an abortion, you need to lay aside that baggage. Every birthday remember there is healing, closure and the grace of God. Thank God for His forgiveness and forgive yourself. Let every birthday be a reminder of the grace of God and what God has done and will continue to do in your life. Don’t live under the dark emotions of bitterness and regret, but live with the grace emotions. Don’t allow this to be baggage any longer, but an open door for you to share with others the grace of God in your life. Remember the scripture, “But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.” (1 John 1:7) The more the soul yields itself through faith to the Spirit of God to understand and enjoy the full power of reconciliation, the more

the power of the blood of Christ works.

Baggage can be feelings of rejection.

It can be feelings of being unloved or feelings of rejection. Baggage can be unbearable emptiness or desperate loneliness due to dependence on others to make you happy. Baggage cries, "If only I had someone else's life, I wouldn't feel this way. If only I were married, if only I had a good husband, if only I had a large family, if only I was in a church where I had more friends." Emptiness doesn't come from the external circumstances; it's internal. You can have a life that is full of God, full of joy and full of faith. It's your choice.

Rejection hurts deeply. Rejection drives people away, rejecting them before they can reject, creating the loss of love and friendship. Rejection is a feeling of "I'm not good enough." It can arise from having your term paper rejected at school, being cut from a sports team, being dropped by a boyfriend, having a spouse leave or any one of a thousand different scenarios. These all spell rejection.

Baggage can be excessive dependence on other people.

The overly dependent person makes other people responsible for their happiness. When holidays come, it is someone else's responsibility to invite them to their home and make them feel loved and accepted and part of the family. The overly dependent person makes other people responsible for their decisions. They are too afraid to make a decision on their

own so they get counsel from person after person, prolonging a decision because they are afraid it will be the wrong one. They are trapped where they are because they won't decide to get to their feet and begin to move.

Baggage can be unforgiveness.

Baggage can be unforgiveness for someone who has wounded you in the past. If you have lived past the age of five, you will have had the need to forgive someone. Forgiveness is just as much a part of life as breathing and eating. We live in a sinful world and people are going to hurt you. It may be a little hurt or it may be a devastating hurt. You cannot prevent someone from hurting you unless you lock yourself into solitary confinement your entire life. You can't choose how you will be treated, but you can choose how you will respond. Forgiveness isn't an emotion. It's a choice and it's one you have to make every day. Unforgiveness is refusing to let the offense and the offender go. It offers no pardon, no mercy, no forgiveness.

Ephesians 4:30-32 says, "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you."

Baggage can be an uncontrolled thought life.

The uncontrolled thought life can and is a great baggage

problem with many people. A person's thoughts occupy a large place in their lives because thoughts influence actions and ultimately one's future. Lustful thoughts can pervade thinking so that a person can't relate to the opposite sex properly. Thoughts of depression and self-pity can lead to thoughts of suicide. Thoughts of jealousy can lead to creating a fantasy world to live in.

Uncontrolled and ungodly thoughts can rule in any area of a person's life. Uncontrolled thoughts are not in alignment with the truth of scripture, but are self-centered and self-pleasing. They are thoughts that feed the sinful nature and lead into a downward spiral which will eventually destroy a person's life.

The Bible says in 2 Corinthians 10:3-5, "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ." You have been given the power to examine your thoughts and choose the ones on which you will focus.

Baggage can be confused sexuality.

The Scripture is clear that God's intention for human sexual relationships is limited to heterosexual marriage between a man and a woman. God's plan is for us to be one flesh in marriage, male and female. Nowhere in Scripture are homosexual relationships encouraged or condoned. Genesis 1:27-28 reads, "So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He

created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.’”

There are many distortions in sexuality because of the effects of sin. Homosexuality is a sin of fallen humanity. It is denounced in Scripture and is forbidden. Leviticus 18:22 says, “You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination.” (See also Leviticus 20:13; Romans 1:24-28)

Don’t let the enemy put this lie into your life. Unpack the baggage and be set free. Homosexuality is a sin that can be forgiven and cleansed by the blood of Christ.

1 Corinthians 6:9-11 declares “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.”

Baggage can be unstable emotions.

Do you live by your emotions? When things are going well, you’re happy. When things are difficult, you’re depressed. You allow your emotions to reflect everything going on around you instead of living by principle. Our society has become so focused on being happy that feelings are now more important

than anything else in life, so every decision in life is based on how you feel about it. That means our emotions are subject to our environment and we are kites that dance high in the sky or plummet to the earth based on outside influences. Instead, we need to learn to soar like the eagle, using the downdrafts to guide us to the updrafts so we soar higher and higher. Use the winds of circumstances instead of allowing them to control you.

Emotions can be redeemed by the blood of Christ, reshaped and healed by the working of the Holy Spirit in your life. Emotions can be ruled and controlled (*Proverbs 25:28*), changed (*Proverbs 42:11*) and focused on loving God (*Matthew 22:37*).

You can probably add a lot more things to the list of potential baggage: disappointment, disillusionment, hatred, rape, incest, child molestation, abuse. "I was a victim of..." "I was a product of..." You can look at your life and find more things to add to the list. Whatever is on your list, you have to choose to let go of your bag.

Jesus can handle your baggage.

It's too much! It's overwhelming! Even the thought of opening your baggage can stir up a storm inside you, but you are not alone. You are not standing alone trying to deal with these things and facing these circumstances. Jesus is there and Jesus can handle your baggage.

Remember this: you have the sovereign Creator standing by your side as you face these things. He has the ability to handle

anything you may be carrying and He has a heart of love and compassion that is eager and willing to help. Meditate on these scriptures. Put them into your spirit and pray over them as you read.

Jesus sets you free.

John 8:32, 36

“And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free... Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.”

Romans 6:22

“But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life.”

Jesus gives you liberty.

2 Corinthians 3:17

“Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.”

Jesus frees you from entanglements.

Galatians 5:1

“Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be

entangled again with a yoke of bondage.”

Jesus frees you from bondage.

2 Peter 2:19

“While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage.”

Jesus looses you from your bondage.

Luke 13:12

“But when Jesus saw her, He called her to Him and said to her, ‘Woman, you are loosed from your infirmity.’”

John 11:44

“And he who had died came out bound hand and foot with graveclothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, ‘Loose him, and let him go.’”

John 11 is the story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. It's an amazing miracle. This man who had been dead for three days is alive and breathing. He was carried into the tomb three days ago and now he's walking out of it. But notice that he was still tied up. He was still bound in the graveclothes and Jesus said to those watching, “Loose him and let him go.”

I want you to receive this word of faith into your life that Jesus wants to untie the knots, loose your hands, loose your faith, take the grave cloth off your face and give you a new life. You have been given new life in Christ and are no longer dead in your sins, but now it is time to be loosed. Untie the knots, empty out your bags, live a life of freedom.

Think About It

Do you want to give up your baggage?

The choice is yours. If you are tired of carrying baggage through life, let's do something about it. If you are tired of being hindered by what you are carrying, let's get rid of it. But you have to decide right now—do you want to get rid of your baggage?

What kind of baggage are you carrying?

You can actually carry several pieces of baggage. Have you ever seen those people going through the airport who look like they've packed their entire house for a weekend trip? They stumble through the airport pulling a large suitcase behind them, with a duffle bag over one shoulder, a carry-on bag over the other shoulder and a backpack on their back. If they are one of those die-hards, they'll have a second suitcase hooked onto the first one so they can pull two at a time.

So think about it: what kind of baggage are you dragging through life with you?



Chapter 2

Where Did I Get All This Baggage?

We have defined baggage as the things, objects, circumstances or beliefs that get in the way. Our baggage is found in the realm of our emotions, mind, will, habits and experiences. We can choose to not carry baggage in our life or we can choose to carry bags of various sizes throughout life, packing them with numerous kinds of unnecessary baggage.

The size of bag you carry is your choice. The handbag person packs things into their life that are a manageable nuisance. The duffle bag person packs things away to be pulled out for special seasons and events of life. The suitcase person packs things for a quick getaway, an escape from reality, hoping to lose their bags while they are gone and come home free. The trunk person packs things into the safety and privacy of a trunk, things such as unresolved life experiences and life disappointments.

The baggage you choose to keep will be an unnecessary burden that will weigh you down all your life. That isn't the life Jesus wants for you. In Matthew 11:30, He offers you a different life: "My yoke is easy and my burden is light." You can choose to carry His easy yoke and His light burden

through life or your heavy and burdensome trunk. Check your bag today and make sure you are carrying forgiveness, freedom, hope, faith, love, blessings, favor, honor, God's word and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Where does baggage come from?

The question you must answer is, "Where did I get all this baggage? How did it get in my life?" We pack our baggage by our responses to things that happen to us. As we stand at the baggage carousel of life, things are coming our way constantly. We can either respond correctly or react incorrectly. If we respond correctly, we allow the baggage to go on past us. If we respond incorrectly, we pick those things up and pack them away. Baggage can be put in our life through:

- Difficult life experiences
- Other people
- Unresolved issues
- The enemy of our soul

Where did you pick up your baggage? What has helped you to pack? There's an advertisement (Nationwide Insurance) that says, "Life comes at you fast." There are life experiences that come rocketing toward us that we have no idea are coming, we don't know anything about them and we most definitely don't deserve them. They are experiences forced upon us and we have to decide what to do with them. These are life experiences that fall under the categories of surprise, mystery and unfairness. They are life experiences that you have no control

over, but you can control what they put in your bag.

Joseph chose not to let life and others pack his bag.

Joseph was the eleventh son of Jacob and the first son of Rachael. He was a man with a God-given dream and destiny. He would find fulfillment of his dreams by never allowing life or people to pack his bags with those things that destroy and ruin character.

Joseph certainly had a rough life that he didn't ask for. His mother died when he was young, his father babied him, his brothers were jealous of him and then God gave him a dream. You would think that when God speaks everything suddenly begins working out great. Not so for Joseph! Things only got worse. His brothers were jealous of his dream and they began to hate him. It's one thing to have people not like you, but this was his family and they hated him so much they plotted to kill him (*Genesis 37:1-11*).

Undeserved jealousy

His brothers got a great idea. Instead of killing him, they sold him into slavery and he was dragged off to a foreign country to serve as a slave. You would think that's bad enough, but then his master's wife falsely accuses him of attempted rape and has him thrown into the dungeon. So what kind of baggage do you pack up after that kind of life?

Undeserved rejection and cruelty

There are times when life is unjust and unfair. It throws curve balls into your family, your health, your spirit, your work. Things are happening to you that you don't understand and you did nothing to deserve. You're trying to serve God. You have a great vision and you're working hard to see it accomplished, but then everything takes a downward turn. People get jealous and criticize you, even those you regarded as close friends. Your boss fires you and things begin happening that you don't deserve.

Now it's your choice. How do you pack your bag? Joseph could have packed his bag with bitterness, resentment, rejection, and a desire for revenge. He could have spent those years in the dungeon plotting how to get even with his brothers. He could have packed his bag with mistrust and unforgiveness. We would consider him justified to have any of these reactions.

Undeserved life crises

But Joseph didn't do that. He didn't allow life experiences to pack his bags for him. He simply decided, 'God is faithful and He will see me through this.' For fourteen years he held to that simple truth. "God is sovereign. God is in control of my life. I forgive my brothers. God is going to use this for good somehow. I chose to trust God."

Joseph went from a pit to Potiphar's house to prison and then to the palace. Yes, the palace. In God's timing, Joseph was brought to the palace to become the second-in-command in the entire kingdom of Egypt. Years later a famine came and as

Joseph sat on his throne he looked out to see his dream coming true. There stood his brothers. No, there knelt his brothers, bowing before him just as in the dreams he had as a young teenager.

What emotions do you think rose up inside him? Anger? Delight? It serves them right? I told them so? Revenge: Let's make them feel what I felt?

Look at his response in Genesis 45:4-5: "I am Joseph, your brother whom you sold into Egypt! But don't be angry with yourselves that you did this to me, for God did it! He sent me here ahead of you to preserve your lives (*The Living Bible*)."

Look at Joseph's perspective: "God has sent me here to keep you and your families alive, so that you will become a great nation. Yes, it was God who sent me here, not you (*Genesis 45:7-8, The Living Bible*)!"

Have life experiences packed your bag with self-pity, with mistrust, or with rejection? Throw that trunk open and take those things out. Like Joseph, look at your life circumstances through God's eyes and see that He is sovereign in them all. He has a plan for every situation. You can trust Him with every situation in your life, whether it is good or evil. Joseph chose forgiveness. He packed forgiveness into his bag. Forgiveness removes anger and hostility from our lives and it enhances our ability to love and trust. Forgiveness affects more than just our emotions. It can actually improve our physical wellbeing and strength.

Joseph believed Romans 8:28: "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose."

Pray this prayer of forgiveness right now:

“Lord, I choose not to hold on to my resentment and unforgiveness. I thank you for setting me free from the bondage of my bitterness. I relinquish my right to seek revenge and ask you to heal my damaged emotions. I ask you to bless those who have hurt me. In Jesus’ name, amen.”

David chose forgiveness over bitterness.

The youngest of Jesse’s eight sons, David became the second and greatest of Israel’s kings. He had his share of suffering and plenty of reasons to let life pack his bags with bitterness, unforgiveness and anger. Saul mistreated and harassed him for years. David spent many years running from place to place, hiding in the wilderness, and living in caves. He couldn’t have a normal life, raise a family or see his parents. Saul ruined his life because of his own baggage of jealousy and anger toward David (1 Samuel 18:7-8), but David didn’t let life’s strange injustices pack his bags. He didn’t let Saul put the wrong attitudes into his bag. David took control of his baggage.

Ruth chose grace and hope over discouragement.

Ruth was an immigrant, living in a nation that despised her home country. They looked down on her ethnic background. Not only that, but she was a widow with no one to look after her. In those days, if you had no sons, you were destitute when you got old because there was no one to take care of

you. Here she was—without family, without hope, without a future. She could have allowed her life to pack her bags with rejection, resentment, and self-pity. Instead she learned grace and to trust in the God who works in surprising ways.

Ruth went from being a despised outsider to a woman who gave birth to kings because she didn't allow life to pack her bags with things that would hinder her from her destiny. Ruth did not let Naomi pack her bags with discouragement and bitterness of soul (*Ruth 1:16-17*). It took the grace of God to befriend a bitter woman, but Ruth did it without becoming bitter (*Ruth 1:19-20*).

The life of Ruth was so emptied of wrong baggage and so full of the grace of God that she became a restorer of life for Naomi and a gift of love and hope to all generations.

Ruth 4:15

“May he be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age; for your daughter-in-law, who loves you, who is better to you than seven sons, has borne him.”

The enemy of your soul can pack your bag.

Job is a great example of this. He had done nothing to deserve anything that happened to him. He was serving God and living right. He gave to the poor and raised godly children. Then the devil showed up and made a deal with God to allow him to test Job.

The story of Job

Job 1:1-12

“There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil. And seven sons and three daughters were born to him. Also, his possessions were seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, five hundred female donkeys, and a very large household, so that this man was the greatest of all the people of the East.

And his sons would go and feast in their houses, each on his appointed day, and would send and invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. So it was, when the days of feasting had run their course, that Job would send and sanctify them, and he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all. For Job said, ‘It may be that my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts.’ Thus Job did regularly.

Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them. And the Lord said to Satan, ‘From where do you come?’ So

Satan answered the Lord and said, 'From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking back and forth on it.'

Then the Lord said to Satan, 'Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil?'

So Satan answered the Lord and said, 'Does Job fear God for nothing? Have You not made a hedge around him, around his household, and around all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But now, stretch out Your hand and touch all that he has, and he will surely curse You to Your face!'

And the Lord said to Satan, 'Behold, all that he has is in your power; only do not lay a hand on his person.' So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord."

Job's response

In one day Satan destroyed Job's life and ruined him. He took every last bit of wealth he had, killed his children and took his health. Then the devil stood back to listen to Job curse God.

"Then Job arose, tore his robe, and shaved his head; and he

fell to the ground and worshiped. And he said: ‘Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return there. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.’” (*Job 1:20-21*)

Scripture attests to Job’s integrity “In all this Job did not sin nor charge God with wrong (*Job 1:22*).” Then his wife showed up. She took one look at him and said, “Are you still trying to maintain your integrity? Curse God and die!” (*Job 2:9*) What is your problem? You’re lost everything including our children. The house is falling down around your ears. You’ve lost your health. Can’t you tell God has it in for you? Just give up, curse God and die.

Job had a different perspective than she did, “You talk like a godless woman. Should we accept only good things from the hand of God and never anything bad?” (*Job 2:10*) He wasn’t going to allow the enemy to pack his bags. Instead he worshipped God and blessed his name. He chose to worship instead of pack his bags with self-pity, doubt and depression. The end of Job’s story is one of restoration. God gave him back double for everything he lost.

When unexpected and undeserved things come to you, you can curse God and blame Him. You can get mad at Him when tests come. You can pack your bag with griping and complaining, with anger at God, when discouragement and depression. Or you can open your heart and say, “I don’t understand what is happening. I don’t deserve these things. I’ve fasted and prayed and nothing has changed. I’m still having this problem, but I choose to trust God.”

Isaiah 50:10 states, “Who among you fears the Lord? Who

obeys the voice of His Servant? Who walks in darkness and has no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord and rely upon his God.” Instead of packing your bag, trust God in the dark times. When it seems as if light has ceased to exist, trust God in the dark and rely on Him.

Your reactions and unresolved issues can pack your bag.

The deciding factor in life is not what happens to you but how you respond to it. Your reaction can pack your bag. You can respond like Joseph with forgiveness or you can pack your bag with rejection and resentment. You can respond with grace and trust like Ruth or you can pack your bag with insecurity.

You can pack your bags for life with poor decisions and hard consequences. You can choose to be unforgiving, unloving and throw your life away with wrong choices and bad habits. You can pack your bags until you need a U-Haul to carry all the baggage. Or you can choose forgiveness, trust and hope in God. You can choose to live Isaiah 50:10 and rely on God or you can pack your bags. It's your decision and one that you make every day.

Hebrews 12:15 warns us to “look carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled.” Choose today—trust or bitterness.

How can I unpack my bags?

Luke 4:18-19

“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.”

The Message translation reads, “God’s Spirit is on me, He’s chosen Me to preach the message of good news to the poor, sent me to announce pardon to prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind, to set the burdened and battered free, to announce, ‘This is God’s year to act!’”

God is bringing His word to your life and saying, “Did you know that this is your year?”

“Who me?”

“Yes, you. This is *your* year. This is *your* time.”

Your life circumstances don’t determine what kind of bag you have. You do. The enemy of your soul doesn’t determine what kind of bag you have. You do. Today you are standing in your bedroom looking at your entire closet laid out around you. Here is a pile of lost friendships. Do you wrap them up with rejection and pack them in your bag or do you let them go? Over there are life experiences: bankruptcy, cancer, diabetes, failed marriage, broken family, abuse. Do you pack them carefully away with bitterness, mistrust of people, fear of intimacy, discouragement, depression? Or do you give them to God and in exchange take faith, trust, hope, determination, confidence, joy?

You choose how to pack your bag. Today make a decision to let go of the oversized bag with the squeaky wheels that keeps you from reaching your destiny. Get rid of your baggage and see how your life can change.

Think About It

What life experiences have you allowed to pack your bags and what have they placed in your bags?

What attitudes are you going to choose instead of packing your bags?

Prayer for grace

Jesus, I need Your grace to help me deal with all my baggage. I realize right now this is beyond my strength and ability to find the freedom I know should be mine. I ask you, Jesus, to take my life and make it the way it should be. I release my hold on my baggage. Come, Jesus, and take control of my life.



Chapter 3

The Holy Spirit Can Handle Your Baggage

There is no doubt that when we face the depth of our problems and the complexity of our baggage, we can be discouraged. We can lose heart and give up on our life and on our destiny to live free and victorious in Christ. Right now you must stop and get a God-perspective on your total life. God knows everything about you, about your problems and about your baggage. God is not giving up on you. He has the power to change your life and bring freedom from your past. This is not your battle alone. It is not up to you with your own resources. God is involved and He has the resources to help you. Open up. Believe. Reach out. The Holy Spirit is already present to do a mighty work in your life.

“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.”

(Luke 4:18-19)

The people to whom Jesus has been sent to minister His grace and power are people like you and me – the brokenhearted, the bound, the discouraged, the blind, those with loss of hope and faith, and those in prison. The passage above from Luke 4 should give you right now a deep sense of hope and faith. God can. God will. God is.

What is your baggage? Is it a small handbag or a U-haul trailer? It doesn't matter how much baggage you have, God is greater. The Spirit of the Lord is available to you. The Spirit of the Lord has wisdom. The Spirit of the Lord has power. The Spirit of the Lord can deliver. The Spirit of the Lord is a counselor. No matter what your situation is, God has what is needed to meet it.

**The Spirit of the Lord is present in you,
around you and through you.**

“...the Spirit of the Lord is upon me...”

(Luke 4:18)

In the Greek, the Spirit of the Lord is the word *pneuma*, which means breath, wind, life, life-creating, inspiring, moving in and through. The spirit of the Lord is available for you no matter how you feel or how you don't feel. Job 33:4 states, “The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life.”

When God created man, He breathed life into man. Genesis

says that God formed man and woman and then he “breathed the breath of life” into them. If God can create life, He can deal with the complexities of those He created. He made you. He knows you. He knows every thought in your head and every word in your mouth. He knows you. He can handle your baggage.

Jesus is willing to help and waiting for us to ask in faith.

*“...If You are willing, You can make me clean...”
(Mark 1:40)*

“Now a leper came to Him, imploring Him, kneeling down to Him and saying to Him, ‘If You are willing, You can make me clean.’ Then Jesus, moved with compassion, stretched out His hand and touched him, and said to him, ‘I am willing; be cleansed.’ As soon as He had spoken, immediately the leprosy left him, and he was cleansed.” *(Mark 1:40-42)*

That is one of those most frequently asked questions. “Jesus, I know you can, but do you really want to? Do you want to get involved with this problem of mine? It’s probably not important to you. You have so many other problems to deal with that this small piece of baggage probably isn’t very significant to you.”

When the luggage is coming around on the carrier at the airport, everyone jostles each other for a front row spot so they can grab their luggage as soon as it comes through. When it does, you only have a few seconds to grab yours before it

passes you and then you have to wait again. What do you think I would say if my daughter asked me, “Daddy, could you grab my suitcase for me?” “Grab it yourself. You need to build up some muscles.” Of course not! I’m willing to help her. I’m not always able, but I’m always willing. God is both able and willing.

You need to hear that. Read that verse out loud now. “I am willing. Be cleansed.” Say it, “Jesus is willing to work on me and take my baggage.” He’s just waiting for you to ask.

The promise of the scriptures to you is Isaiah 44:3: “For I will pour water on him who is thirsty, and floods on the dry ground; I will pour My Spirit on your descendants, and My blessing on your offspring.” God desires to pour His Spirit upon your dry ground and bless you in every way. His Spirit can re-create in you that which is missing emotionally, mentally and spiritually. God can create and breathe His life into your life. Job 33:4 is true and we should claim it right now: “The Spirit of God has made me and the breath of the Almighty gives me life.”

Right now, pray 2 Corinthians 3:17 “Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.”

The anointing of the Holy Spirit is present in you, around you and through you.

*“...He who has anointed us is God...”
(2 Corinthians 1:21)*

When the anointing of the Lord comes upon us, we can

expect Acts 10:38 to happen: “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.”

God desires to anoint you in the presence of your problems with all your baggage. Psalms 23:5 says, “You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over.”

God is the anointer of my head, the lifter of my life, the stability I need in my life. 2 Corinthians 1:21: “Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God.”

God is the giver of my fresh, new beginning of life through His gift of fresh oil. Psalms 92:10: “But my horn You have exalted like a wild ox; I have been anointed with fresh oil.”

The anointing of the Holy Spirit is a fresh touch of God in your life. It is a divine influence that comes upon your body, soul and spirit, upon your mind, will and emotions. It is an anointing of divine power that comes upon your weaknesses. The anointing is also referred to as “divine enablement.” It is the power of God that comes upon you to enable you to deal with experiences in life, to enable you to change when needed, and to enable you to face challenges when they arise. The anointing of God enables you to stand up straight, look in the mirror and say, “I have a problem in this area but God will help me overcome it.”

The anointing of God fills me with truth and strengthens me to stand in Christ. I can face myself and my baggage because the anointing of God in me enables me to handle the truth. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, you can face the truth

and say, “It’s not my mother’s problem. It’s not my counselor’s fault. My boss isn’t to blame. It’s me.”

I can hear you talking back to these pages right now, “But you don’t know my mother or my husband or my situation.” No, I don’t. Remember what we learned from Joseph in the last chapter. Joseph didn’t blame his father for showing favoritism to him or his brothers for being jealous of him or Potiphar’s wife for falsely accusing him or the cupbearer for forgetting him. He chose to grab hold of God in those situations and walk through the situations with grace, the divine enablement of God.

Blame shifting is the last great career in America. We have degrees in it. We don’t want to face ourselves. We blame other people for making us feel the way we do, for treating us unfairly, for taking advantage of us. It’s always someone else’s fault. The truth is that you may be going or may have gone through some extremely difficult experiences, but you want to get through them, not live in them. You want to leave them in the past and not drag them behind you the rest of your life. The anointing comes to enable you to walk through these experiences, to embrace God’s truth and walk in freedom.

It may seem overwhelming to you to unzip that bag and look inside. By the anointing and strength of God you are enabled to look into the bag and dump out the things you are carrying. Through the grace of God you are able to walk in the freedom of the Holy Spirit. You may be shocked to look inside and see what you have packed. You may want to deny that some of those things are there, but through the anointing of God you have the ability to do just that.

Isaiah 10:27 is my promise: “It shall come to pass in that day that his burden will be taken away from your shoulder, and his yoke from your neck, and the yoke will be destroyed because of the anointing oil.”

The anointing is for the person whose life is empty and limited.

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor...”
(Luke 4:18)

Jesus said, “I come to preach to the poor.” This word is not used just to mean those who are financially poor. It’s a much broader word that refers to anyone whose life is empty and limited. The root word means “inability.” The poor person is one who does not have the ability to change something. He doesn’t have the resources, the connections or the power.

Poor people can be limited by finances. They can be limited by their situation. They can be limited because of drugs, alcohol or disease. They can be morally poor, emotionally poor or spiritually poor. They don’t have the ability to change their lives. They don’t have the resources to get help. They don’t have the strength to take a stand. But Jesus promises, “I’m here with an anointing for the poor, those with disabilities, whose lives are empty and limited.”

Is your life empty? Is it limited? Are you unable to deal with your life situations? Do you lack what you need to handle the stresses of your life? Be encouraged! Jesus has come to your

life to preach the gospel to the poor, to bring good news to the poor. He is here to remove the limitations and give the anointing that enables. Jesus helps the financially poor, the situationally poor, the socially poor and the spiritually poor. The promises of scripture are:

Psalm 34:6

“This poor man cried out, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles.”

Psalm 22:26

“The poor shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek Him will praise the Lord. Let your heart live forever!”

Psalm 40:17

“But I am poor and needy; yet the Lord thinks upon me. You are my help and my deliverer; Do not delay, O my God.”

Psalm 69:29

“But I am poor and sorrowful; Let Your salvation, O God, set me up on high.”

Psalm 113:7

“He raises the poor out of the dust, and lifts the needy out of the ash heap.”

The anointing heals the person whose life is broken.

*“...He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted...”
(Luke 4:18)*

Brokenhearted means “to break, crush together, break into pieces, to break the strength of someone, to weaken, to shatter hope.” This is a broken person, one who has been crushed through disappointment. The brokenhearted have had their strength broken because of long-term struggles. They have had their hope shattered into little pieces and now they are numb inside. Psalms 147:3 says, “He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.”

I believe in every church, there’s a broken heart in every pew. It could be cancer, addiction, a moral problem, bankruptcy, depression or any number of things. The next time you sit in church, look at those around you and realize that there are broken hearts everywhere. You aren’t alone.

In the human heart there can be a crushing by the enemy of our soul. Feelings lie buried that only grace can restore. We can be touched by a loving hand, wakened by kindness. The chords that were once broken will vibrate once again. The broken must see God from the ruins of life. The broken must reject the impulse of isolation and the idea that no one cares, knows or loves them. This is the voice of the wicked one whispering discouragement into your soul. Reject this. Call on God out of your brokenness.

Jesus is ready to heal the brokenhearted. He doesn’t just

slap a bandaid on, pat you on the back and send you on your way. He heals.

Matthew 12:20: "A bruised reed He will not break, and smoking flax He will not quench..."

Flax was used as a wick for the lamps. When the oil ran out, the wick would begin to smoke and become an irritation to everyone in the room. The first response was to reach over and snuff it out. Yet this is what Jesus did not do. He said, "I won't quench your smoldering wick even though it irritates everybody around you. It irritates everybody in your life. It's something that people would just as well discard and get rid of it. No, I'm not going to discard you. I'm going to bring some more oil to your life. I'm going to rekindle the fire and not throw you out."

A reed was used to make musical instruments, but if it was bruised it couldn't be used because it affected the quality of the music. Jesus says that there are people like bruised reeds. They used to have a beautiful song and could make music in their soul. They used to have harmony and rhythm but now everything in their lives is out of tune and the noise grates on the ears of those listening. Jesus says, "I will not throw your reed away. I will give you the ability to create new songs."

If you are brokenhearted, you must recognize that God is in control of your life. None of these circumstances you are experiencing caught him off-guard. He isn't standing up in heaven, scratching His head saying, "Oh my, I didn't see that one coming. Now what will I do?" He is in control and He can bring good out of every situation.

Jeremiah stood looking at his city being utterly destroyed by

the enemy. The people were being slaughtered and there was complete destruction everywhere he looked. As he stared brokenhearted at the scene around him, he wrote these words in Lamentations 3:22-24: “Through the Lord’s mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness. ‘The Lord is my portion,’ says my soul, ‘Therefore I hope in Him!’” The mercy of God will preserve you. The compassion of God will not fail you. The faithfulness of God will never leave you. Hope in Him.

The anointing proclaims liberty to the person whose life has been conquered.

*“...To proclaim liberty to the captives...”
(Luke 4:18)*

The promise in Luke 4:18 is that Jesus ministers liberty to the captives. The word “captive” can refer to a prisoner, someone taken and conquered and held captive. Jesus’ ministry was not to the literal prisoner of war; he didn’t go around to every prison and release all the prisoners who were in manmade prisons. Jesus went to people who were prisoners in a spiritual war, prisoners who had been taken captive by spiritual powers and held in captivity by unseen rulers of darkness.

Our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against spiritual powers that work to ruin and capture souls. Jesus’ ministry then and now is to release people from the power of hell and give them life and freedom. He is our liberator. Liberty means deliverance, released from control, to let go, to untie the

bondages.

What has conquered your soul? What have you allowed to bring you under the controlling influence and power of the wicked one? Have you been conquered by a multiple choice culture, a culture that teaches the best choice is one without commitment? We have online dating, more choices, more options, and more potential problems. There are so many choices in our culture that it contributes to people feeling indecision, anxiety, dissatisfaction and depression.

Relationship captivity doesn't allow you to believe and move forward into developing healthy relationships. Have you been conquered by those fears? We can be conquered by living in a fantasy world of perfection. We want a perfect dream person to walk into our life. A single person can be paralyzed by waiting for perfection. They can be conquered by a wrong perspective that can be very discouraging and cause emotional problems.

Listen to what a 37-year-old professional listed as the girl of his dreams:

“Loves children, is hard working, has the ability to listen and communicate, poised, is a team player, looks good, sexy, balanced, has the ability to keep things in perspective, is enthusiastic, loves life, shows initiative, knows how to be a friend, is patient, has religious convictions, is determined and persistent, is considerate of others, has faith that things work out, loyal, ambitious, loves sports, loves music, loves to travel, good mental, physical and emotional condition, sense of humor, ability to be herself, can't be high maintenance.”

Here is the 25-year-old-single woman's list of the man of her

dreams:

“Open-minded, cultured, handsome, comfortable with self, well traveled, into the same things I am, can teach me new things, gregarious, generous, emotionally available, traditional, sensitive, communicative, motivated, independent, charming, takes my breath away when he walks into the room.”

With those two lists in mind, read a checklist written 75 years ago for both men and women.

- Is this person from an appropriate background and religion?

- For him—Can she bear children? Can she keep house?

- For her—Is he sober? Can he support a family?

Life has been conquered by the unreal and the perfectionist mindset. Let us, at least in this one area, get on with life and not be conquered by wrong thinking.

2 Corinthians 3:17

“Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.”

The anointing restores people who have lost their vision and dreams.

“...And the recovery of sight to the blind...”

(Luke 4:18)

Jesus promises to help those who have lost their ability to have a clear vision and dream for their life. The recovery of sight for the blind takes a miracle of God. Jesus ministered

healing to the physically blind in Matthew 9:28-30. “And when He had come into the house, the blind men came to Him. And Jesus said to them, ‘Do you believe that I am able to do this?’ They said to Him, ‘Yes, Lord.’ Then He touched their eyes, saying, ‘According to your faith let it be to you.’ And their eyes were opened. And Jesus sternly warned them, saying, ‘See that no one knows it.’” (See also Matthew 11:5; Matthew 15:30-34; Matthew 20:30)

Jesus also ministers to the spiritually blind in Ephesians 1:17-18. “That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints.” He desires to restore spiritual sight to your vision and dreams.

The word “sight” in the original Greek is *anablepsis* which means “to see again, receiving of sight, recovery of that which has been lost.”

The word blind is *typhlos*, meaning the inability to see, unclear, hidden, dark, concealed, to envelop with smoke, to wander in the dark. Spiritually it denotes a person who is ignorant and slow of understanding. We can be in a season of life where we feel as if we are living in a cloud or a fog and we can't see clearly.

Jesus can open the eyes of the vision-impaired. Psalms 146:8 says, “The Lord opens the eyes of the blind; the Lord raises those who are bowed down; the Lord loves the righteous.” We may need Jesus to make a unique healing potion just for our

particular vision problem as he did in John 9:6 “When He had said these things, He spat on the ground and made clay with the saliva; and He anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay.”

Death of a dream

You may have experienced the death of a dream. The poet Langston Hughes said, “Hold fast to dreams, for when dreams go, life is a barren field frozen with snow. Hold fast to dreams for if dreams die, life is a broken-winged bird that cannot fly.”¹

Jesus desires to move us from our shattered dreams to better dreams to highest dreams. You give up your dreams as unrealistic and begin to live without hope. Visions can die because of time. You’ve spent so many years hoping and believing that the vision would become reality and yet it seems no closer to fulfillment than when you first had it, so you give it up. You quit seeing. You go blind.

Sometimes a vision dies because of life situations. Maybe something has changed in your life and the dream is impossible to restore. Maybe you dreamed of having children but the doctors said it is impossible. It could be the death of a loved one has killed the vision you were dreaming together. Perhaps something has happened in life that has destroyed any hope of your dream ever happening.

Damaging of a dream

You may have experienced the damaging of your dream. Sometimes “wonderful” survives everything terrible and it

surfaces most clearly when we hurt. Sometimes it is out of the ashes that the new arises. The dream doesn't die but it is altered from the original and you must begin to build your dream with what is left.

Maybe the vision will not be fulfilled as you imagined. In the story of Ruth and Naomi, Ruth had a vision of a happy life in her home country, married to a good man, but that dream died with her husband's death. Later God brought her a new vision. It wasn't the same as the first one; it had been changed some but it ended up being an even better vision than the one she originally had. She went from being the husband of an immigrant in a foreign country to being the great-grandmother of a king.

Jesus is the restorer of our sight so that we can see our vision and dreams. Jesus restores dreamers to dream again. He is creating within you an appetite for a better dream, a higher dream, and a new dream.

The anointing sets at liberty the person whose strength is drained.

*“...To set at liberty those who are oppressed...”
(Luke 4:18)*

The promise of Luke 4:19 is that Jesus sets at liberty those who are oppressed, burdened and battered. The word used for “oppressed” in the Greek is *thraumatizo*, to break into pieces, crushing the strength of anyone down to nothing, bruised, downtrodden. The oppressed person is the person whose fight

against life's disappointments, unpleasant surprises and a host of other pressures has left them without strength. They have literally been drained of all strength and can't seem to find a way to get their strength back again.

The oppressed person lacks physical strength, mental strength, emotional strength or spiritual strength. This results in weariness, broken-life despair, depression and a spirit of giving up.

In our country, depression would be one aspect of oppression. Depression is a disturbance or disorder of one's mood or emotional state with symptoms such as sadness, heaviness, darkness of feeling, emptiness, hopelessness, despair, isolation, negative thoughts. Scripture offers hope and freedom to the oppressed.

Isaiah 58:6

"Is this not the fast that I have chosen: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke?"

Psalms 9:9

"The Lord also will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble."

Psalms 103:6

"The Lord executes righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed."

Acts 10:38

“God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.”

The Lord Jesus will restore your strength and enable you to empty your bag from all the baggage of yesterday, including oppression. God is our strength. Psalms 18:1-2 states, “I will love You, O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; My God, my strength, in whom I will trust; My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.” God will arm me with His strength (*Psalms 18:32*) and give me a special strength for the battle (*Psalms 18:39*).

The anointing proclaims the acceptable year of the Lord.

“...To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.”
(*Luke 4:19*)

Some people don't believe it is their time. They never believe it is their time. Their attitude is one of “one day maybe God will,” but there is no faith for today. It is always someone else's chance, someone else's blessing or someone else's opportunity. Jesus comes to proclaim loudly and clearly: “This is your year. This is the year God's going to act.” 2 Corinthians 6:2 declares, “ ‘In an acceptable time I have heard you, and in the day of salvation I have helped you.’ Behold, now is the

accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.”

Today is the day. “This is God’s year to act!” (*The Message Bible*) “The time of the Lord’s favor has come.” (*New Century Version*)

Think About It

2 Corinthians 3:17

“Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.”

Acts 10:38

“...God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.”

Isaiah 10:27

“It shall come to pass in that day that his burden will be taken away from your shoulder; and his yoke from your neck, and the yoke will be destroyed because of the anointing oil.”

Psalms 18:1-3

“I will love You, O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; My God, my strength, in whom I will trust; My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. I will call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised; So shall I be saved from my enemies.”



Chapter 4

Having Courage to Face Your Baggage

The questions we are seeking to answer are simple. Who packed your bag? What's in your bag? Do you want to get rid of all your baggage? Do you have faith that Jesus can handle your baggage? I believe you know who packed your bags and you have made a decision to face what is in your bag. I also believe you greatly desire to empty out your bag and live a victorious, faith-filled life.

Fallen mankind has taken command of his own life. He is determined to live above his problems, flaws and fears. Our fallen human nature is determined to prove that we are adequate to bring the needed changes to our life. Wrong! We are not adequate. Failure results from our trying to change without the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit. Guilt is real. Change is necessary and difficult. Letting go of the baggage we have carried for a long time can be only done with the help of God Almighty. The awareness of how things should be makes the reality of how things are all the more ugly. Are you ready to let Jesus invade your life, open all your baggage and do a marvelous work in your life? I trust your answer is a loud "Yes! Absolutely! No holding back with me, I'm ready to get on with whatever it takes!"

Don't limit the work of Jesus in your life.

Mark 6:1-6

“Then Jesus went out from there and came to His own country, and His disciples followed Him. And when the Sabbath had come, He began to teach in the synagogue. And many hearing Him were astonished, saying, ‘Where did this Man get these things? And what wisdom is this which is given to Him, that such mighty works are performed by His hands! Is this not the carpenter, the Son of Mary, and brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? And are not His sisters here with us?’ So they were offended at Him. But Jesus said to them, ‘A prophet is not without honor except in his own country, among his own relatives, and in his own house.’ Now He could do no mighty work there, except that He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed them. And He marveled because of their unbelief. Then He went about the villages in a circuit, teaching.”

The dictionary defines familiarity as the quality or state of being familiar, to be well acquainted with someone or something so as to expect no surprises.

The Nazareth hometown attitude of familiarity is being so acquainted with something that you humanize, philosophize, and talk yourself out of it. We live in the 21st century. We have

doctors, medicine, and technology. Our philosophers and scholars have studied Christ and the Bible. Our media has made movies that undermine the truth of who Christ is. Our society accepts Jesus as a good teacher and a good man, but they question the supernatural aspect of who He is and we accept it. Astronomy has surveyed the galaxy and hasn't found God. Philosophy has charted the beliefs of men and explained away God. When these learned men and women begin hammering away at your beliefs, you begin to question the miracles in your Nazareth, which is your life. The words of Mark ring loud and clear, "He could do no mighty work there." "There" is the place where Christ desires to work but the unbelief born of familiarity limits the mighty work of God.

It's hard to explain the Holy Spirit, so you drop Him out of the equation of your spiritual life. You reduce Jesus to being a good teacher, a good philosopher and a good man. You adapt your belief in Christ to fit into the belief system of our culture.

You reduce Jesus and the Bible down to fit into your world and your understanding. You are so acquainted with Christianity, prayer and the Word that you are offended by them. You're offended when someone tells you to believe for miracles.

If your son speaks up at the dinner table and says, "I'm going to be a millionaire," do you think his sisters respond, "Wow! That's great!" No, they would all laugh. "Yeah right! You're always borrowing money from me. You don't have a job. You got a C in math." Why? Because they are familiar with all of his problems and his flaws. They reduce him to their perspective of who he is. Familiarity undermines their belief in

what he can do.

In Mark 5, Jesus cast out a legion of demons from the demoniac in the Gadarenes, He healed the woman with the issue of blood, and He raised Jairus' daughter from the dead. Then He came to Nazareth and "He could do no mighty work there." In Mark 5, the people marveled at Him. In Mark 6, they rejected Him.

Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his own country, among his own relatives, and in his own house." A prophet is honored by everyone except those who are familiar with him.

The attitude of familiarity that expects nothing

You believe in God. You faithfully attend church, listen to the preacher, give your tithe, read your Bible and pray. Then your coworker tells you about his child who has cancer or your neighbor confides in you about her marriage that is falling apart. Do you believe that the Jesus of Mark 5 can touch their lives, heal the sick, and restore marriages? Or do you say, "I've been in the church all my life and have never seen someone healed of cancer"?

What happened to your expectation? What happened to your faith? What happened to your attitude about Jesus being the same yesterday, today and forever? What happened to the attitude of opening your life to Jesus and allowing Him to change you?

You can carry your baggage or you can believe that God can take it right now and set you free. You can struggle with your

addictions your entire life or believe that God can break their power through the miracle power of the Holy Spirit. You can doubt Christ's ability or you can believe.

Pray today: "Jesus, I know you do these things. I'm going to expect you to work in my life and work in my family today. I'm going to believe that you can and will restore that person and help that marriage because you're a living God and you're an active God. You're a God that's here today. You're not a God who only worked in the past, but you're a now God. I'm coming in the spirit of faith and believing you to work."

The attitude of familiarity believes that the Bible is true, but doesn't believe it affects today. The Bible records the healings of Jesus, but Jesus isn't going to do that for me today. He can do no mighty work here.

Are you telling me that I can limit Almighty God? Are you saying that the Almighty God who is always here and all-powerful and sovereign can be limited in my life? Are you saying I can change how God acts in my world?

Yes. God has not changed; we have. Our problems aren't so complex that God can't meet them, but our belief in taking those problems to God may have changed. Our habits aren't too strong for God to break; we think we are strong enough to handle them alone instead of taking them to God. Our attitudes toward God may have changed and how we respond to Him may be the issue.

The attitude of familiarity that doesn't believe

We have an unbelief born of familiarity that limits the mighty

works of God. Unbelief can limit the working of His power. It doesn't change that God has the power. Unbelief doesn't change God, but it changes the work of God and how it enters a situation. In the climate of unbelief, Jesus chose not to exercise His miraculous power. He performs His miracles in the atmosphere of faith.

The power was there, but it had to be recognized, respected and released. Jesus' power does not force itself upon the needs of unwilling, unbelieving people. Faith opens the door and unbelief shuts the door. The power of Jesus can be limited. You must believe that Jesus can work in your life. You must believe that the power of God can restore and rebuild you. You must believe that God can change your life. The atmosphere produced unbelief. As faith has positive effects when present, so the absence of faith hinders the manifestation of God's power in our lives

Allow the Holy Spirit to open your baggage and expose the hidden things.

There are hidden things in our life that we don't want anyone to know, even God. We try to hide those things, avoid dealing with them. The Holy Spirit wants to deal with each one of us personally and individually and bring out those hidden things of our lives. He wants to take those things we have been guarding and do away with them.

1 Corinthians 4:5 says, "Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the

hearts.” It can be the pornography that started with a few magazines and then a little bit on the Internet. Now it has grown to control you and you find yourself surfing the Net anytime you’re online to find something. The Holy Spirit wants to remove that completely from your life. Our hidden things can be little nuisances that we want to hide in the corners of our suitcase but the Holy Spirit wants to dump the bag out and break every stronghold, little or big. Job 28:11 says, “He dams up the streams from trickling; what is hidden he brings forth to light.”

If you resist, the Holy Spirit will use people and circumstances.

You can resist the Holy Spirit opening your bag, but if you do, He can create a circumstance to expose how bad those hidden things really are. He can create a circumstance where one of those hidden things will surface and you will get fired or your wife will walk out on you or you will go bankrupt. Maybe you have been hiding something for ten or fifteen years. The Holy Spirit has been dealing with you the whole time, “Don’t lie about that. Don’t cheat on that. Don’t go there any more. Get off the internet. Don’t talk to that woman anymore. Don’t hide these things anymore.”

You don’t listen, so He creates a circumstance that blows up the hidden baggage right in your face. You have to deal with it. He gives you the opportunity to expose it to Him, but if you don’t then He takes it to the next level and exposes it to someone else. If that doesn’t work, He’ll send someone into

your life to expose the whole thing and make it public. He won't let you keep the bag closed.

Psalm 51:6 "Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts, and in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom."

Have the courage to open your baggage.

In the Bible David stuffed his bag with some problems and thought he got away with it. He committed adultery, deception, lying and murder. He had some serious stuff stuffed in his bag. The Holy Spirit said, "David, get rid of it. Own up to it." He refused and Psalm 32 says his bones started hurting, his mind got cloudy, his health started deteriorating, his conscience was affected and his sleep was messed up.

God was trying to tell David, "Give it up, David. Deal with it. Confess what happened."

"No, I got away with it. I'm not going to talk about it. Bathsheba's in my house and we're just going to leave it there."

Finally, God sent a man, Nathan the prophet and Nathan exposed the whole sordid mess. "Then the Lord sent Nathan to David. And he came to him, and said to him: 'There were two men in one city, one rich and the other poor. The rich man had exceedingly many flocks and herds. But the poor man had nothing, except one little ewe lamb which he had bought and nourished; and it grew up together with him and with his children. It ate of his own food and drank from his own cup and lay in his bosom; and it was like a daughter to him. And a traveler came to the rich man, who refused to take from his own

flock and from his own herd to prepare one for the wayfaring man who had come to him; but he took the poor man's lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him.' So David's anger was greatly aroused against the man, and he said to Nathan, 'As the Lord lives, the man who has done this shall surely die! Then Nathan said to David, 'You are the man! ... So David said to Nathan, 'I have sinned against the Lord.' " (2 Samuel 12:1-7,13)

The Holy Spirit crashed in and brought his hidden baggage to the surface and David responded, "I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,' and You forgave the iniquity of my sin (*Psalm 32:5*)."

God forgave him, but there were consequences that David could not avoid. There are some consequences that repentance cannot change. The Holy Spirit comes to you today to tell you to open your bag. Expose the things lurking in the shadows because sooner or later they will come out and you will face the consequences.

If David knew that one day he would commit adultery and then kill the woman's husband to hide his sin, he would have opened the bag up sooner and begun to deal with the hidden lust. If you knew the result of the things you hide in your heart, the cost of your hidden sins, the potential consequences you will have to live with, you would open up your life and allow the Holy Spirit to deal with those things now. You would allow Him to step in and acknowledge His power to cleanse, His compassion to make you face the hidden things and His grace to help you change.

Have the faith to empty your baggage.

In John 4, Jesus encountered a woman with a lot of baggage. As she was going through her daily activities, He confronted her hidden baggage and brought it to the surface. How did she respond? Did she try to hide her baggage? Deny the truth? “You’ve got it all wrong, Jesus. Yes, I did have five husbands, but one of them left me and one of them was a bad husband and so I was right to leave him. And you really can’t count number three as a real husband because...”

She opened up her baggage and gave it all to Jesus, “Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?” She believed that this was the Christ, the Messiah, the one spoken of in Isaiah 61 and Luke 4. She believed that He had come with an anointing to proclaim liberty to the oppressed and heal the brokenhearted. She had faith He could unpack the hidden things from her baggage and responded with an expectation that He would do all He said.

The Holy Spirit first deals with you through personal words and situations. He very patiently exposes your baggage so it can be removed. If you persistently resist His dealings, He will use circumstances to reveal and expose these things in your life so you have to face them. Finally, if like David you refuse to listen, He will use a person to come and expose your baggage publicly. He does not expose out of a desire to punish but from a heart of love to expose and restore.

Think About It

What things do you have hidden in your baggage?

How have you limited Jesus' emptying your baggage?

What are you going to do now?



Chapter 5

Having Faith to Empty Your Baggage

Have you ever tried to find something in your suitcase? You don't want to unpack everything so you lift your sweaters and slide your hand around looking for those traveler's checks. Not there. So you end up taking everything out, feel through every pocket, look into every corner, trying to find them. Twenty minutes later the suitcase is in total disarray, your clothes are a mess and you still haven't found what you're looking for. That's not how Jesus works. He knows exactly what is there and where it is and goes precisely to the right place, separates out the side issues and removes that one issue He is focused on.

Are you aware of what's going on inside of you or do you not like to talk about it? Are you uncomfortable when a conversation shifts to a topic that you're struggling with inside? Do you engage in camouflage instead of honesty? Do you pretend to be more spiritually healthy than you really are? Do you avoid subjects that put you in touch with unpleasant emotions?

Most of us know things about ourselves that no one else knows or would even guess—thoughts, fantasies, things we

do in private, our secrets. We hide things that we shouldn't have, things we shouldn't keep, things that we should never have buried. We know something is wrong but we have become a great society of pretenders. We know how to act the part while keeping people at arm's length. We know how to turn people away from a conversation if it starts creeping too close to our sensitive issues. We know how to get out of those conversations, but we still feel the baggage of guilt.

Jesus cleans the inside of our lives.

Matthew 23:25-26

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also."

We like to clean the outside of our lives. We're very concerned about how other people view us, but it's the inside of our lives that Jesus wants to work on. We want to keep Jesus on the outside of the cup looking at how nice everything is instead of letting him in to see what's really inside our lives.

Hebrews 4:12-13

"For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit,

and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account."

God's scalpel is sharp, sharp enough to divide soul and spirit, joint and marrow. He knows exactly where to cut and how deep to cut. He can separate out the thoughts and intentions of our heart. Those things that we think nobody but us knows? He's right on top of them, separating what we really feel from what we portray, separating the appearance on the outside from the reality on the inside.

"All things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account." You can't dress things up and hide them. You can't conceal the bad underneath a veneer of good. You can't cover it up with your personality. Jesus knows exactly what is there and where it is. He knows exactly what is in your baggage and how to get right to it.

Do you ignore the inward ache and corruption?

Some people have learned how to successfully ignore what is going on inside. They put off the reality of dealing with problems. But ignoring something does not make it disappear. Ignoring an issue doesn't make it better. It only buys you time until you choose to deal with it or are forced to deal with it.

The problem with ignoring things is they only get worse. I tried ignoring my knee when it was causing problems. I would take some Advil and favor that knee when I walked. It didn't

get better though; it got worse. It took more Advil for it to stop hurting and I had to take them more frequently. All ignoring my knee problems did was postpone the inevitable. Only when I allowed the doctor to use the scalpel did the problem get fixed.

Are you overcome with the awareness that something is wrong?

Some people are gripped by the awareness that something is terribly wrong inside them but they don't quite know how to fix it. They are finding it more and more difficult to drag the internal baggage through life. They don't want to admit it to anyone because they are afraid of what people would think. "If they knew I struggled with this, I couldn't be a small group leader, I couldn't be a worship leader, people wouldn't respect me."

They use the Adam and Eve method of dealing with things. Adam and Eve knew that something was drastically wrong after they sinned. They were naked and felt the shame and guilt but instead of allowing God to deal with it, they tried to deal with it. They used man's method – cover things up and hide.

That doesn't work long term. Leaves dry up and expose the things hidden behind them. And remember, you're playing hide and seek with a God who is present everywhere and knows everything. You can't win at that game!

Paul said, "I'm the chief of all sinners." (1 Timothy 1:15) Nobody is as good as we think they are. We are all sinners. Except by the grace of God, we would be a lot worse off but Jesus helps us and gives us the ability to change.

Do you deal with what you can handle and ignore the rest?

At least these people are trying. They deal with some things, but then they ignore everything else. They only deal with the one thing and pretend that fixes everything. It's great you're dealing with that one thing, as long as you go on to deal with the next one and the next one. If you have 26 things wrong and stop after dealing with one, you have a bigger problem. But if you continue dealing with problem number two and then number three and number four and on and on, you're on the right track. Jesus doesn't want you to deal with just one thing. He wants you to deal with that issue, resolve it and go on. Don't stop.

Do you courageously face everything that is in your bag?

This is what Jesus wants for each one of us. He wants us to courageously face everything, every issue, every hurt, every problem, every sin. How can I do that? Have faith in the real Jesus and the real Holy Spirit and the real Word of God. Know that Christ can do anything with your life, so you can confidently face whatever is in your bag.

What's in your bag?

Just a reminder of some of the things we have talked about.

- A deep wound that has never been healed
- A broken heart

- A ruined relationship
- A hidden moral mistake
- A character flaw
- An addiction
- Uncontrolled anger
- An unwanted pregnancy
- A critical spirit
- Feeling unloved
- Overly dependent on others
- Unforgiveness
- Unbearable emptiness
- Uncontrolled thought life
- Nagging guilt and shame
- Confused sexuality
- Unstable emotions
- Rejection

Jesus can handle your baggage.

You can be overwhelmed by your baggage, but take courage. It is never overwhelming to Jesus. He can handle anything that is in your baggage. He won't be shocked by it. He won't love you any less. And He can take care of those things. He can bring healing to emotions, victory over addictions, and forgiveness for sins.

Have faith to empty your bag.

Your story can be overwhelming. Your feelings of rejection or broken heartedness can be so deep that it seems hopeless.

“I was rejected by my parents, by my step-parents, molested by my step-father, rejected in the foster home.” Your life can be one of unbelievable heartache and suffering. But you have to look beyond that to see who Jesus really is. “Jesus, I have this deep root in me of rejection, of bitterness, of unforgiveness, but I believe that if You come into my life You can tear down the walls. You can help me. I’m going to depend on You. I’m going to start praying, journaling, and getting counsel. Jesus, You and me are going to fix this.”

If you pray this, Jesus will partner with you, walk through this with you and get you involved with the right people to help you. The Holy Spirit would reveal things in your life and through worship and the presence of God you will find hope and begin to walk out of that rejection. It has to start somewhere. It can start today. Have great faith that God and you can empty your bag.

God desires to remove our baggage of guilt.

Sometimes we carry a baggage load of guilt. Guilt is a consequence of sin. The Hebrew concept of guilt reflects a state of being and not a feeling. Guilt is the result of breaking the law of God. When we disobey God, we are guilty in the court of divine law. Our mind and emotions can justify what we have done, but our spirit is grieved and knows that we are not in right standing with God.

True guilt can come from refusing to deal with our own sinful actions, trying to cover our sin like David did and pretend we did nothing wrong. Guilt can come from the awareness of the

wrong we have done to others.

Feelings of guilt can also arise from our not knowing how to handle our baggage. We know something is wrong in our life but we don't know how to handle it or what to do about it. Sometimes we know what to do but the idea of actually dealing with those things can be so overwhelming we are afraid to try.

Guilt makes a person depressed.

Guilt drains us of our emotional energy and ultimately produces emotional depression. It controls our thoughts and plagues us until our spirit is broken down and unable to hope. Proverbs 17:22 says that a broken spirit dries the bones. It dries up every bit of life in us until we become brittle and without strength.

In contrast, David rejoices in Psalm 32:1-4 "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit. When I kept silent, my bones grew old through my groaning all the day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was turned into the drought of summer."

Guilt makes a person defensive.

When we feel guilty, we try to justify our wrong behavior. We argue why we are right and everyone else is wrong. Proverbs 21:2 says, "Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, But the Lord weighs the hearts." (See also Proverbs 17:15; Luke 10:29)

Guilt makes a person judgmental.

A person who is guilty is quick to point out similar weaknesses in others. If you can make someone else look bad, then you look better. “Maybe I took a candy bar from the store but that person took the safe.” Does that make you feel better? The problem is that stealing is stealing. Sin is sin. There are no gradations of sin with God. Romans 2:1-3 declares, “Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things. And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God?”

Guilt makes a person angry.

A person who feels guilty usually focuses that guilt in anger against other people. It makes them feel better to take out their frustration on someone else. A guilty person is easily offended so they attack quickly and angrily at the most innocent comment. Proverbs 12:16 says, “A fool’s wrath is known at once, but a prudent man covers shame.” Ephesians 4:31 says, “Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice.”

Guilt makes a person fearful.

Guilt produces many fears, such as the fear of being found out. If someone has a secret they are hiding, they live in

constant fear and anxiety (*Proverbs 10:24*). They feel as if their secret is so obvious everyone must know. Their sin must be branded on their faces for everyone to see. They live in fear of God's judgment, always expecting that divine baseball bat to come swinging down on them. Christ's heart for us is for us to live in peace, at peace with him, at peace with others and at peace with ourselves. In John 14:27 He said, "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."

Guilt makes a person blame everyone.

It's always someone else's fault. It started in Genesis with Adam saying, "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree and I ate (*Genesis 3:12-13*)."

Eve quickly jumped in and blamed the snake. It wasn't her fault; it was the devil's.

John Killinger tells about the manager of a minor league baseball team who was so disgusted with his center fielder's performance that he ordered him to the dugout and assumed the position himself. The first ball that came into center field took a bad hop and hit the manager in the mouth. The next one was a high fly ball, which he lost in the glare of the sun—until it bounced off his forehead. The third was a hard line drive that he charged with outstretched arms; unfortunately, it flew between his hands and smacked his eye. Furious, he ran back to the dugout, grabbed the center fielder by the uniform, and shouted, "You idiot! You've got center field so messed up that

even I can't do a thing with it!"²

Guilt makes a person insensitive.

Guilty people are hypersensitive to how other people relate to them and easily offended by the slightest intimation of their own guilt. However they are insensitive to others. A guilty person is self-centered and everything revolves around them.

Think About It

Are you carrying a bag of guilt over past sins?

What are the past sins you are holding on to?

How is guilt affecting your life?

How would you feel if you let it go and moved on with your life without it?



Chapter 6

The God Who Is Full of Second Chances

We receive and live by the grace of God. We can do nothing to earn His grace. There is no reason God should bestow His divine favor upon us. There is no reason why He should forgive all we have done. He should make us pay for our sin. Instead He pours out a grace so unbelievable that it changes our lives. The one who accepts God's grace accepts God's forgiveness that transforms their life forever. We become the forgiven.

We receive the grace of God.

It's hard to receive God's grace. We feel we should pay for what we have done. We can't seem to let go of our sin, but we allow the burden of our guilt and shame to push us down. It can't be that easy to receive forgiveness, but it is. That's the beginning of an unbelievable life called grace. God doesn't give us what we deserve.

What do we deserve? Romans 6:23 says, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life." The wages of sin is death. That means physical death, spiritual death, and eternal death. That is the result of sin, but the gift of God is

eternal life.

We deserve death, but instead of giving us what we deserve, God gives us the gift of life. When God looks into your bag, He doesn't say, "I didn't realize this was in your life. I didn't know you did that. You're going to pay for that one! Look at that piece. I've been waiting for you to confess this one so I can use my divine heavenly baseball bat to beat that sin out of you." Wouldn't that be horrible? You'd lock the bag and send it away with someone else's name on it so it can't come back. You would never open your bag, never confess anything, and never try to deal with anything.

There are consequences to our sin, to our wrong decisions, to our wrong attitudes. Psalm 103:10 says, "He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities." We deserve to live with the consequences of our failures, our bad decisions, our hard heartedness, and our sinful behavior. We deserve the consequences of the wrath and judgment of God. We deserve life to crash down on us. We deserve something to break on us. That's what we deserve, but that's not what we get.

We receive the love of God.

Even when we are guilty, He loves us. Even though we deserve judgment, He died for us. John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." It doesn't matter what we have done. God loves us. In Romans 5:8, Paul makes one of the most profound

and amazing statements: “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

As a wealthy woman toured an artist’s studio, she accidentally spilled a blot of ink on her expensive handkerchief. Frustrated with her foolish mistake and the cost of replacing it, she tossed it in the trash. The artist stopped her. “Wait. Let me have it.” He took that ruined handkerchief and began to paint on it. Using that ugly blot as his centerpiece, he created a unique and beautiful design. What was once ruined was now a treasured work of beauty.

In the same way, God covers our ugliness, our sin, and our guilt with his love, creating a masterpiece of beauty from our ruined lives. Whatever your need is today, whatever the loss might be in your life or the failures you need to let go of, there is grace for you.

We receive the provision of God.

Romans 4:5 says, “But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness.” The ground of our justification is God’s act of redemption in Jesus Christ.

God has provided the most awesome and precious gift ever. He provided Christ as the only and the complete provision for our sin. “For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time (*1 Timothy 2:5-6*).” There is nothing we can do to take away our guilt. There is nothing we

can do to pay for our sin. As the old hymn says, “Mercy there was great and grace was free. Pardon there was multiplied to me. There my burdened soul found liberty—at Calvary!”

We must reach out with faith and receive Christ, turning from our sin and turning to Christ. This is an act of the will strengthened by the Holy Spirit that causes a movement of our whole life away from sin and toward God.

Romans 10:4-10 declares, “For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. For Moses writes about the righteousness which is of the law, ‘The man who does those things shall live by them.’ But the righteousness of faith speaks in this way, ‘Do not say in your heart, “Who will ascend into heaven?”’ (that is, to bring Christ down from above) or, “Who will descend into the abyss?”’ (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).’ But what does it say? ‘The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart’ (that is, the word of faith which we preach): that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.”

We receive Christ personally.

Going to church isn’t enough. Doing good works isn’t enough. Being raised in a Christian family isn’t enough. None of these things can remove your sin and guilt. “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone

should boast (*Ephesians 2:8-9*).” It’s a gift. It is because of God’s grace. It is nothing that you earn or nothing that you deserve.

You must personally, by faith, experience Christ for yourself. In Revelation 3:20, Jesus says, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.” You have to open the door. You can’t wait for your father or your mother or your pastor or your spouse. You have to open it. You have to invite Christ to come in.

When you receive Christ, you can have confidence that God’s forgiveness is complete. He forgives totally. He doesn’t keep a list to pull out and flash in your face when you fall. He forgives utterly. He doesn’t choose some sins to forgive and some not to forgive. He forgives all of your sin. He forgives irrevocably. He doesn’t change His mind. Meditate on these two amazing scriptures:

Jeremiah 31:34

“I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more!” Never again! He has forgotten your sins and will never hold them against you.”

Psalms 103:12 declares, “As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.” You can go north and eventually you will begin going south. North and south meet at the north pole and the south pole. But where do east and west meet? If you go east long enough will you

eventually be going west? That is how far He has removed our sins from us.

God's forgiveness is in Christ. He forgives us through Christ who died for our sins. Ephesians 1:7-8 states, "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that He lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding." In Christ—what does that mean? Put a piece of paper between the pages of a book and then close it. Whatever happens to the book, happens to the paper. If you throw the book away, you throw the paper away. If you put the book in a safe place, you safeguard the paper. If the paper is dirty and spotted, you don't see the dirt at all—you only see the book. The same is true of our position in Christ. When God looks on us, He sees us just as clean and pure as Jesus Christ Himself.

1 Peter 1:3

"By His great mercy we have been born again to a living hope through His resurrection...has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus."

We receive God's mercy of second chances.

God is a God of the second chance. He doesn't allow us one mistake and then throw the book at us. He doesn't count our sins and when we hit a certain number stop forgiving us. He is a merciful God. Mercy is God reaching out to help us and give us what is needed because he has such great compassion for

us.

Do we deserve a second chance or a third chance or a fourth or fifth? No! But God doesn't count second chances. He is merciful. He is full of mercy, full of compassion and full of grace. His supply of second chances for us is inexhaustible.

Mercy is unexpected and undeserved by the recipient. There is no buying of mercy, no earning of mercy and no deserving of mercy. Mercy is when someone who is in the position of a helper and doer shows mercy unconditionally without need of payment. Psalms 41:4 is our prayer: "I said, 'Lord, be merciful to me; Heal my soul, for I have sinned against You.'" Psalms 86:5 promises, "You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive, and abundant in mercy to all those who call upon You." God is full of mercy. He doesn't run out of mercy.

The Prodigal Son received a second chance.

The word prodigal means a waster, a person who wastes his life, his strength, health, morals, mind, body, destiny, dreams, visions, gifts, ministry, or influence. Seeing a prodigal person, someone who has wasted everything, is so sad and unbelievable.

Do you remember the story of the prodigal son? As he was sleeping in the mud of the pigpen and fighting the pigs for a few scraps of food, he said, "I did this to myself. I left my father's house. I squandered his money. I've slept with harlots. I ruined his name. Now I'm starving to death. I have nothing. I'm going to die out here. Even my father's servants are better off than I am. The lowest paid person at my father's estate is

better off than I am. I'm just going to go home and be a slave in my father's house." He practiced that speech all the way home.

That's what guilty people do. They keep going over and over and over and over and over and over what they have done. He practiced his speech, "Father, I have sinned and I've done these grave things, and so I'll immediately humble myself. I don't expect a job. I don't expect anything. If you'll just let me sleep in the shed and just eat a little bit of corn that will be fine with me."

As the son rounded the last bend in the road leading up to his father's house, he looked up to see his father running towards him. What was going through the son's mind? What was he thinking? "I've never seen him run like that. Get ready. Brace yourself. He must be pretty steamed. I hope he lets me at least ask his forgiveness before he chases me away."

Before the words get out of his mouth, his father has grabbed him and his hugging him, stinking and muddy clothes and all. He kept trying to explain, "Dad, I need to tell you something." But his father wasn't listening. Instead he was yelling out to the servants who had followed him down the road and to the neighbors who had come out to see what was going on. "Look! It's my son! We thought he was dead but he's alive! Get the calf we've been fattening up for the holidays. Get him one of my robes. Put some shoes on his feet. Let's party! He's home!"

"But dad, I don't deserve this. Just let me be one of your servants and I'll be happy, even though I don't deserve that either."

"Nonsense!" the father cried. "You're home. You're forgiven.

You're restored. I'm not going to give you what you deserve. I'm going to give you what I want to give you from my father's heart."

God has a father's heart for you.

You don't get what you deserve; you get what the Father wants you to have. He wants you to have forgiveness, freedom, cleansing, love, and acceptance. Right now, open up your bag and hold it up to God. Allow the Holy Spirit to empty it out for you. You don't face that baggage alone. Your Father stands side by side with you as you open up each piece of baggage. Each emotional hurt, each physical disability, each sin, each guilt—He is there as you empty each one out. You don't have to open your baggage alone. The Holy Spirit, the Comforter and Counselor, is there with you to provide the grace you need.

As you face your baggage, repent of anything that you need to repent of. Confess your sin and know that the God of second chances is there to offer complete forgiveness and cleansing. He will restore you and give you fresh life and fresh hope in Him. You may feel like the prodigal son with a wasted life, but your Father is running out to meet you with wide open arms. He is welcoming you back, not as a servant, but as a beloved child whom He has missed and longed for.

Receive His love, throw yourself into His loving arms of grace and forgiveness. Today His anointing is here. Today is the day that He is acting in your life. Today is a new day in Him. Hebrews 4:16 says, Let us therefore come boldly to the

throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

There is hope for your life.

Hope is imagining. Hope is at the door whenever we see beyond what exists to what can be. When we see within what is the potential for what can be, we do not have to see it all, nor need we see it in fine detail, but we need to see enough to convince us that what we imagine is what, in the deepest part of our hearts, we truly want. Hope comes alive with a birth of faith and stays alive as long as we keep believing. We hope only for what we believe is possible. Hope quietly reminds us that there is a faint possibility of a comeback. Hope looks at the grim situation and says, “It might work.” Hope keeps saying, “It is possible” and reaches out to the God of hope and says, “Yes! Yes, I can leave this baggage behind. Yes, there is life for me beyond where I have been. Yes, there is hope for me and my future.”

Prayer of release

Father God, right now in the name of Jesus, let the blood of Jesus be shed abroad in the hearts of your people. Help them to take the first step in opening up their baggage. Help them to release the hurts and woundings of the past. Help them to have faith in You. As they respond to Your Holy Spirit, bring freedom and release. Bring them into a new place in You.

Think About It

Do you have a friend or family member who accepts you despite your past mistakes and sins? How does that make you feel?

Do you believe God can look into the deepest hidden pockets of your baggage and still love you? Will you accept His mercy by letting go of your baggage? Write down your personal prayer of release, repeat it, and believe it.



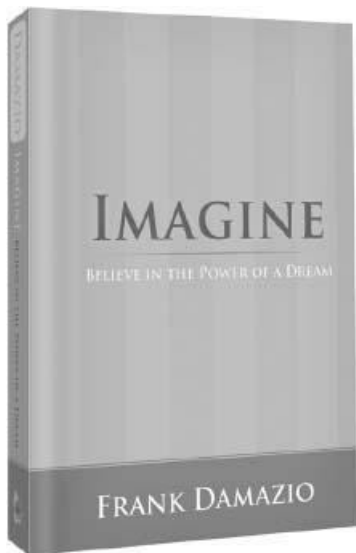
Endnotes

¹ Robert Andrews, Mary Biggs and Michael Seidel, *et al.* “The Columbia World of Quotations”. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996. www.bartleby.com/66/). November 13, 2006.

² Galaxie Software. 10,000 Sermon Illustrations. Biblical Studies Press, 2002.



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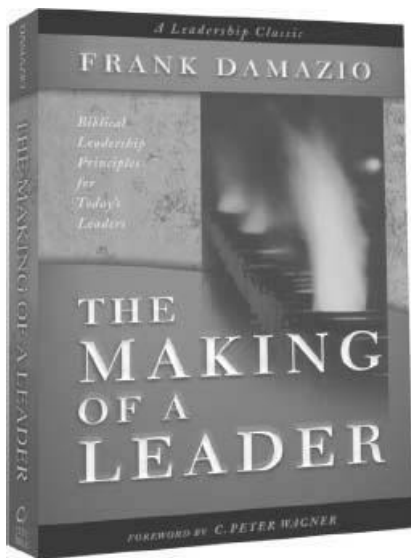
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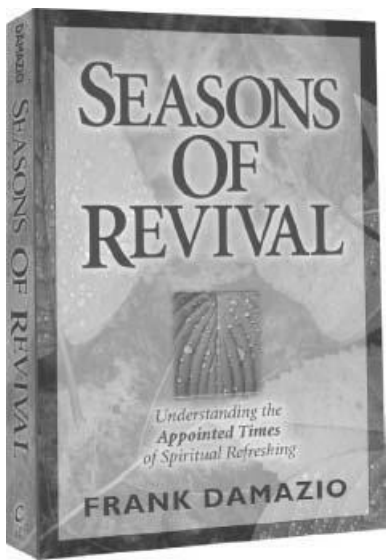
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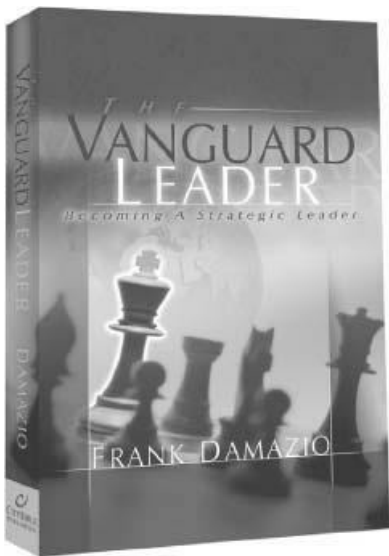
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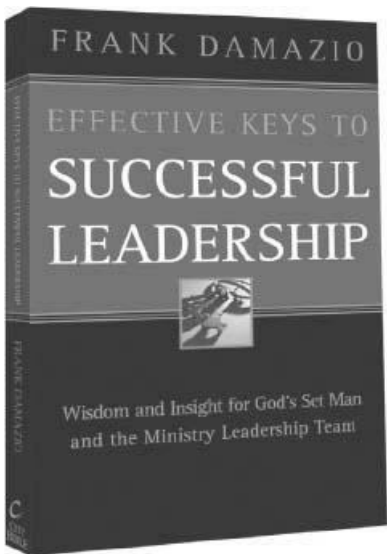
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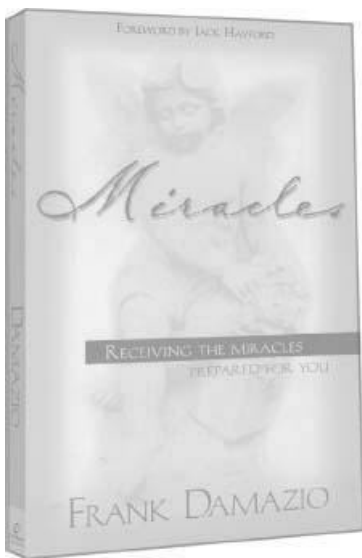
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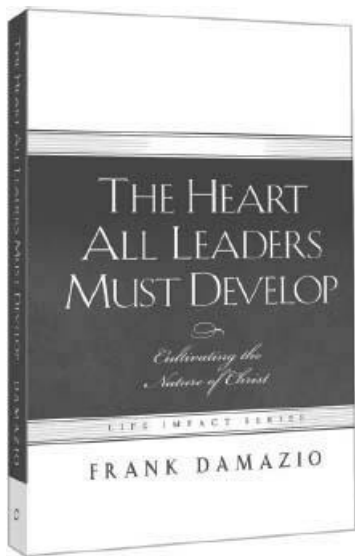
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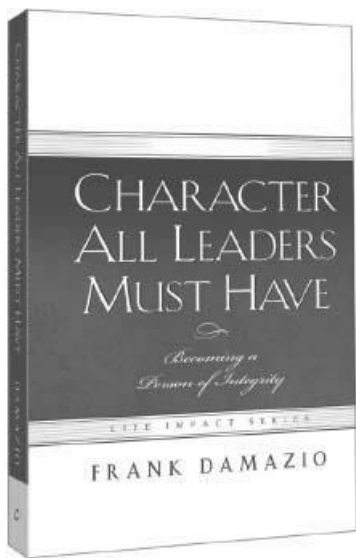
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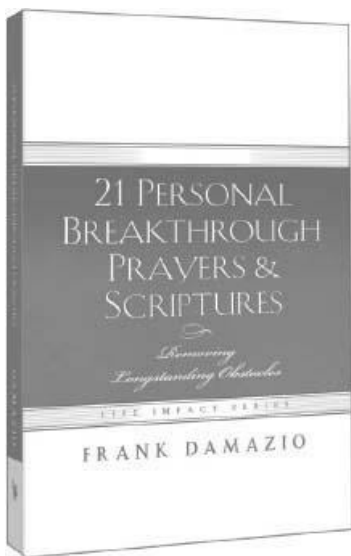
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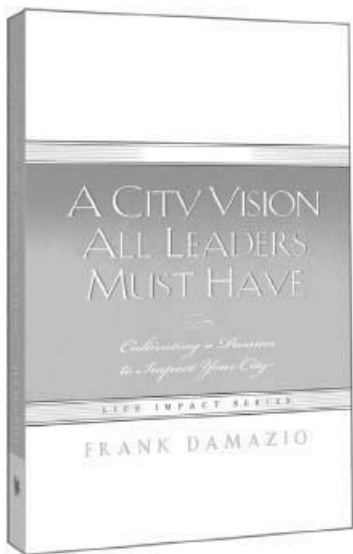
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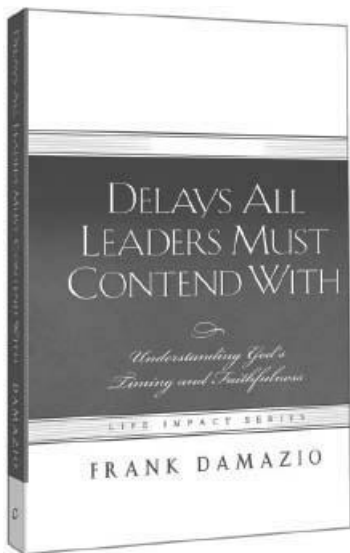
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