

PART ONE
CONTEMPLATORS

YOU ARE WORTH FIGHTING FOR; YOU NEED TO BELIEVE THAT!
Giving up—not crossing your bridge—is *not* an option. Someone needs you whether you realize that right now or not. Maybe you feel like you are running out of patience or time trying to figure out why you are alive, but rest assured—you have a purpose for being here.

Maybe you're trying to convince yourself that you will not be missed. That is simply not true. *You would be greatly missed by everyone you left behind.* Do not listen to the words you hear or the thoughts that are trying to rob you of the life you're meant to live. Don't cave in to your feelings of fear, doubt, and worry. Instead, put on your boxing gloves and step into the ring. Fight like you've never fought before. *Fight for what has yet to be in your life. There's so much more in store for you.* You have been uniquely designed and chosen to do things that only you can do. People have shared story after story with us of how—because they held on even a little bit longer and kept walking—they not only found their purpose but also found amazing people who supported them along their journey. They went from “futile” to “fuller,” and not only crossed their bridge but also kept going way beyond their original destination.

CROSSING THAT BRIDGE

You have a special gift to offer this world. And most likely the battle you're now engaged in will be your testimony and living proof to someone else who may be having the same thoughts you currently are. Christine's mother fought suicide more than 25 years ago. She had been battling severe depression and had even written a suicide note that she tucked into one of her dresser drawers. Christine and her mother were close—the best of friends! She never imagined her mother was suffering in such darkness that she would contemplate suicide. Christine's mother made the decision to fight hard and live, because more than anything else, including suicide, she wanted to be there for Christine and her sister. Her mother got the help she needed, was properly diagnosed, and made sure she welcomed people into her life, regardless of whether she felt like it or not. Today, Christine's mother is alive and well and loving her life. Christine couldn't have said it better: "She is a wonderful woman who has added so much beauty to so many people in ways only she could. She is loved beyond measure, and her purpose for being here is too much to mention on these few pages. Thank you, Mom, for holding on!"

Christine's stepchildren will never have that opportunity, because their mother did complete suicide. Their story would be so different today if she was present in their lives. There would have been more chapters to share in their journey, and more memories for them to experience together. Instead they are left forever longing to hug their mother one last time. Christine has experienced both sides of the story—the one that ends mournfully and the one that provides decades more of rejoicing and happiness.

Please seek help, and reach out to others who want to pull you out of your quicksand. Make the choice to keep breathing every breath you are purposed to breathe. You have a bridge to cross, and you'll find so much more than you ever envisioned once you reach the other side.

CHAPTER ONE

CONTEMPLATOR STORIES

Holli's Story

HOLLI'S SUICIDE ATTEMPT WAS A RESULT OF DEPRESSION. At an early age, she had been raped and sexually abused. As a result, she began to fear people—she trusted no one and felt as though she just didn't belong. When stress and life changes became too much, she turned to alcohol—what she referred to at the time as her “best friend.” As bad and depressing as times were, she needed to restart her life with her son, and so she moved closer to her parents. Becoming increasingly weary of trying to combat the hardship of reality on life's terms, Holli began to feel like a loser and that her faith had disappeared. She believed that being in bondage to alcohol was her curse—it was telling her she would never become anything and that her son would be better off without her.

Holli came to the tragic conclusion that she did not want to wake up another day. She was living in hidden depression that she could not understand. She decided to have a couple drinks and polish off a bottle of prescription medication. Holli put her young son to sleep and began weeping and pleading with God, “Take me, please!” Six hours later she woke up in an emergency room. She didn't even remember wrecking her car. After leaving the hospital, she pleaded with authorities to have an officer drive her back to her house to verify the status of her son. He was

CROSSING THAT BRIDGE

“lying there untouched, like an angel.” Holli swore right then and there that she was going to do whatever it took to get well, and she entered a treatment facility to begin her journey to wellness.

Holli told us that she has experienced hundreds of miracles since that dreadful night, including her own. She had driven over a 400-foot bridge that night following her drug and alcohol intake, wedging her car (face down) between the bridge and the water. A minister and his family happened to see headlights beaming into the lake from the bridge and wondered how that was possible. Today, Holli has committed her life to walking in the blessing of being alive and being a blessing to those who need help. Her new life mission is: “Through service to others.” She told us, “It’s about the journey—every person has his or her own experience—but it doesn’t have to be alone and there is help for those who truly desire it.”



Ann's Story

ANN'S PILGRIMAGE ENCOMPASSED A WEALTH OF TRAUMATIC circumstances of abuse, abandonment, foster home environments, worthlessness, rejection, expectations, self-doubt, and discouragements of all kinds—all culminating on the day in her late teens that she found her father's lifeless body following his suicide. “The picture is permanently burned into my brain. It sickens me to think that he felt like he had no other option than to end his life.” She told us the hardest thing she ever had to do was to stand in the viewing room of the funeral home and say goodbye to her father. “Sometimes to this day I feel I made him make that awful decision.”

As Ann's life progressed, she was blessed with a loving husband and two daughters. Over the years their lives became more challenging as they moved several times due to job relocations and had to deal with physical ailments. Ann began having seizures, causing her to once again feel that she

CONTEMPLATOR STORIES

was cursed in some way. “I drove down the interstate looking at the barriers, overpasses, hills, and valleys. I felt like a loser. Maybe my daddy was right: if you feel you aren’t good enough, just check out. I thought about driving into one of those barriers. My children would probably be better off with a ‘normal’ mom.” Right then and there, Ann heard a still, strong voice saying, “*You should never give up. You are normal. You are loved.*”

Ann began working with a professional counselor. Talking about her past relationships, family, and feelings of anxiety helped her feel much better about the swirl of her life. She became focused more than ever on her two daughters, wanting to bring the best of everything into their lives. “I didn’t want them to think that they weren’t good enough.”

The best part of Ann’s story is how she faced discouragement: “There is always going to be sickness. There is always going to be turmoil in relationships, family, and friends. There are always going to be times when you feel like you are not good enough. You can’t change your past or change other people. When I start feeling worthless, have self-doubt, or feel like a failure, I pray. I talk to other people and tell them I’m in a dark place and need prayers. I know God hears me and I know He will always be there even when things don’t go as planned. And whenever I feel down, I tell myself not only am I good enough, in God’s eyes I am perfect.”



Luke’s Story

LUKE’S STORY BEGAN IN EIGHTH GRADE AS HE WAS TESTING FOR admission to St. Xavier, a suburban private high school in Cincinnati, Ohio. When his classmates learned of his desire to attend a different school than the rest of them, they began to bully him. Berated with attacks like, “You think you’re too good for us,” Luke soon felt ostracized from his peers. He remembers days when the only people who would speak to him were the teachers. Internalizing these feelings of low self-

CROSSING THAT BRIDGE

worth, he became convinced that there was little reason anyone should like him. Feeling trapped and certain that nothing would ever get better, he soon lost his desire to live.

One night he found the courage to share his doubts with his parents. They immediately sought help from the school psychologist. However, knowing that his classmates saw where he was going, Luke's feelings of relief soon turned to paralyzing shame. After his first session, Luke acted like everything was fine, but in reality, he continued to internalize his feelings.

The summer before high school, Luke joined the track team. Finally feeling accepted, and included, he found confidence in his new friends. Things took a sharp turn at the beginning of his sophomore year, however. Already feeling behind, he began his coursework worried that he had not retained enough from the previous year. His fears were realized when the results of his first exams revealed failing grades. He thought that if his classmates knew he was struggling, they would begin to think of him as weak and reject him just as his peers did in eighth grade. Afraid and unwilling to ask for help, Luke's self-esteem plummeted. He felt that if he was failing at this one thing, then he must be a complete failure as a person.

At the same time, Luke was trying to come to terms with his own sexuality. Negative thoughts began to consume him. "Why am I even here if no one is going to accept me?" Luke did not want to live anymore and started making a plan to end his life.

One day while the family was out, he wrote a note, cleaned up his room, and proceeded to the family's backyard with the intent to take his life. "I felt completely trapped in my own mind." After putting the gun in his mouth, a flood of emotion overcame him. Finally he was able to see the reality of his situation. In that moment, he could think clearly about his family who loved him unconditionally and his friends who would support him through anything. He dropped the gun and called his parents to tell them what was going on and that he needed help.

CONTEMPLATOR STORIES

In the ambulance, Luke realized how easy it was to ask for help and how willing people were to listen. Today, he speaks about suicide, letting people know that *talking* is the key to surviving. “If you can give somebody hope, it’s an amazing gift.”

CHAPTER TWO
HELP AND HOPE FOR
CONTEMPLATORS

MITCH REMEMBERS ANSWERING THE PHONE ON HIS SHIFT AS A counselor on a suicide help line. The person on the other end of the line spoke in a distraught tone, “I just want to die.”

“No, you don’t,” Mitch replied. He was stunned at what just came out of his mouth but he continued, “If you really, truly wanted nothing other than to die, you never would have made this call. What if you shifted your perspective from ‘wanting to die’ to ‘being afraid of living’? How would that change this conversation? Tell me what you fear most about living.”

“I can’t deny that,” he replied and began to describe the sense of failure, shame, and despondency that had begun to fill his waking hours. They began to talk through each of his issues individually, searching for responses that were healthy rather than destructive. They began to reframe his situation through the “Serenity Prayer” paradigm:

*Accept what I can't change;
Change what I can;
Seek wisdom to know the difference.*

By the time their hour on the phone had ended, the man said, “I feel so bad about all that has happened, but I know I can do this.” He had

CROSSING THAT BRIDGE

turned the corner of hope by focusing on what remained, what mattered more than his mistakes, and on those who loved him.

Suicide contemplation, at the core, is not the desire to die—it is the fear of living. Once you embrace this perspective, you can begin to make progress on how to live with the realities in your life. You cannot begin to walk across the bridge of hope until you turn your back on death and begin to face life.

A Permanent Answer to a Temporary Problem

MITCH USED TO ASK PEOPLE WHO WERE CONTEMPLATING taking their own lives, “Before this recent contemplation, have you had another time in your life where you were really down or discouraged with life?” Many times they would describe an earlier episode in life that had been very difficult. He would bring this fact to their attention: “You made it from there to here, so we cannot question the fact that you have the resources to cope and survive.” Mitch would then ask, “What did you do to get through that period?”

Understanding one’s own coping mechanisms is a fundamental piece in the art of surviving difficult periods. Coping is a very personal matter. What works for one person doesn’t necessarily do the trick for another. Some people exercise, some listen to music and contemplate, some write out their angst, while others try to sleep it off.

The key in personal coping is to choose mechanisms that are healthy; if the coping behavior is not healthy, the troubles only increase. Unhealthy coping behaviors such as getting drunk or high, venting anger on others, or isolating oneself only compound the problem.

On the other hand, there are some universal guides for coping that apply to all people. For example, talking to someone who can provide wise guidance is good for anyone who is confused and distraught. The problem is, when deeply troubled people have a tendency to isolate themselves, it

HELP AND HOPE FOR CONTEMPLATORS

then intensifies their negative feelings and sense of loneliness. We are all wired with a need for support, and so if we have insulated ourselves by living in a bubble, we will find it difficult to open up when we most need to.

Sometimes, you may need the professional support of a doctor, counselor, clergy person, or social worker when things seem to be spinning out of control. At other times, you may simply need the compassionate ear and comfort of someone who cares about your fate. It could be a brother, sister, friend, mother, father, or confidante who has seen you through some of life's storms. Who is that person who talked you through the last trial? Who is that person who is willing to lend a compassionate ear? Sometimes in life it is not some pithy advice that is going to get you through, but rather just knowing that you have been heard.

Once you have been heard, you will realize that wise counsel in a time of trouble is worth its weight in gold. However, in a time of vulnerability you may need to be mindful about who you turn to for guidance. Misguided advice can lead to deeper pain, whereas sharing your plight with someone who has demonstrated the ability for coping positively can lead to the path that is right for you.

Though each situation is unique because of the who and how and why, people before you have fought through similar circumstances and pain and made positive changes in their lives. While someone else's experience may not make your pain any less, it can give you a glimpse of hope that your situation is survivable and, more personally, "I *can* survive this." One important key of a survival attitude is to keep everything in perspective: **temporary problems do not require permanent solutions.** Although this problem has your total attention today, a year from now your life will have moved forward, you will be changed by this experience, and you can grow from it—no matter how unpleasant it may feel at this moment. Just like you certainly don't choose amputation when you have joint pain, you don't need to choose suicide when you have heartache. At times, the test of life is to fight through the pain, focusing on others and the tasks

CROSSING THAT BRIDGE

ahead, or simply just surviving another day. The will to survive comes from participating in life. The passage of time takes care of the rest.

Sources of Discouragement

ALL DISCOURAGEMENT IS NOT EQUAL, NOR IS IT EQUALLY weighted. Mitch has observed three major sources of discouragement that periodically appear in our lives, with each requiring a unique response. When we become discouraged, we are often inclined to attach a sense of personal failure to our discouragement: “If I had done it differently, this might not have happened.” While introspection is a healthy exercise in times of discouragement, beating yourself up over circumstances beyond your control is not. An effective and liberating exercise in these moments is to examine your personal sources of discouragement (when you are feeling the weight of your emotions) in order to assess if you are unnecessarily being pulled into a quagmire of negative thought patterns. Here are the three distinct and different origins for discouragement:

1. **Failure:** “My actions are the chief cause of the situation I find myself in.”
2. **Disappointment:** “Others have let me down or have caused these discouraging circumstances.”
3. **Adversity:** “Circumstances beyond my control have created an obstacle.”

Mitch has often encountered people who, being discouraged at the actions (or inaction, as the case may be) of another, begin to internalize the discouragement through a lens of personal failure. On the flip side of the issue are those who blame others or adverse circumstances for their discouraged states when they have failed to make the efforts necessary to change what is in their control to change.

HELP AND HOPE FOR CONTEMPLATORS

The Learning Response

EVERY TIME WE ENCOUNTER THE THREE FACES OF discouragement (failure, disappointment, and adversity), we have the opportunity to respond either optimistically (with hope) or pessimistically (without hope). In studying the character traits of the resilient person, one that quickly rises to the surface is the ability to maintain a hopeful attitude by means of employing the *learning response*. These individuals have trained themselves to respond to negative situations with the thought, “What can I learn from this situation that will make me better the next time I face it?”

In her book, *If Life Is a Game, These Are the Rules*, Cherie Carter Scott shares the following two fundamental rules of life:

1. Life is a series of lessons.
2. If you don't learn the first time, the lesson will be repeated until you do learn.

These rules are fairly evident in our world. Some people continue to make the same mistakes over and over, growing increasingly pessimistic and cynical because of the lack of positive outcomes, yet fail to ask, “What is it about *me* that is causing this to happen repeatedly?” This fundamental lack of awareness leads easily to a lack of resilience.

Carry-on Baggage

IN THE CASE OF DISAPPOINTMENT, YOU MAY REMEMBER A time when someone treated you unjustly or thoughtlessly and where you possibly spent emotional energy fantasizing revenge and harboring bitterness. If you responded in an emotionally intelligent manner in that disappointment scenario, however, you may remember that you chose to take a more understanding and forgiving approach—and then moved on with your life, absorbing any “dents” and “dings” gathered along the way.

CROSSING THAT BRIDGE

We can argue from physiological, spiritual, and moral vantage points the advantages of letting go of old injuries and moving forward with life. The deleterious effects on one's physical health of an embittered spirit are well documented in medical journals. In this discussion, however, we want to focus on the *emotional* impact that results from hanging onto old baggage.

We all know people who are so devoid of trust that their suspicion (and sensitivity) becomes an unpleasant aura or odor they carry into every relationship. Quite often this emotional posturing can be traced back to a disappointing circumstance they experienced in their personal history. Those lacking resilience grow bitter and cynical when they get burned, consequently developing a lens of suspicion through which they filter every conversation and relationship. On the other hand, the emotionally resilient individual who has a similar experience grows wiser and more cautious, not allowing yesterday's toxins to pollute the air in today's dialogues. Words and phrases such as "touchy," "thin-skinned," "chip on one's shoulder," "carrying too much baggage," "oversensitive," and "living in the past" describe the negative reactions people have to this disposition.

If you personally struggle with bitterness, keep in mind that this emotional toxin will find its way into your relationships, causing unwelcome damage and hurt to those you care about. It is important to do whatever is necessary to remove these toxins from your emotional storehouse. Why swallow the poison and hope for someone else to be harmed in the process?

Seek psychological or spiritual counsel if necessary, but do not fool yourself into thinking that this "virus" will not infect your satisfaction in life. If you do not believe this to be so, ask yourself a very simple question, "Do I know someone who has a hard and bitter edge, and who is quick to go on a negative rant? How much do I enjoy talking to that individual?"

You cannot live long on this planet and not incur injuries during your journey. This life is a crowded roadway where almost everyone is driving over the speed limit—and far too often it is a contact sport. If you are not

HELP AND HOPE FOR CONTEMPLATORS

prepared for the bumps and offenses, and had hoped for something in life more akin to badminton, you will find yourself nursing some serious injuries the first time you take a blindside hit. As one serial sufferer put it to Mitch, “You are going to get hit in this game, and how hurt you get depends on how prepared you are for the hit.” There will be friends who will let you down. Stay alert, spend time with those who will help you nurture a more hopeful disposition, and don’t forget to continue looking downfield. When you get knocked down, stand up, nurse the wound and continue to keep your eyes wide open.

Third-Party Opposition

THE THIRD SOURCE OF A DISCOURAGED STATE OF EMOTION is *adversity*. This is not trouble of your own or another person’s doing but rather a situation where circumstances beyond your control have conspired to form the difficulty. You can also adopt a learning response to adversity as well as to failure and disappointment. Some people draw pessimistic conclusions when they face adversity, basically deciding that they are unlucky or that things just seem to always go bad—the very definition of the word “hapless.” A sense of haplessness can begin to take shape in their expectations. Soon they begin to work with the expectation that no matter how great a sandcastle they build, the surf is going to come in and wipe it out. The resilient individual has had to learn an altogether different way of processing adversity.

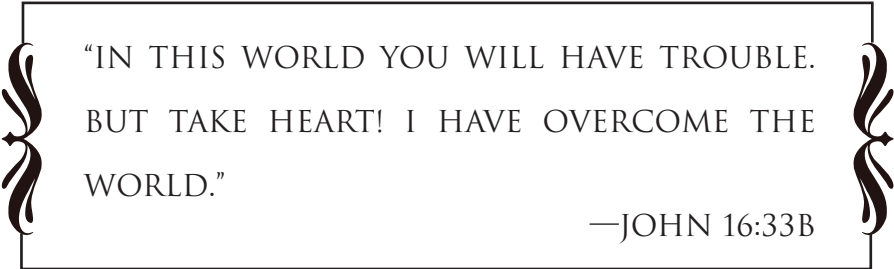
To make progress through the discouragement that comes from adversity (death, job loss, economic trouble, recessions, etc.), it’s important to find a way to separate what is changeable and controllable from what is unchangeable and uncontrollable. Sometimes things happen in life that you didn’t cause or ask for, and that no other person is responsible for—it’s just the result of living in an often chaotic and unpredictable world.

CROSSING THAT BRIDGE

Many have discovered great comfort in God's love and promise of comfort in these difficult moments in life. If He can be trusted to take care of His children (as we would care for our own), then it stands to reason that the time to turn to the Author of Life is when the pages we are reading no longer make sense. Things happen to us that don't make sense at the time.

You may feel lost, confused, and maybe even cursed. Whatever adversity you face at this moment has been confronted before and resolved over time by people just like you who were feeling just as you feel now. In these times, you may need to:

- Start over.
- Pick up the pieces and strengthen what remains.
- Turn to someone for help.
- Pray.



“IN THIS WORLD YOU WILL HAVE TROUBLE.
BUT TAKE HEART! I HAVE OVERCOME THE
WORLD.”

—JOHN 16:33B

As much as you may dislike it in the moment, the words in John 16:33 are not just a promise of help and comfort, they are also a guarantee that you can't get through life on this planet without encountering trouble, pain, disappointment, failure, or adversity. You won't be alone in your suffering if you choose to talk with someone who's been there and can empathize.

Expectations—Yours and Others

IN MITCH'S WORK WITH TEENAGE CONTEMPLATORS OF suicide, he often came across young people who in the eyes of their

HELP AND HOPE FOR CONTEMPLATORS

peers had everything in the world going for them. These were successful students who should have been enjoying their accomplishments but were not. Very often the reason behind their dissatisfied state was having *unrealistic expectations*—sometimes self-imposed, sometimes imposed by family, and sometimes merely a matter of perceived expectations.

Mitch found that many of the teens who attempted suicide were perfectionists. It was ingrained in their personality to beat themselves up for not doing better, rather than enjoy the level of accomplishment they had achieved. He would often discuss with them the difference between *excellence* and *perfection*. Excellence in all our endeavors is an admirable standard and fuels us toward introspection, striving for self-improvement and necessary discipline. Perfection is the dark shadow side of excellence that fuels self-loathing, overexertion, and frustration. Perfection is simply not a healthy standard to expect. Shoot for 100 percent, and sometimes you'll make it. But when it gets to the point that you are berating yourself for 92 percent, you have adopted an unhealthy mental habit that will keep you from enjoying life as you could.

Others spoke about imposed expectations from parents. Some of the most discouraged teens Mitch met were feeling that way because of comparisons articulated by their parents with an older, successful sibling. He often warned parents to avoid this temptation to compare, and to be intentional and careful to rejoice in the uniqueness of each child. This is best done by sitting down with each child and pointing out that their job as a parent is to encourage the child's unique attributes and to offer help in growing through any inadequacies (which everyone has), and then proceed to *describe* all the attributes they see in that child. Being compared with another is not just discouraging, it is insulting to one's sense of identity and uniqueness as a human being. God makes no two people the same, and with good reason. Our obligation is to become the best we can become—nothing more.

CROSSING THAT BRIDGE

Tides of Grief: Walking into the Angry Sea

DURING A PERIOD OF INTENSE GRIEF IN HIS LIFE, MITCH had a dream of walking along a shoreline. The waves were pounding against the land with a violent fury, and he had the sense that he was supposed to turn and walk into these waves. Instead, he kept walking a seemingly endless shoreline looking for a gentler place of entry where he might be better able to keep his footing and balance. He walked and walked but it never appeared. He finally just turned into the tidal fury and walked straight into it and, as he expected, was knocked flat on his backside. Wave after wave hit him as he struggled to get back on his feet. He was afraid he would drown before regaining his footing.

Mitch turned over and forced himself back to his feet with the surf now hitting him in the back. He then slowly rotated his face back into the angry waves. The waves kept hitting him and knocking him off balance, but he kept walking *into* them with resolve. He knew he had to keep walking intrepidly and that he had to walk face first.

Mitch realized when he awoke that he was being taught how to overcome grief. The key to getting through the fury of grief is to confront it. In the dream he had walked the shore for miles and miles avoiding the waves of loss and grief, but they kept pounding away at his consciousness until he turned and faced them—and walked directly into them. We often don't know when the waves of grief will hit or what sight or sound or memory will trigger them. When they hit us they knock us off balance, and sometimes we feel like we can't breathe and aren't sure we can take one more step. But when we take one more step, and that step is directly into the pain, there is no escape. Those who seek to avoid pain walk endlessly in their search and end up patterning their lives around that avoidance dynamic. The lesson is: Trying to escape the pain ends up being the path that avoids all possible growth.

We have more strength than we realize, though we may not feel it at this very moment.

“NO TEST OR TEMPTATION THAT COMES YOUR WAY IS BEYOND THE COURSE OF WHAT OTHERS HAVE HAD TO FACE. ALL YOU NEED TO REMEMBER IS THAT GOD WILL NEVER LET YOU DOWN; HE’LL NEVER LET YOU BE PUSHED PAST YOUR LIMIT; HE’LL ALWAYS BE THERE TO HELP YOU COME THROUGH IT.”

—1 CORINTHIANS 10:13

These were Paul the Apostle’s words to those who doubted they could endure the trouble and pain they were experiencing. This divine promise assures us that if we walk straight ahead into the fury, God’s very hand will pick us up and continue to hold us up.

Surviving Rejection

NORM WAS AT AN ALL-TIME LOW. HE TOOK THE PILE OF PAGES (his manuscript and life’s passion) and threw it in the garbage. That was it. Having received 40-plus rejections from 40 different publishers was quite enough for him. His hopes had been raised and dashed one too many times.

His wife Ruth came into the room and was horrified to see his book in the garbage and went to pull it out. He told her, “I forbid you to take that out. I have had enough.”

Ruth was troubled. She didn’t want to go against her husband’s wishes, but neither did she want to see his life’s work go to the landfill. He had been rejected so many times by so many people that he had run out of energy, even though he had so much energy.

CROSSING THAT BRIDGE

Ruth decided to follow his wishes, sort of. She left the manuscript in the garbage, wrapped it up, and sent it to one more publisher—who did take notice. He'd never before received a manuscript in a garbage container. He read her explanatory note and then the manuscript. He decided to publish Norm's manuscript. Little did he realize it would become one of the top-sellers of all time: *The Power of Positive Thinking* by Norman Vincent Peale.

This story has always meant a lot to Mitch, not only because he is a writer and knows all too well how it feels to have ideas rejected, but also because he found rejection to be a difficult issue to deal with in life at many levels. Born cross-eyed, his parents could only afford to fix one of his eyes. Consequently, he grew up with a crooked eye that became the target of bullies at school in junior high and high school. He was humiliated daily because one eye was "off." Suffering social rejection over something he couldn't do much about, he felt unworthy, less than others, and stigmatized. He felt like nobody could see the real "Mitch." He also remembers being rejected by girls he had worked up the courage to talk to or ask out. Each rejection felt like an affirmation of his freakish-looking eye. The rejection he felt later in divorce only reinforced the idea that he was unworthy of a happy life.

You cannot help but experience rejection of some kind in your life—if you take any risks at all. If you risk trying or creating something, you can be rejected for your ideas or efforts. If you risk starting a relationship, you can be rejected in your approach or later for reasons that may not seem right or fair. Though risk often leads to rejection, it also is the only path that can lead to fulfillment of a dream. Those who never risk will never know real satisfaction.

That's why Norman Vincent Peale's story is so important. His dream was to encourage millions of people to continue risking, continue chasing their dreams, and continue believing that something good can come of it. He was rejected over and over for these ideas, but he—and his ideas—eventually prevailed.

HELP AND HOPE FOR CONTEMPLATORS

At some point you have to choose your own opinion of yourself over the world's opinion of you. This is the essence of transcending rejection. You know your heart. You know what substance lies within you. How much weight do you give to those who do not understand your heart and substance? There is only one, the Creator, that truly understands who you are and what you can be. His opinion is the only one that deserves true consideration.

“IF THE WORLD HATES YOU, KEEP IN MIND
THAT IT HATED ME FIRST.”

—JOHN 15:18

Happening to Life

OFTEN WHEN PEOPLE THINK ABOUT TAKING THEIR OWN LIVES, they are mad at life, but sometimes what is really needed is to get even madder—mad enough to fight back. Stoke the fires in your own behalf, not against yourself. One day Mitch was listening to someone talk about everything that was happening in his life—a long litany of hapless events. It suddenly occurred to him that either we can let life happen to us and hang our head or we can happen to life and lift our head like we intend to fight to the finish.

Each of us has a choice: be the victim and just let it all happen to us or choose to confront the things that seek to destroy us and be the force to move our life forward.

The late Louis Zamperini's story in *Unbroken* vividly demonstrates how life can offer so much misery and torture yet cannot break the spirit of those who will not accept defeat. During the Second World War, Zamperini was afloat in the Pacific for over 50 days after his plane was shot

CROSSING THAT BRIDGE

down. He somehow survived, only to be taken captive by the Japanese. The leader of the prison camp singled out Zamperini and proceeded to inflict the most inhumane torture upon him every day of his internment.

Reading Zamperini's story one can only wonder where he found the determination to survive—and then to return to Japan to seek out his torturer to tell him he had forgiven him! This seemingly superhuman strength demonstrated that all along he had found his strength in a power greater than what humans can provide—he found it in his Creator. Zamperini, a former athlete in the 1936 Berlin Olympics, knew he was a fighter, and he wasn't going to just sit there and take it, but instead to fight to the end.

Troubles and tribulations are like hot water—we find out what we're made of when we are in them. Are we going to be like the egg, the carrot, or the coffee bean? If we choose to be like the egg, we will allow these experiences to harden us, becoming cynical and telling ourselves that none of it is worth it. If we choose to be like the carrot, we will let these experiences turn us to mush, telling ourselves that there is no use in trying because nothing ever works out. But if we choose to be like the coffee bean, we are going to change the nature of the water more than it's going to change us. The decision is about becoming an agent of change in our own lives and doing what we must to fight through.

Have you had enough? Have you taken enough grief? Then put 'em up and start swinging back at life!

The Tessera—That One Missing Piece

ONE OF THE GREATEST DELUSIONS WE CAN ENCOUNTER ON this planet is the thought that says, "My life doesn't matter." Looking through the darkened lens of discouragement, we may feel that way when we are absorbed in our troubles, but we can never really know how much we mean to those near us.

HELP AND HOPE FOR CONTEMPLATORS

Viktor Frankl, author of the inspiring book *Man's Search for Meaning*, wrote about the tessera to make this point. The tessera is just a single piece found in a mosaic (that may contain thousands of tesserae). Frankl said that if you were to stand back and look at a beautiful, artfully designed mosaic and there was only one tessera missing, that is where your eye and attention would be drawn to—not to the beauty of the whole but to the single missing piece. This is how it is with life. The missing piece affects the entire community. If just one of us is missing, it erodes the beauty of life, affecting all who know us, and the community of which we are an integral part.

During Mitch's time working on the suicide crisis line, he would often encourage discouraged callers to take two hours to watch the classic Frank Capra Christmas film, *It's a Wonderful Life*, to underscore this point. As cheesy as it may have sounded to the person he was talking to, watching that film provided an insight into the lamentation many are tempted with in dark days: "I wish I had never been born." In the film, Jimmy Stewart's character, George Bailey, is granted his dark wish to see what the world would have been like for his family and friends if he had never been born. It isn't a pretty picture, and he finally sees the impact he had on others that he wasn't aware of. The angel Clarence who was sent to help him tells George, "You've been given a great gift: to see what life would have been for others if you had not been here."

We wish we could introduce you to some of the people who have altered their contemplation of suicide and who went on to live fruitful and fulfilling lives that they did not deem possible in their hour of suffering and angst. We've shared stories of contemplators in this book to help you understand that as dark as life may look, it will get better. It took the healing of time and the perspective that comes from accepting their situation and moving through it for them to realize they were living a life that mattered. *Your life matters as much as any life that has come before it.* You can be the tessera that makes the mosaic whole—complete and beautiful again. The world needs you, and people in the future need you more than you can ever know.

CROSSING THAT BRIDGE

Bitter Pills

MITCH HAS ENCOUNTERED MANY PEOPLE IN THE MIDST of suicide contemplation who had constructed their plan as a form of payback for the wounds they had suffered at the hands of another. Some of those people had also constructed a poisoned letter to leave with their poisoned body. In their mind, this was going to be the ultimate payback.

A quote attributed to the late Nelson Mandela says it all: “Holding onto anger is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die.” These words assume a greater insightfulness when we consider that they came from a man who spent 27 years in prison during the prime of his life (he was released when he was 72). From 45–72 years of age, Mandela lost his freedom but not his dream; he refused to allow himself to swallow the bitter pill and absorb his life into anger.

I have often thought about what he missed during that time: children growing up, grandchildren being born and growing, time with his wife and family, the ability to wake without the shackles of a tiny room and barbed-wire fencing. Who wouldn’t blame him if he did get bitter? However, he persisted through the ordeal with a belief that something good could come from it if only he responded as a responsible human being. Isn’t that the ultimate definition of being responsible? To respond in the most constructive way possible to the burdens life presents to us.

If we retaliate, the enemy wins. If we wallow in the poisons of bitterness, the enemy wins again. We win only by trying to embrace and extend forgiveness to the perpetrators, the sinful, the mean-spirited, and the hateful. This isn’t easy, and for some, it feels impossible. In times like these we need a glimpse of something greater than ourselves: the Divine—the mercy, the grace, and the forgiveness that has been extended to us. When we understand this in our own hearts, we begin to understand that *only hurting people hurt others*. Hurting people are living in their own anguish with the memories of the harm they have inflicted—and in the bitterest of ironies, they are often repeating the very abuses that were inflicted upon them at an earlier time in their lives.

HELP AND HOPE FOR CONTEMPLATORS

If you choose to swallow those bitter pills, you may insert some poison into the life of your intended target, but it is your life, your fate, and your eternity that are being poisoned most of all. The greatest vengeance of all is to go forward and make something significant of your existence and to stop the cycle of abuse and revenge.

Cycle of Addiction

IT IS NOT A REACH TO SAY THAT WHEN LIFE FEELS OUT OF control, thoughts of suicide take over. When addictive behavior has led to the loss of important interpersonal relationships, employment, and opportunities, it is understandable that a person would hold such a contemplation if he or she is living under the assumption that his or her life is out of control and leading from one disaster to the next.

Research of addiction issues has demonstrated that very few people can overcome destructive and addictive behaviors without some outside assistance and support, or without being confronted with the realities of their behavior pattern. Hence, the intervention process forces the person being consumed by an addictive behavior to either drive deeper into denial and addiction or to break and sincerely seek help to end the destructive spiral. If you find yourself trapped in an endless cycle of destructive behavior leading to shame, and leading to more destructive behavior, it is time to reach out for help. If you've made a thousand promises to yourself and yet find yourself in the very same place—but only deeper and less hopeful—it is time to reach out for help. If you know you are not giving your best self a chance to shine because some habit or compulsion has taken control, it is time to reach out for help.

Name It

MITCH HAS A GOOD FRIEND IN THE BUSINESS WORLD WHO told him that for years he learned to ignore problems or dance around

CROSSING THAT BRIDGE

them—but no more. Now he is fond of saying, “Nothing gets fixed until you name it.” Until you figure out exactly what the problem is and name it (aloud), you will be tempted to remain in denial over the matter and the problem will just continue to grow.

So it is in the business of life. Name the problem out loud and then you can begin to fix it:

- I feel like my life is not worth living because _____
_____.
- I have not found the help I need because _____
_____.

Naming the problem aloud forces you to confront the reality, face the truth of what is going on, and ultimately get real about what you *can* do to make things turn out differently. You’ve chosen to read this book, and that’s your first step out of the darkness. You’re on your way out of the abyss of denial and on your way toward the light of personal responsibility.

If You Want to Know More...

DID YOU KNOW THAT THE BIBLE CONTAINS OVER 7,000 promises God has made that have not failed throughout history? Just as God made promises to those before you, He continues to remain consistent and dedicated to keeping those promises for you, and for such a time as this.

Psalm 119:49–50 says: “Remember your promise to me; it is my only hope. Your promise revives me; it comforts me in all my troubles.” (NLT)

Name the Problem and Claim the Promise

EVERY PROMISE GOD HAS MADE HAS BEEN MADE FOR YOU,

HELP AND HOPE FOR CONTEMPLATORS

at this time, in this circumstance, and in this feeling that you're experiencing. He did this so that you can steer ahead just enough to see what you need, where to go, and who will get you there. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. His love has never failed. *You* are included in those 7,000 promises.

The chart below is a visual aid to help you identify what you're feeling (which is being and has been experienced by all humans on this Earth), so that you can lay hold of what has been promised to you.

WHAT YOU ARE FEELING (What You Want to Get Rid Of)	WHAT IT'S CALLED (What Has Latched onto You)	YOUR PURSUIT (What You're Going After/What God Wants You to Have)
Dread, panic, uneasiness, anxiety, doubt, worry, scared	FEAR	Peace, calm, assurance, trust, faith, joy, happiness
Confusion, disbelief, distrust, fear, apprehension	DOUBT	Clarity, faith, knowledge, trust, belief
Anguish, uncertainty, misery, concern, anxiety, questioning	WORRY	Peace, comfort, joy, confidence, assuredness, relaxation, patience
Loneliness, divided, secluded, alienated, separated, disconnected, misunderstood, unloved	ISOLATION	Belonging, feeling included/connected, unity, linked-in, together, understood, part of, loved
Failed, demolished, wrecked, broken, defeated, hurt, flawed, imperfect, not good enough, worthless, a mess, shame, unforgiven, unloved	DAMAGED/IN RUINS	Rebuilt, revived, restored, repaired, rescued, healed, mended, renewed, worthy, complete, deserving, strong, forgiven, fixed, freedom, loved
Desperate, pointless, sad, useless, downhearted, despondent, depressed	HOPELESSNESS	Peaceful, joyful, loved, purposeful, hopeful, glad, rescued

Following are promises to overcome fear, doubt, worry, isolation, feelings of being damaged (in ruins), and hopelessness.

CROSSING THAT BRIDGE

If FEAR has its talons in you:

PROMISE: Isaiah 41:10 “So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”

PROMISE: 1 Chronicles 28:20 “Be strong and courageous... Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the Lord God, my God, is with you.”

PROMISE: Romans 8:15 “For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, “Abba, Father.” (NKJV)

PROMISE: 2 Timothy 1:7 “For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline.” (NLT)

PROMISE: 1 Peter 3:13–14 “Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened.”

PROMISE: 1 John 4:18 “There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.”

PROMISE: 2 Corinthians 1:20a “For no matter how many promises God has made, they are ‘Yes’ in Christ.”

PROMISE: Psalm 27:1 “The LORD is my light and my salvation; Whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life; Of whom shall I be afraid?”

When you were an infant, you did not have a care in the world. You had nothing to fear because you simply did not know that fear existed. Whether it was a parent, family member, or caretaker, someone older and wiser took care of that part and protected you—there was no fear in you. It is exactly the same with our loving Heavenly Father. When you choose to let God’s perfect love run throughout your heart and mind, your fear will flee, and when it does...your spiritual, physical, and mental strength will increase exponentially. Now that’s a lovely promise!

If DOUBT is causing your head/heart to spin in nonstop confusion:

PROMISE: Hebrews 11:1 “Faith is the confidence that what we hope for will actually happen; it gives us assurance about things we cannot see.” (NLT)

PROMISE: Matthew 21:21 “Then Jesus told them, ‘I tell you the truth, if you have faith and don’t doubt, you can do things like this and much more. You can even say to this mountain, ‘May you be lifted up and thrown into the sea,’ and it will happen. If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.’” (NLT)

PROMISE: 1 Corinthians 14:33 “For God is not the author of confusion but of peace.” (NKJV)

CROSSING THAT BRIDGE

PROMISE: John 20:27–29 “Then Jesus said to Thomas, ‘Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.’ Thomas said to him, ‘My Lord and My God!’ Then Jesus told him, ‘Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.’”

PROMISE: Proverbs 30:5 “Every word of God is pure; He is a shield to those who put their trust in Him.” (NKJV)

PROMISE: Psalm 9:10 “And those who know Your name will put their trust in You; For you, Lord, have not forsaken those who seek You.” (NKJV)

PROMISE: John 3:16 “For God so loved the world that He gave his only Son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” (NKJV)

PROMISE: Romans 8:38–39 “For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels or demons, neither the present or the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Doubt can become your wrecking ball. Yet God did not doubt your being one iota when He formed your innermost being. He created you because He believed in your existence and He has a plan for your life. He is your “I Am” that created the “you are!” See? Another awesome promise!

If WORRY is consuming you like an out-of-control fire:

PROMISE: Psalm 55:22 “Cast your burden on the LORD, and He will sustain you; He shall never permit the righteous to be moved.” (NKJV)

PROMISE: Matthew 6:25–27 “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?”

PROMISE: Matthew 11:28–30 “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (NKJV)

PROMISE: John 14:27 “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.” (NKJV)

PROMISE: 1 Peter 5:7 “Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you.”

PROMISE: Isaiah 43:1–2 “But now, thus says the LORD, who created you, O Jacob, and He who formed you, O Israel: ‘Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will

CROSSING THAT BRIDGE

be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you.” (NKJV)

PROMISE: 1 Corinthians 10:13 “No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.”

PROMISE: Romans 8:31 “What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?” (NKJV)

Worrying does not provide an avenue or route for any answers. Yet, God once again lays a firm foundation of peace stating that He is your Way, your Truth, and your Life. He is in control! Having this Answer Provider in your life will help make your paths straight and more peaceful. What a Promise Maker!

If ISOLATION is blocking your every movement toward others:

PROMISE: Matthew 28:20b “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

PROMISE: Psalm 27:10 “Though my mother and father forsake me, the Lord will receive me.”

PROMISE: John 14:18 “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.”

HELP AND HOPE FOR CONTEMPLATORS

PROMISE: Hebrews 13:5b “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.”

PROMISE: Psalm 121:5 “The Lord watches over you—the Lord is your shade at your right hand.”

PROMISE: Psalm 118:6 “The Lord is on my side; I will not fear: what can man do to me?” (KJV)

PROMISE: Isaiah 41:10 “So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”

PROMISE: Ephesians 2:19 and 22 Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household ... And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.”

You are not alone. God is with you. Now that’s a promise!

If you are DAMAGED from the past and IN RUINS in the present from whatever:

PROMISE: Psalm 40:1–2 “I waited patiently for the Lord; he turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand.”

PROMISE: Joshua 1:5a “No one will be able to stand up against you all the days of your life.”

CROSSING THAT BRIDGE

PROMISE: Isaiah 53:5b “The punishment that has brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.”

PROMISE: Psalm 107:20 “He sent out his word and healed them; he rescued them from the grave.”

PROMISE: Ecclesiastes 3:11 “He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end.”

PROMISE: 2 Corinthians 4:16–18 “Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”

PROMISE: Jeremiah 33:6 “Nevertheless, I will bring health and healing to it; I will heal my people and will let them enjoy abundant peace and security.”

PROMISE: John 10:10 “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.”

PROMISE: Philippians 4:13 “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” (NKJV)

God sent His son to rescue, repair, and restore you (to make you whole and perfect in His sight). He didn't have to—He wanted to.

HELP AND HOPE FOR CONTEMPLATORS

Because of that there is nothing or no one that can make God blink and forget about you. Now that's a promise!

If HOPELESSNESS is pushing you out to sea without a life vest:

PROMISE: Psalm 130:1–2 “Out of the depths I cry to you, Lord; Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy.”

PROMISE: Psalm 46:1 “God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.”

PROMISE: Psalm 34:17–18 “The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles. The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.”

PROMISE: Psalm 23 “The Lord is my shepherd; I have all that I need. He lets me rest in green meadows; he leads me beside peaceful streams. He renews my strength. He guides me along right paths, bringing honor to his name. Even when I walk through the darkest valley, I will not be afraid, for you are close beside me. Your rod and your staff protect and comfort me. You prepare a feast for me in the presence of my enemies. You honor me by anointing my head with oil. My cup overflows with blessings. Surely your goodness and unfailing love will pursue me all the days of my life, and I will live in the house of the Lord forever.” (NLT)

CROSSING THAT BRIDGE

PROMISE: Philippians 4:19 “And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.”

PROMISE: Psalm 119:28 “My soul is weary with sorrow; strengthen me according to your word.”

PROMISE: Romans 8:26–27 “Meanwhile, the moment we get tired in the waiting, God’s Spirit is right alongside helping us along. If we don’t know how or what to pray, it doesn’t matter. He does our praying in and for us, making prayer out of our wordless sighs, our aching groans. He knows us far better than we know ourselves, knows our pregnant condition, and keeps us present before God. That’s why we can be so sure that every detail in our lives of love for God is worked into something good.” (MSG)

PROMISE: Romans 4:18a “Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations.”

PROMISE: Job 11:18a “You will be secure because there is hope.”

Hopelessness is a thief that is more than eager to steal away the “hope” of your present and future (two of the most wonderful times of your life). God has laid claim to you and desires for you to have life and live abundantly in hope from this day forward...a hopeful, heart-filling promise!