

Introduction

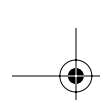
One year when I was in high school, my friend Dan bamboozled me into going to Ocean City, New Jersey, for a spring-break week of fun and sun on the beach. What I didn't know was that each evening there would be speakers who would challenge us to commit our lives to God. Midweek, Jay Kesler spoke. He was the president of the trip's sponsoring organization, and his challenge to come home to God moved me deeply.

I will never forget the soul struggle I engaged in that night. I knew if I returned home a Christian believer to my highly educated family, which was sometimes quite hostile toward simple faith, I would not get a warm reception. But at three in the morning I came to the end of my struggle and met my God face to face. My life has never been the same.

The next afternoon I joined others to hear my group leader talk with some two hundred folk hanging out on the beach about how to begin a relationship with God. In the middle of his presentation, he crooked his finger and beckoned me over. I didn't want to go. But I did. When I got to where he was standing, he thrust his microphone in my hand and invited me to tell what God had just done in my life. Haltingly, even incoherently, I began to speak.

After a few minutes, our leader invited all who had decided to become a Christ follower that week to join him in the surf. He baptized





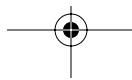
forty of us that afternoon, amidst the turbulent ocean waves.

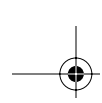
What a beginning!

Later in college I got “the rest of the story,” as Paul Harvey likes to say. I learned what it means to follow God. I grew through studying the Scriptures, praying daily, having fellowship with other people of faith and sharing my experience with people still outside God’s family. Those were good times of growth. It was as if God had an umbrella over my head or a spiritual Teflon coating around my life. I failed often but was so full of enthusiasm that it didn’t seem to matter. Only later did the cracks in my soul begin to appear, and widen, and sometimes split open, revealing seething emotions and a confused heart.

The crisis crystallized in my thirtieth year. I had just moved to Chicago with my wife and our two-year-old. I felt stressed and lonely. Nobody knew my name or cared about my work. I became driven to turn things around, to please authority figures and to become known. I was living in an anxious workaholism. My wife and I began to feel less close to each other, and we drifted toward the edge of danger in relationships outside our marriage. I was lonely but was away too often to feel connected to her. She was lonely but too hurt to seek comfort from me. At night I was haunted by recurring dreams filled with images of tornadoes out of control, crashing waves, violent men.

Seeking help, my wife and I joined a small group and began to pursue the soul’s journey toward healing. We had three mentors in our group. Our first mentor, C. S. Lewis, taught us through his writings to understand our true self, our true identity in Christ. Our second mentor, Leanne Payne, leader of a prayer ministry and author of a number of books, was teaching us about the presence and power of God with us to save and to heal. And we were seeing the life of our third mentor, Jesus, with new eyes, realizing that because the kingdom or rule of God had come in his life and ministry, we didn’t need





to be trapped in self-destructive patterns. Jesus set so many people free when he walked the earth. He is a master in the art of healing the soul and the body.

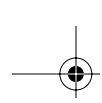
One night as I went to bed I was troubled by a mental image of a man I had known years earlier. In my mind's eye he was coming at me with a knife. The image was so powerful that I tossed and turned for several hours before being able to fall asleep. When I awoke, the image returned with a haunting reality. I told no one.

Later that day I met with William, my prayer companion from the small group. As soon as we began to pray, he looked up and in a quiet voice reported that he was seeing a man coming at me with a dagger. He asked if that image meant anything to me. I related my experience of the night before and told him about my long-ago relationship with this man. In his understated way, William remarked, "Maybe God wants us to pray about that relationship."

That prayer session began a profound healing process in my masculinity and my relationships, especially with men. I experienced the healing touch of God and the blazing light of his wisdom. I invited Jesus into my heart and my imagination in ways that touched and transformed me at the core of who I was. That prayer time was such a turning point that I will return to it several times in the pages to come. Suffice it to say now that I came into touch with some divine resources for soul healing that I had never before experienced.

For a number of years I have worked with college students and people in their twenties. Many of them are trapped in hidden temptations, addictions, negative emotions, self-centeredness and sin. Their study of Scripture, their prayers and all their attempts to psyche themselves up to do right don't seem to be working. Alcohol, addictive sexual experiences or dependent relationships trap them, or they are fighting a losing battle with depression or self-hatred or hopelessness or anxiety or fear. And they aren't finding much help





anywhere. Struggles like theirs are increasing as families break down and society gropes for a moral foundation. The need for healing has never been more urgent.

Look around you. How many trapped and hurting souls do you know? How helpless have you felt as people confess their pain and brokenness, looking for some help or relief? How helpless have you felt when you've needed a touch from God in your own life?

This book is about the soul's true journey into healing. We can enter into and experience Jesus' ministry of healing and transforming souls. Do you want to join me on this journey? Let us walk a while together.

A word on how to use this book: You can work through it on your own. But your experience will be even more profound and powerful if you take this journey in a small group or with another person. The end of each chapter provides discussion questions and a simple healing prayer to use personally or with others

May God guide and bless our journey together into healing.

