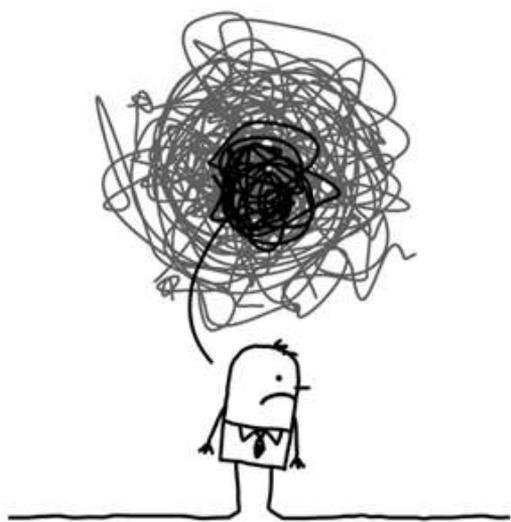


what to do  
after people  
pop on you



MARY DEMUTH

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# Introduction

A while back, I wrote a book called *The Wall Around Your Heart*. I actually wanted to title the book, *What to Do After People Poop on You*, but the publisher wasn't too keen on that idea. Although I'm not usually one for potty metaphors, this title rang true for me. Because after I've been hurt by someone, I honestly feel like I've been pooped on.

So when I decided to write another ebook for you, I dusted off my funny little title because I knew you'd understand how it feels to be hurt by others. One minute you're joyfully going about your business only to run headlong into a relational trap. After that? Covered in poop, smelling badly, and wondering what hit you.

If you're a human, you understand this. Sometimes you've flung the excrement right back in retaliation, angry words, or shouting. Sometimes you've retreated, sulking as you've cleaned up the aftermath. There may have been times you felt you deserved it, so you didn't clean up afterward. Instead, you learned to live stinky, which then prompted stinkin' thinkin' about yourself, where you believed you had little or no worth. In short, poop becomes your way of life, the manner in which you think about yourself.

Let me stop you there: You are not poop!

You are wildly loved by the Creator of the Universe. He sacrificed everything for you, including His beautifully loved Son, Jesus. You sacrifice for those who are valuable, for those you love, and that is what God has done for you. And Jesus took the waste products of sin upon His holy shoulders, bore the weight and shame of all that muck, paid the penalty for all of it by dying on a cross.

The story does not end there, friends. Otherwise, all our hope for renewal and joy and strength would be buried in a garden tomb.

No, Jesus rose from the dead.

After death, resurrection.

After pain, life.

And that's exactly what I want for you as you read this teensy weensy book: LIFE. New life springing from the aftermath of pain. It is possible. I'm living proof.

When we lived in France as church planters, nearly every type of relational heartache came my way. My words used against me. Ridicule. Mockery. Underhandedness. Betrayal. By the end of our two and a half years there, I was done. And undone.

No more relationships for me.

The white fuzzy cat would have to suffice. Because I was not venturing back into the land of poop with people.

So I cocooned for a while once we lived stateside. Licked my festering, sad wounds. Pulled away from the very thing that God would eventually use to heal me: good community.

I know this is not a popular truth, but the difficulty of it does not make it less true:

**God often uses the thing that wounds us to *heal* us.**

Put another way:

If you were wounded in harmful community, the pathway to healing is to engage in good community. What has wounded is what will heal.

Ouch.

I know.

You may be saying, “Mary, you have no idea what it’s like to be pooped on over and over and over again. Why in the world would I choose to trust someone else when I’ve been so hurt?”

First, let me say, I hear you. I’ve been there.

Before I explain more, let me clarify. I’m not saying you need to hurl yourself headlong into a negative situation. There are terrific books out there on setting boundaries with difficult people, or dealing with narcissists, or running away from codependency. We all have to discern our relationships. We may need to sever some relationships. A friendship may need a cooling off period so you can get your head on straight to re-evaluate. Some interactions may need a long-term time out. The healthiest thing you may need to do is to step away.

Once we've stepped back, we run the danger of letting someone's actions make us build a high fortress around ourselves. We reason, "Well, if people can hurt me that much, then I will simply wall myself off from the entire human race."

And it works.

Oh how beautifully it works.

No more pooping! No more pain!

**But walling our hearts leads also to:**

*No more true, genuine, shout-it-from-the-rooftops life.*

When you wall yourself off, you sever life.

There has to be a better way. A way to heal from the past so you're able to stick your toe into the water of stable relationships.

That way? The POOPING method. Now before you chastise me for this unsavory word, remember that it's been used in cuisine:



Although I love Thai food, I'm a little reticent about dining in this fine establishment. Even so, as I prayed about helping you get over relational heartache, this acronym presented itself in seven truths:

**P**rocess the pain with Jesus.

**O**pen your heart to safe people.

**O**btain wise counsel.

**P**ursue forgiveness and reconciliation (if possible).

**I**nvestigate your patterns.

**N**avigate the new “new.”

**G**row forward.

Now that you know the POOPING acronym, are you ready to begin the healing process? Each chapter will have a teaching section, some action to take (or belief to believe) and a prayer to pray. May this simple little ebook become the impetus toward raucous, wild healing, my friend!

# Step One: Process the Pain with Jesus

It won't do you any good to deny that pain happened. The more you shove it down, the more potential it has to erupt in other forms, usually in blow ups of anger at inopportune times. Healthy people *process* their pain. They talk about it. Ruminates. They are brave enough to know that if they don't take the bold step now to deal with the emotions and grief of a difficult encounter, they will inevitably have to revisit it at some point.

Which is my question for you: Since this offense hurts so much, do you really want to have to revisit it again? Keeping short accounts with others (and with ourselves and our current pain) enables us to grow beyond bitterness.

You may be afraid to process the grief or pain with a friend right now. That's okay. First, grab a pen and a piece of paper, then write down everything that's bothering you. It doesn't have to be coherent. It doesn't have to be pretty. It can be a list of events or ten sentences about your emotions after the pain. However you want to do it, get it out on paper.

Now, read through what you've written. Add more to it as God brings incidents to mind. Take a day or two to continue this process until you feel that most everything you've thought about the issue is on paper(s). (If you're not wild about paper, feel free to journal on your computer or phone. Or if writing is difficult for you, voice-record your feelings on your phone.)

Set aside what you've written (or said) for 24 hours. Don't peek. Don't think about it. Don't rush back to it. Just let it percolate without you.

Once the 24 hours have passed, I want you to re-read (or listen to) what you've written. How do you feel? Does it accurately represent the pain you've gone through?

Next, I want you to pray. Ask God if He wants you to share these papers with someone (preferably NOT the person who hurt you). Listen carefully and closely. Take time to be alone and quiet. Or take a walk outside, leaving your phone behind.

You can use this time to tell God the contents of your grief and bewilderment. (Yes, of course He knows, but His desire is to be in a relationship with you. Your processing is a blessing to Him. It means you want to interact with Him about the pain.)

I once heard the story of a pastor who was overwhelmed with counseling appointments, so he advised his secretary to book each person an hour of time alone in their sanctuary before they saw him. Their task? To spend that hour praying to God, asking Him for help. The result? Less counseling appointments. Bringing things to God first (seeking Him first) will revolutionize your life.

Yes, we have busy lives. Yes, we are plagued by noise and tasks. But we have a God who visits us in silent places. We must crane our neck to hear that still, small voice. Jesus is very clear about how He loves to bear our burdens:

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

For my yoke is easy and my burden is light” (Matthew 11: 28-30, NIV).

Carrying around anger and bitterness and angst does not allow rest for your weary soul. It starves your heart, emaciates it, makes it small.

But we have a great God who loves to hear from us, who understands everything we've been through. Why? Because His Son Jesus endured every possible pain and conundrum. He was betrayed (in such a heinous manner it meant His death), misunderstood, gossiped about, marginalized, lied about, opposed, abused.

The writer of Hebrews asserts that Jesus is our High Priest who “gets” what it's like to live on this betrayal-hungry earth. “This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin” (Hebrews 4:15 NLT).

Later in the chapter, we're reminded: “So then, since we have a great High Priest who has entered heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to what we believe. This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin. So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most” (Hebrews 4:14-16 NLT).

Come boldly. Take your words and lay them before God. Read it to Him. Cry. It's okay to question, “Where were You, God, when this betrayal happened?” He already knows. Again, He is interested in your heart, what bothers you, where you're injured. He is best able to come alongside a son or daughter He created.

And, believe it or not, He knows you better than *you* know you. This is the first step in being set free: Processing our grief with Jesus.

Before we move to the first O in POOPING, let's set some foundations. There are four truths we need to keep in mind when it comes to healing from relational pain:

**Truth One:** It is possible to be set free. The past is gone, cradled by Jesus.

**Truth Two:** There is no passive healing. If you want healing, you have to pursue it.

**Truth Three:** Often you have to make difficult choices to completely separate from perpetrators so you can heal. They may haunt, but they don't need to have power over you anymore.

**Truth Four:** We are healed to become healers.

I believe you can be set free.

I believe you have the guts it takes to passionately pursue healing. (By taking this first step, you've proven it!)

I believe God will let you know if you need to separate from a toxic person. He will guide you.

I believe being healed from this pain will cause you to become an agent of healing in this relationally broken world.

**Prayer:**

*Jesus, I face far too much loss these days. I choose to rest my head on Your sacred shoulders. Weep alongside. Lift my head. Rejuvenate my vision for the relationships in my life. Bring me back to a place of wonder and trust. This world can be dark, and people can be mean, but I recognize in this moment that You are glorious light. Please, please shine down on me so I can see You at work. Replace my crying with dancing. Hold my hand, my heart, my dreams, my relationships. Amen.*

# Step Two: Open Your Heart to Safe People

Sometimes because we've been hurt so much, we stop knowing who is safe and who is unsafe. We continue to pursue people who hurt us. So before you jump right in and meet with someone about your pain, slow down and read this step.

Some of us grew up with unsafe people. They became our normal, our comfort zone, so much so that when safe people entered our lives, we were scared of them. We'd rather trust the untrustworthy (people whose behavior is known to us) than the trustworthy. In short, we like what whatever it is that has become normal to us, even if that normal is painful or chaotic.

After you process your pain with Jesus, you'll begin to re-enter the world of relationships. And as you do, it's important you know they types of people to pursue in friendship. You need to find safe folks, people who won't malign or shame you. The better you choose your companions, the less injury you'll incur.

This doesn't mean safe people won't hurt you. We're all humans. We all have flaws that rub up against each other. But you're less likely to be deeply damaged by a safe person than an unsafe person. And the more your heart endures jabs from unsafe people, the more apt you are to throw in the towel and retreat from humanity altogether, becoming more and more bitter as the years wear on.

You don't want to be the old person in the nursing home who alienates everyone, do you? You want to be the person who grows more sweet and kind and joyful and relational. So the key is to guard your heart against unsafe people and tentatively reach for safe ones.

The Bible is clear that we must be careful when we give our hearts to others: "Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life" (Proverbs 4:3 NLT). It's okay to guard our hearts. It's okay to ask for discernment in our upcoming relationships.

### **There's a difference between a fortress and a fence, though.**

A fortress lets no one in. It keeps you isolated and lonely, unable to process your life with others. But a fence is a boundary with a gate. You can keep out the thieves, but open the gate to good company and have a party.

In case you need to know the characteristics of safe people, here is a comprehensive list, taken from my sexual abuse recovery book, *Not Marked*. (And if you want to know the difference between safe and unsafe people, simply consider the opposite trait as unsafe.)

## **Safe people...**

- Ask clarifying questions.
- Don't jump to conclusions.
- Aren't passive-aggressive.
- Empathize with you, not needing to interject their story of doom to one-up you.
- Encourage other relationships in your life.

- Honor and encourage your relationship with God.
- Want what is best for you and your healing journey. (They don't have their own healing agenda, or pressure you to heal their specific way).
- Aren't domineering.
- Tell the truth, even if it's painful, but they tell it in a way that encourages trust and without shaming you.
- Offer grace.
- Are self-aware.
- Reveal their flaws and shortcomings.
- Aren't defensive.
- Don't play the victim in every aspect of their lives.
- Apologize, even before they're caught.
- Take responsibility for themselves.
- Work on their issues without being confronted first.
- Are eager to learn from their mistakes.
- Accept blame.
- Avoid gossip and slander. They don't triangulate.
- Are humble, teachable.
- Have a positive influence over your life.
- Have proven to be trustworthy over a period of time.
- Are the same person in different situations—They are consistent and they possess integrity.
- Applaud your growth.
- Don't try to be your parent or the Holy Spirit.
- Welcome freedom and autonomy—yours and theirs.
- Don't demand trust—instead they earn it by consistently acting honorable.

This is a terrific list if you're looking for a spouse, seeking a friend, or evaluating family relationships. It's also a convicting list if we apply it to ourselves. Are we safe? Do we applaud the growth in others? Is our fallback to shame people or set them free? Spend

some time reading over this list, thinking about your current relationships, the past relationship that POOPED on you, and your own safeness as a person. Ask God to give you wisdom and insight as you pursue your next relationships, and that He would enable you to become a safe person, too.

**Prayer:**

*Jesus, my relationship-chooser is broken. I sometimes choose unsafe people. Please help me choose my friends wisely and love my family with peace, even if they are unsafe. Open my heart like a gate opens to a party. Unfold my fears. Root out the anger and feelings of inferiority. Eradicate the pain by healing it. Show me where to ask for forgiveness, when to be confident, when to humble myself. Grant new freedom, Jesus, especially in the dark recesses where Your light hasn't shone. Give me deep bravery to open the door to the fortress of my heart. In that light, Lord, shine Your joy, forgiveness, grace and truth. Amen*

## Step Three: Obtain Wise Counsel

In the Step One, I asked you to write down everything you feel and think about the situation. I asked you to process with Jesus, letting Him bear your burden. I hope (and pray) this exercise was helpful, at least to enable you to get out what was boiling inside. In Step Two, you learned about safe people—both in choosing them and becoming one.

Because when we shove things down, they inevitably blow up in our behavior. We overreact to unrelated situations because we haven't dealt with pain from the past. And the more we stuff, the more potential there is to be explosive.

During your processing, I asked you to ask God if there were someone you could share your words with. Now I want you to make an appointment with your safe friend, spouse or family member. But before you see him/her, reprocess your words. You may want to amend what you've written, to tone it down when you share it. Sometimes we need to process very raw, but after a few days, we are able to see things in a more detached way.

Once you meet, hand your friend your words. Say, "I've been really hurting about a situation in my life, and I want help processing the pain. Here's what I've written about it. Would you be willing to read it and talk with me about it?" Assure them that

your goal is to get to a healthy place, that you want to avoid bitterness and a closed-off heart.

If it's too scary to share in person, type out what you've written and send it electronically. Then meet in person.

Ask your friend to pray for and with you about what you've written.

Processing the pain with another human being is the first step toward letting go of that pain. And adding prayer to the process supercharges the healing. There is power in a circle of two.

After praying, be willing to hear advice. This is encouraged throughout the Bible, but particularly in the book of Proverbs:

"Get all the advice and instruction you can, so you will be wise the rest of your life" (Proverbs 19:20 NLT).

"A wise man will hear and increase in learning, and a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel" (Proverbs 1:5).

Remember that your friend is not perfect. He/she may give awesome counsel, or the counsel may not resonate with you. Either way, thank your friend, then process what you've heard in the privacy of your relationship with Jesus.

Consider that you may be too close to a situation to see it objectively, which is why seeking wise counsel is so important. Don't dismiss what someone says simply because it goes against the grain of what you feel in the moment.

Several years ago, I reacted harshly in the moment with a co-worker because I perceived some injustice. In my mind, my

reaction was appropriate for the situation. A friend pulled me aside and asked me to consider I might have reacted too angrily. Initially I believed my friend's words were judgmental and harsh toward me, but later, in the quiet of my room, I realized I did have a problem with being reactionary. Now, I often remember my friend's difficult but ultimately kind words to me, and I try to calm myself down when I sense I'm going to overreact.

Seeking counsel is a wise, grown-up thing to do. Besides, it gives your issue one other shoulder to rest on. In other words, you are no longer carrying the burden alone. Paul writes, "Share each other's burdens, and in this way obey the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2 NLT). By sharing your pain, you're allowing someone else the privilege of obeying Jesus. Isn't that amazing? If you close yourself off, you'll deny people the joy of obeying Him by helping you.

The truth? Good friends WANT to bear your burdens. They want to know what makes you sad, angry, joyful, confused, or invigorated. But if we hide our hearts from everyone behind a great big wall of fear and insecurity, we'll never be known.

And we'll never understand the outrageous love God has for us through His body, the church, because we'll simply be projecting an image of ourselves to the world. People may "love" our image, but deep down we'll think, "Well, if they really knew me, they'd run a million miles away."

Friend, you are worth being loved. You are worth being listened to. All of you, even your secrets and fears and hidden pains, are WORTH knowing. You will never truly understand love until you've made the long journey toward vulnerability, so that

someone can love the real you, the you who lives inside your head.

Is it a risk to share your pain story and seek wise counsel? Absolutely. Is it worth it? Yes. It's the difference between living your life as a zombie, unfeeling and unemotional, versus living flawed, but brilliantly alive.

**Prayer:**

*Jesus, I am scared to share my inner life with a friend. I'm worried. I know what it's like inside of me, all the fears and anxieties that make me tick. Help me to be gutsy and bold enough to share my pain story with someone. And give me a quiet heart to listen when they pray and offer counsel. Help me not to react to the counsel with anger in the moment, but to run back to You to re-evaluate their words. I want to be set free from this pain. Amen.*

# Step Four: Pursue Forgiveness and Reconciliation (if possible)

Forgiveness is the hallmark of a life in Jesus. Jesus personified forgiveness when He forgave the people scrambling below as He hung on a cross. He exemplified grace and pardon and mercy. He told the story of an unmerciful servant who was forgiven a bajillion dollar debt only to belittle a man who owed him a dime.

We have been forgiven everything. EVERYTHING. A bajillion dollar debt of sin against a holy, amazing Creator. All of that has been beautifully erased because of Jesus' sacrifice.

Forgiveness, then, should inform the way we live our lives. Pardoning others should be like breathing, a natural response to the outrageous forgiveness we've encountered.

**We are most like Jesus when we forgive.**

Let's take a look at forgiveness, what it isn't, what it is:

**Forgiveness is not:**

- Forgetting. Lewis Smedes wrote, "When we forgive evil we do not excuse it, we do not tolerate it, we do not smother it. We look the evil full in the face, call it what it is, let its horror shock and stun and enrage us, and only then do we forgive it." Remembering makes it a revolutionary act, and it helps to reclaim good memories

- A sign of weakness.
- Necessarily reconciliation. (You can forgive, but that doesn't mean you will reconcile. It takes two humble, forgiving people to reconcile a relationship. Reconciliation cannot be one-sided.)
- Pretending all is well or minimizing your anger.
- Easy or superficial.
- Painless.
- Instantaneous or flippant.

### **Forgiveness is:**

- Modeled and commanded by God. "O LORD our God, you answered them; you were to Israel a forgiving God, though you punished their misdeeds" (Psalm 99:8). "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins" (Matthew 6:12-15).
- Remembering that our battle isn't actually against people. "For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12).
- A lifestyle.
- Continual and layered. "So watch yourselves. If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I repent,' forgive him" (Luke 17:3-4).
- Freeing.

- The antithesis of bitterness. “See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many” (Hebrews 12:15).
- An indication of the depth of your relationship with God. “Then the master called the servant in. ‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?’” (Matthew 18:32-33).
- Seeing the past as a gift.
- Costly. “Forgiveness is the Christ-like suffering which is the Christian duty to bear.” Dietrich Bonhoeffer
- Recognition of your own need.

Now that you’ve processed your pain with Jesus, determined to discover the safe people in your life, and brought a friend in to offer wise counsel, it’s time to begin the journey of forgiving that person who hurt you so much.

Before you take that step, let me say this: **I am sorry.**

I am sorry this happened to you. I am sorry you were hurt. I am sorry that someone betrayed your confidence, sliced your heart, bewildered you by hurtful actions and words. I am sorry.

It is certainly a grief. And forgiving is not light or easy. As you’ve seen above, it is something we are commanded to do, but it’s not flippant or magical. It’s sheer obedience.

You may not feel like forgiving. You may say the words out loud and feel dead inside. That’s okay. It’s a start.

You also may get discouraged. Another pain may come your way, re-opening the wound you have. You may think, “Oh dear, I haven’t forgiven because this still hurts.” That’s okay. It only means there is a new layer to forgive.

Forgiveness is like breathing. You inhale the pain and exhale the forgiveness. When I was in the throes of forgiving a family member, it certainly felt as regular as breathing. “Oh, she hurt me again, Jesus. I choose again to forgive.” Repeat. One thousand times.

Forgiving doesn’t mean you’ve let the person off the hook. God has everything under His control—the people, the situation. He sees everything, knows every intention of the heart. He is the all-knowing, merciful judge. Forgiveness means you step away from taking God’s rightful place, and you take yourself off the hook to enact vengeance. This frees your heart to actually want the best for the other, and it gives you the joy you need to live your life without being held back by bitterness.

Will your forgiveness mean there will be reconciliation? Not necessarily. **But if you do not forgive, there will be NO possibility of reconciliation.** Remember, reconciling a relationship takes two willing, forgiving, honest people. All you can do is your part (forgiving). You cannot control the other person’s bitterness or anger.

### **Prayer:**

*Jesus, I am having a hard time forgiving \_\_\_\_\_. So much pain. I’m afraid if I do forgive, I’m admitting that what \_\_\_\_\_ did was somehow okay. Help me to take this anger and my desire for vengeance and place it in Your hands through*

*the vehicle of forgiveness. Teach me to breathe forgiveness, to let go of the pain over and over and over again when it comes to \_\_\_\_\_.* Jesus, You are good at forgiveness, so would You teach me how? And please, I pray that You would enable \_\_\_\_\_ to reconcile with me. Amen.

# Step Five: Investigate Your Patterns

As I mentioned earlier, when we're hurt, we may believe we deserve ill treatment. This spirals into a lack of ability to defend ourselves. In short, we let bad people happen to good people (us). (Although I will say that we also can be bad people if we don't work through our issues and, instead, take our anger out on others).

Although not all relational pain is caused or even welcomed, sometimes we do have a part to play in it. Maybe we keep choosing to befriend narcissists because we grew up with a narcissistic (selfish) parent, and we are secretly holding the belief that if we can just get ONE selfish person to like us, we'll prove we're finally loveable. Or maybe we unknowingly pursue predatory people, hoping again that we can cause a predator to treat us well so we can prove we're worth something. It seems like a strange logic, I know. These two patterns have been mine. And they did not work for me.

I pursued narcissists, naively believing that I could change them from selfish to selfless. It NEVER happened.

I pursued predators, thinking that if I could reform them, I would feel better about the world. I NEVER reformed a predator.

The only person I could reform was me. Which meant that I needed to take a careful look at my worst relationships, the most damaging ones, and see what kind of common traits they had.

And then I asked friends to help me see the why of my pursuit. I asked God to clarify. Eventually I began to see that I was trying to tie up loose ends from my childhood.

We are wired for story. We need a beginning, middle, and an end. But when we experience pain, particularly in childhood, we short-circuit, nursing an insatiable need to complete the story. It may look like one of these hypothetical situations:

My father (who was self-absorbed) rejected me. Perhaps I will find another father figure (who is as equally self-absorbed) and hope for acceptance.

My brother was cold hearted toward me. Perhaps I will find a friend who is also cold-hearted who I can win over. Then I'll prove my brother was wrong to turn away from me.

My friend took advantage of me. Perhaps I'll find an exploitive person and be so overwhelmingly wonderful that she'll have to stop her manipulative ways and change. Then I'll show others that I have power in an exploitive situation.

All these scenarios are not obvious. They're hidden inside you. You most likely won't even know you're pursuing unsafe people. But because there is a lack of resolution (a story ending), you have an insatiable need to tie that unresolved story up in a nice bow.

The problem is that pursuing unsafe people will injure your heart in such a way that you'll retreat and never seek out awesome, safe people. You'll continue to pursue those who are bad for your heart.

So what's a person to do?

Ask God to mend your untied story.

Share with Him the heartbreak you're trying to address, the hole you're trying to fill. Ask Him to bring resolution, but in His way, not yours. Those relationships may NEVER resolve, but God still has an uncanny, beautiful ability to heal you despite other people's actions.

Maybe an example will help. One of my relatives spent much of her life pursuing herself at my expense. This made me feel very unwanted and small. In my adult life, I kept pursuing female friends who were uncannily like my relative. The world rotated on their axis. I bent over backwards trying to get them to notice me, to love me, to validate me, but none of my efforts worked. I finally realized I was trying to resolve my issue with the relative, and, in that, I was pursuing narcissists.

I asked God to heal the little girl who longed to be noticed. I asked friends to pray for me. I invested more time in my friendships where people did validate me and sacrifice for me. Over time, I gained important discernment. Where before I might run headlong into another narcissistic relationship, now I discerned whether a person was a narcissist, and I politely walked the other way. Because God had healed my heart so much, I no longer needed to complete my story with broken people.

Because of Jesus, I was already a completed story.

Writing past tense and present tense sentences may help you too. When I interacted with the narcissistic relative, the truth I believed about myself was this:

I was unwanted.

But as I healed, I realized the truth that even though people may not want me or may live their lives as if I didn't exist, the truth was, God always, always, always loved me. That truth is eternal and fixed. So my new present tense statement becomes:

I am wanted by the God of the universe.

This settled truth then informs my healthy relationship quest. I no longer have to complete a half-written tragedy. Instead I can rest in knowing the Author of my faith has scribed a great adventure for me. And ultimately, the resolution of my story will be perfect.

Look back over your story. Where did painful people intersect? In what ways are you trying to finish your story by pursuing difficult people? How has that worked for you?

Take some time to process this. Talk it over with a trusted friend. Journal about your significant painful relationships from the past. Notice patterns in your current relationships. Dare to ask God to heal the broken parts of you that cause you to chase people who hurt you.

{Also know that you did not deserve to be hurt. Asking you to see your own patterns doesn't mean you invited the pain or abuse. But it may help you see how you can change the way you pursue some people.}

**Prayer:**

*Jesus, life can be confusing and complicated. I don't exactly know why I have pursued unsafe people, but I really want to know. Would You show me the patterns I've set in my life that contribute to my pain? Help me run to You for healing in this area. Re-write my pain story, from past tense lies to present tense truths. Amen.*

## Step Six: Navigate the New “New”

After people hurt us and we process the pain with Jesus, choose safe people, share our specific hurt, forgive, and examine our patterns, it's time to move blessedly forward into a new life, a new way of living, a new “new.” In other words, the poop has gone; it's time to live clean.

When we meet Jesus, clean and fresh is a promise: “This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!” (2 Corinthians 5:17 NLT).

This may scare you, and that's okay. When we've become accustomed to living in the muck, it's hard to find comfort in the clean. I can say this, though: **clean is better for you.**

Having good, strong, supportive relationships of mutuality and joy will absolutely make a better life. Yes, you've been hurt. Yes, you've experienced a deep sadness and pain. But that is not all that life must be. *There is hope.*

The problem comes when we believe we will never change, or that God doesn't want to remedy our situation. Yet God has always been at work. Before we delve into a beautiful scripture, I want you to take your eyes off all the heartache you've experienced and list the ways God has been faithful to you in the past. Aim for fifty items.

## Here's a list of five from my life:

1. Even though I experienced sexual abuse as a kindergartener, we moved away at the end of the school year, ending the abuse.
2. The songs I gravitated to as a child almost always involved God—as if He sent me a “find Me” playlist.
3. My grandparents filled a gap in my life when I needed shelter.
4. That boy that broke my heart? So grateful I didn't marry him.
5. That my father died when I was young inevitably made me long for a father who wouldn't die. This led me to the arms of God.

God has been faithful, even though you've experienced hurt. Now I want you to read the following verses from Isaiah.

### Isaiah 43:16-21 (NLT)

<sup>16</sup> I am the LORD, who opened a way through the waters,  
making a dry path through the sea.

<sup>17</sup> I called forth the mighty army of Egypt  
with all its chariots and horses.

I drew them beneath the waves, and they drowned,  
their lives snuffed out like a smoldering candlewick.

<sup>18</sup> “But forget all that—  
it is nothing compared to what I am going to do.

<sup>19</sup> For I am about to do something new.

See, I have already begun! Do you not see it?

I will make a pathway through the wilderness.

I will create rivers in the dry wasteland.

<sup>20</sup> The wild animals in the fields will thank me,  
the jackals and owls, too,  
for giving them water in the desert.

Yes, I will make rivers in the dry wasteland  
so my chosen people can be refreshed.

<sup>21</sup> I have made Israel for myself,  
and they will someday honor me before the whole world.

In verses 16-17, God reminds the Israelites to recount His faithfulness in the past. That's just what you did in your list of fifty. But take note of the "But" in verse 18. It says, "But forget all that." What? Forget the faithfulness of God?

Not exactly. We do need to look back and remember what He has done. We need to live grateful. But if we stay camped in the past, particularly in the place where we were hurt or scared, we will not move forward. God doesn't simply want to rescue us from the past. He doesn't want us to stay tethered to all that pain. No, **He has greater things in mind for us.**

*"It is nothing compared to what I am GOING TO do. For I am about to do something new. See, I have already begun! Do you not see it? I will make a pathway through the wilderness. I will create rivers in the dry wasteland."*

Consider the power of these words! God wants to do a new thing in your life, a new "new." The problem is, if you are looking back, you won't see it. Note that Isaiah uses the word SEE twice. *God wants you to see forward, to take note of His work right now.*

Our God is called The Great I Am. Not the Great I Was or the Great I Will Be. He is the God of the present tense. But many of us spend so much of our lives ruminating on the past that we

actually miss our present tense God doing present tense things in the great right now.

And what does the great I Am promise to do?

In the places of your life that are untamed (wilderness), He will create a pathway. Yes, even your relational life.

In the places of your life that are parched and void of life, He will flow a river of refreshment.

And He may just do that by sending new relationships. Or He may help you see your friendships differently. Or He may change YOU and make you a better friend, spouse, parent, or confidant. The key is to wait expectantly for this new life He has for you.

**You no longer need to be defined by the hurt of another. You can be defined by the outrageous, transforming love of your Savior.**

The last two verses hint at your calling in this life. We are to be refreshed by Jesus to become refreshment to others. Our goal and mandate is to honor Him before the whole world. If we spend our days constantly bitter, rehashing past pain, we will miss our calling.

We must let God heal us, then anticipate what He wants to do NOW in our lives. This helps us remember **our purpose is to shout His fame, not wallow in our past pain.**

Think about it. If Satan can derail you from God's purpose, less people will know about Jesus. If he can make you fester in your

sadness, always looking back, never moving forward, he has won a small victory.

You were made for more than pain. You were created to declare the amazingness of God. Don't let the pain prevent you from faithfulness today.

**Prayer:**

*Jesus, I sometimes have a hard time recounting Your faithfulness to me. Help me list more and more and more things You Have done in the past. But please don't let me stay there, tethered to back then. I want to live in the new, sparkling now. Would You show me what You're up to? Would You renew my mind? Would You heal me so I can declare Your greatness to a dying world? I want to live forward, not backward. Amen.*

# Step Seven: Grow Forward

You've walked through six life-altering steps. It's been a risky, but hopefully profitable, journey. And now it's time to step outside your door and move freely about the galaxy of relationships.

I have one word of caution:

**You will be pooped on again.**

Pooping (people hurting people) is a part of life. You've now learned a simple coping pathway to deal with new pain that comes your way. You're going to process it, not stuff it. You're going to examine your own heart. You're not going to let the pain prevent you from living life today. You're going to become a better friend.

And another truth:

**You will poop on someone too.**

What will get you through all this relational excrement is old-fashioned grace—grace to offer those who fail you, grace to grant yourself when you hurt another. Grace is the air we breathe, the blessing God grants us when we run to Him. It's beautiful. It's simple. And it's freely given by Jesus because of His sacrifice on the cross. It may be a gift to us, but it cost Him everything.

Don't take this gift lightly. Instead, live in light of that costly grace, knowing we are all guilty of falling short. We're all in need of pardon.

His death and resurrection help us to grow forward in relationships, to forgive those who wrong us, to not become so touchy or easily offended. It helps us take off our bitterness glasses and see the world through God's grace-graced eyes.

Growing forward is a choice. It's a declaration that you are not the same person you were when you were hurt. You are not letting the pain shrink your heart. Instead, you're boldly asking God to grow your heart, make it have a higher capacity to love others, even people who are difficult to love.

Every day of your life you have a choice—to camp in the pain or to grow faithfully through it. Which will you choose?

As you grow forward, you may need to take one more step, and that's to pray for the person who may be angry with you. Pray this prayer as long as it takes for your heart to tenderize toward them, to want the best for them. Because the best is for everyone involved to be set free from bitterness, right?

Take caution. This is a dangerous prayer. But it just may change everything—you, your relationship, the other person.

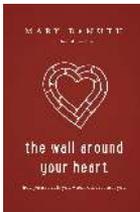
**Prayer:**

*Jesus, if \_\_\_\_\_ has prayed vengeance upon me, I pray You would sift through that and find the parts of me that need correction. No doubt there's a kernel of truth in \_\_\_\_\_'s prayers. I am a sinner, in need of discipline and correction. Would you give \_\_\_\_\_ the holy gumption he/she needs to forgive me and let go of bitterness? And as I pray that, would You grant me the same request? And if \_\_\_\_\_ prays blessing*

*over my life, please hear that prayer and bless \_\_\_\_\_ as I  
pray the same over his/her life. Amen.*

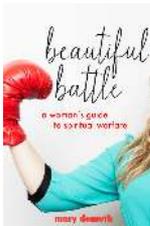
# A Final Note

If this book has helped, you may enjoy some of my other titles.



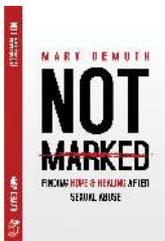
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## My prayer for you

*Jesus, would You do a miracle of healing in my friend's life right now? I want to see him/her set free from offensive words spoken over, from jabs in relationships that seem to continue, from heartache that keeps on opening. Grieve alongside, dear Jesus. Show a pathway through. Bring reconciliation where it is possible, in Your amazing timing. Help my friend to know how much You love them, how much You have forgiven them, how much You long for them to be whole and healthy and joy-infused. Give my friend the tools necessary to discern safe people, to forgive freely, and to boldly step into their calling. This is a brand new day with a brand new life burgeoning. Bring it, Jesus. Amen.*

Discover more ways to heal at <http://www.marydemuth.com>