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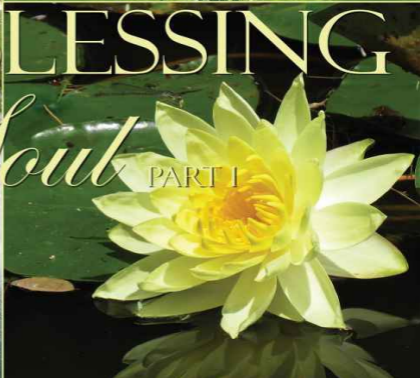


BLESSING

your

Soul

PART I



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Table of Contents

[Introduction](#)

I. Healing the Wounded Soul

[1. In the Womb](#)

[2. Childhood](#)

[3. Marriage](#)

[4. Family](#)

[5. Church](#)

[6. Death](#)

II. Nurturing the Neglected Soul

[1. Wife](#)

[2. Counselor](#)

[3. Pastor](#)

[4. Invisible Soul](#)

5. The Professional

6. The Inventive Soul

III. Calming the Harried Soul

1. Expectations

2. Health

3. Work

4. Family

5. Relationships

6. A Healing Journey

IV. Growing the Hungry Soul

1. Beauty

2. Life

3. Redemption

4. Confluence

[5. Intensity](#)

[6. Immensity](#)

[About Sapphire Leadership Group](#)

Introduction

How well developed is your theology of the soul?

Oh. A bit vague, huh? No problem. We all have to start somewhere so here are a few key points to jump start your process.

God has a soul.

- › His soul hates religion. *Isaiah 1:14 NIV*
- › His soul insists on revenge. *Jeremiah 5:9, 29 NIV*
- › His soul likes some people a whole lot. *Matthew 12:18 AV*

Your soul is God's breath.

- › He breathed into that first clay manikin and it became alive. *Genesis 2:7 AV*

Your soul is pretty intense in its relationship with God.

- › You can pray with your soul and change history. *1 Samuel 1:15 NIV*
- › You can enter into covenant with God using your soul. *2 Chronicles 15:12 NIV*

- › Your soul can desperately pursue relationship with God. *Psalm 42:2 NIV*
- › Your soul can find immense joy in salvation. *Psalm 35:9 NIV*
- › Your soul can worship God extravagantly. *Luke 1:46 NIV*

God has an agenda for your soul.

- › He wants your soul to be fully sanctified – just as much as your spirit. *I Thessalonians 5:23 NIV*
- › He requires you to love Him passionately with your soul. *Luke 10:27 NIV*
- › He specializes in restoring banged up souls. *Psalm 23:3 NIV*
- › He wants your soul to prosper. *III John 2 AV*
- › In fact, He wants it to be like a well watered garden. *Jeremiah 31:12 AV*

So there is your starter plan. You can build it out from there. There are around 750 verses about the soul in the Bible. The topic seems to mean a lot to God.

That is why I wrote this book. Too many people have

a soul that looks more banged up than looking like a well watered garden.

We will start with blessing the wounded soul, then feed the neglected soul.

There is a whole section for the soul that finds itself stuck on a relentless treadmill.

Then it will be my delight to feed the hungry soul and empower the immense soul.

But don't forget, **you do need your own theology of the soul**, so feel free to put this book aside for a while and go to THE Book to explore the original.

Arthur Burk
Sapphire Leadership Group, Inc.
Anaheim, CA
March 2014

BLESSING
your Soul - PART I

I. HEALING
THE WOUNDED SOUL

HEALING
THE WOUNDED SOUL

1. In the Womb

Anger Over Your Existence ~ Ishmael

The Story:

Abraham and Sarah were married but had no kids. Sarah decided to have a child using Hagar, her personal slave, as a surrogate mom. When Hagar got pregnant, Sarah flipped and became furiously jealous of her and the baby, Ishmael, even though it was her idea to begin with. How unfair is that?!

So Ishmael was conceived and raised in a conflicted context. His wealthy father loved him, but he was still a slave. Sarah, who was supposed to adopt him and be his de facto mother, was hostile to him.

Eventually God intervened and commanded Abraham to settle the mess. He was to emancipate Hagar and Ishmael and send them off to have their own life. Abraham did, and God did the rest. Ishmael became the father of twelve nations!

Genesis 16 & 21

The Principle:

You can choose to come into agreement with God's plan for your life, no matter how fiercely people resent your existence.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

Most of your life, someone will not like you. Often a lot of people will not like you. Sometimes a person will violently wish you would cease to exist or that you never did.

These situations are very ugly and quite painful. But the fact that they are intense does not change the reality that God created you for a purpose.

I bless you with being able to endure years of overt, in-your-face rejection and opposition, if that is what it takes, without ever coming into agreement with them that you should not exist.

I bless you, soul, with defiantly coming into agreement with God that it is good that you exist, even if no one else can see that.

Rejection for Gender ~ Dinah

The Story:

Jacob was a male chauvinist. It was extreme! His four wives competed vigorously to give him sons, and he ended up with twelve. Each boy was celebrated as a triumph for the mom. The boys were pawns in the chess game of competing wives whose legitimacy rested on each woman being a factory for more sons.

Into this family of twelve boys, one girl was born. Far from being the little princess, Dinah was merely an asterisk – a data point reported unemotionally with a mere six word sentence. She had no utilitarian value in the world of male shepherds and businessmen.

She grew up in a house full of men who did not value her, but she did grow up. And in time, Dinah was found by a man outside the family who thought she was pretty special.

Genesis 30 & 34

The Principle:

Celebrate your gender – even if no one else does – until the day God brings you the people who can agree with Him that you are special because of your gender.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

God is right, no matter how many people disagree with Him. He chose your gender wisely, even though they and you may not see it yet.

There is deep pain in being rejected for your gender. It is real and can cut deeply. Because of that, God provides grace for the long journey between conception and acceptance.

I bless you, soul, with never coming into agreement with those who think God made you wrong. I bless you with being able to reach for the grace, time and again, to sustain you until your design is celebrated by those around you.

The Stigma of Incest ~ Perez

The Story:

It isn't pretty. Incest never is. Tamar pretended to be a prostitute to trick her father-in-law into getting her pregnant.

Really?

How sick!

Yeah, I agree.

And Tamar didn't really want a baby. She wanted a tool to manipulate Judah. The short version is, before Perez was even conceived, this whole story was really twisted. And after he was born, the story became public knowledge and has been retold to every generation for thousands of years. If you are Perez, how do you deal with THAT?

I don't know how He did, but I know God did not hold him responsible for his beginnings. Perez was one of David's forefathers!

Genesis 38

The Principle:

No matter how our parents mess up our beginning, it doesn't keep God from creating a masterpiece.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

The circumstances surrounding your conception are often public knowledge. What the world does not see is the heart of your Father who designed you in private, far from the cruel eyes and mouths.

No mistake your parents ever made can force God to make you less than He wanted to. He designed you with your future generations in mind, compensating for the twistedness of your conception and the cruelty of people who know about it.

I bless you, soul, with being able to walk in the dignity of knowing you were designed by the same God who made the most celebrated man or woman on earth. Your parents' choices do not diminish God's artistry.

Brutal Birth ~ Benjamin

The Story:

Benjamin's mom had a very hard time getting pregnant. Her husband loved her a lot, but it had been years since her one child was born. Hence, when Benjamin was conceived, it was considered a spectacular answer to prayer for dad and mom.

But when his mom died in childbirth, the spectacular became ghastly. As mom was dying she named her son "Grief Boy." How harsh is that! Your own mother accuses you of killing her!

The reality is that there was a much bigger story. Dad had been given an assignment from God to go care for some important land. Dad gave it a lick and a promise and left town. From that day on, God's hand was against Benjamin's father in a big way. The death of his wife was really his fault, not Benjamin's.

Genesis 35

The Principle:

Babies do not kill their mamas. Period. There is always a bigger picture.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

If your mother experienced great pain or the loss of her life during your birth, I am sure harsh things were said about you. The bottom line is, you did not design your mother's birth canal, and you did not ask to be conceived in that womb. You are innocent of wrong doing in this matter.

I ask God to break off all the judgments spoken over you by family, friends and the medical staff. I bless you with being free to be the person God made you to be.

Benjamin's father rejected his wife's bitter naming and instead called the boy "My Right Hand Man!" I bless you, soul, with becoming defined by the nature your Heavenly Father gave you, not by the dynamics of your birth.

HEALING THE WOUNDED SOUL

2. Childhood

Evil Parents ~ Hezekiah

The Story:

What if your parents were murderers? What if they murdered your own brother? This is Hezekiah's life. His father was King Ahaz. He started his reign by vandalizing the Temple and closing it down so there was no worship of the One True God. Then, when the dogs of war were loosed, Ahaz sacrificed one of his own sons in the fire to an idol.

How do you say good bye to your brother, knowing what was going to happen and why? From a psychological perspective, Hezekiah should have been utterly scarred and damaged for life.

In reality, the aggressive presence of unspeakable evil in his life produced a passion for purity. When he became king, his first act, on the first day, was to begin restoration of the Temple. He was passionate about bringing the knowledge of the Most High God to everyone in his kingdom. What a stunning rebound from his childhood.

2 Kings 16-20; 2 Chronicles 28-32

The Principle:

A horrific childhood can create the deepest hunger for a world made right.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

Have you seen horror upon horror? Whether it happened in childhood or in adult life, whether premeditated like war or sudden like an accident, it marks you.

I bless you with the resilience of Hezekiah. May you sanctify trauma by becoming a champion for safety. May you rise above betrayal by teaching a whole generation what it means to be loyal. And may the rejection of God by those around you produce in you a white hot passion for more of Him.

Lonely ~ Joash

The Story:

When Joash was a baby, there was a palace coup. To save his life, his nanny hid him in the Temple. He stayed there in a mind bending paradox for six years. He was the crown prince – but was a virtual prisoner. He had no friends his age. He did not go to school, or the ball game, or shopping or to the beach. He had to pretend he did not exist!

Imagine being locked indoors for six year of early childhood! Yet Joash used it to become deeply focused on His God. When he became king of Judah at the age of seven, he was God-focused. Once he had all the privileges of the throne, he did not pour himself into self-gratification, making up for lost time. He brought the nation to God.

2 Kings 11-12; 2 Chronicles 22-24

The Principle:

Lack of human community allows you time to go deep with God.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

Your aching, craving, longing for friendship is not wrong. God gave you that desire. The acute pain that you feel walking through life alone, with no one celebrating with you in your successes, is a real pain.

It is assuredly easier for most of us to connect with people and have human community. However, it IS possible to have a deep, intimate relationship with God, when the people are not there. It just takes a whole lot more work to get there, sometimes.

I bless you with the courage to rise above failed friendships by pursuing the connection with God that will allow real life to flow from Him to you, satisfying you at the core.

Life without Roots ~ Othniel

The Story:

Imagine going to bed tonight, not knowing where you will live tomorrow. That was Othniel's life. He grew up during the 40 years the Hebrews wandered in the desert. Each night they pitched a tent, not knowing if they would be there for a day or a month.

He had no roots. Pack up. Be quick and efficient. March all day. Set up the tent. No wasted moves. Do it again tomorrow. For 40 years. Not a fun childhood!

Out of that experience came a highly disciplined man with a keen ability to see available resources and to adjust his plan swiftly to take advantage of a new reality. He became a skilled warrior who is famous for conquering one of the more formidable fortresses in Canaan.

Joshua 15

The Principle:

A transient lifestyle can make one highly adaptable and able to seize the moment.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

The desire for roots and familiarity is God given. Not having them is generally a disruptive thing. But soul, you can grow in the midst of disruption.

If you have been deprived of stability, I bless you, soul, with developing uncommon alertness for available resources. I bless you with seeing opportunities others miss. I bless you with becoming a keen strategist, moving forward with confidence in situations that would be daunting to others.

I bless you, soul, with becoming highly sought after for your ability as a crisis manager when others are destabilized inside because their outside world is changing.

Force Fit into a Career ~ Daniel

The Story:

Daniel grew up in a privileged, righteous family in Judah during war time. His nation lost the war, and he was taken to Babylon as a POW where he was forcibly assigned to a career in the civil service. His training included studying black magic.

Daniel was gift of Mercy. He loved the One True God and had no taste for political machinations. Yet he was forced into a career that violated most of his design.

Regardless of being jammed into a slot that he was not designed for, God met him consistently, giving him power and intimacy in that misfit place!

Daniel 1-12

The Principle:

Life doesn't have to be right for it to be good.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

Finding where you fit in a complex culture is challenging. Sometimes your own choices are counter productive and other times the pressure of family or economics push you into a slot that is a total misfit.

Soul, the pain of operating out of your design is very real and I know that feeling well. However, I bless you with faith to anticipate meeting God in that place. No matter why you are there – your sin, someone else's control or simply the culture in disarray – it does not limit God's willingness to meet you and give you a rich life.

After all, if Jesus would leave heaven and come to Nazareth, He has no compunctions about coming into your situation in an astounding way to give you an uncommonly extraordinary life.

HEALING
THE WOUNDED SOUL

3. Marriage

A Wrong Beginning ~ David and Bathsheba

The Story:

In terms of wrong beginnings, it doesn't get much worse than this. Bathsheba was married. She and David committed adultery. She got pregnant. David tried to cover it up. Eventually he arranged for her husband to be murdered, so he could marry the widow.

It was just plain wicked.

Fast forward 20 years and they are a dream couple. David dealt successfully with his sex addiction that had been on display for a lot of years before this incident. The two of them built an intimate marriage around the pursuit of God's best for their son. It wasn't easy, but they got there.

2 Samuel 11; 1 Kings 1

The Principle:

A horrible beginning to your marriage does not necessarily define its potential.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

A bad beginning is a bad beginning, and whether the whole world knows, or just you and your spouse, the grief over your choices and the shame over your lack of self-control can gnaw at you endlessly.

I challenge you, soul, to embrace the fact that you were designed by God to change. The road may be long, and hard, and confusing, and marked by many setbacks, but it is entirely possible for you to become a different person than you were then.

Since God invites you to become what you have never been yet, I suggest you accept His invitation to lean into the journey toward dignity, rather than remaining mired in shame.

A Coarse Spouse ~ Nabal and Abigail

The Story:

Abigail is presented as beautiful, with a keen sense of presentation. She had the respect of the many servants on their large farm. She understood human psychology and did crisis management with brilliance. An unusual, exceptional woman.

Her husband is presented as a man who had wealth, drank too much, was crude and insensitive, lacking perspective on life. His servants existed to enable his self-absorbed lifestyle. A stereotypic boor.

And they were married. It had to be hard for her to retain her elegance and excellence when her husband was the antithesis of who she was. Difficult or not, she did it. And that is the point.

1 Samuel 25

The Principle:

You can continue to be a class act, even if you have a coarse spouse.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

You are made to function in community, and you are often most comfortable in a community that shares your values and cheers you on in keeping the standard high. That is right and good and is the way God made you. It is the heart of a great marriage.

However, if you find yourself in a marriage where there are not shared values, you have a challenging choice. You can lower your standards to gain the approval of someone you do not respect, or you can endure the loneliness and the weariness of keeping your standards high so you can respect yourself.

I bless you, soul, with the wisdom and endurance to reach for the best you can be, even if it puts stress on your family relationships.

Spiritual Distance ~ Jacob and Rachel

The Story:

Jacob walked out a very messy life, but he never wobbled on his adherence to Yahweh as his God. He did not always follow Him fully, but he never worshipped any other god.

His love for Rachel was deep and unwavering.

Rachel, however, never bought into his faith. She didn't buck him openly, but when he made a dicey business decision just because God told him to, she hedged her bets by stealing her father's ancestral idols. Jacob and Rachel simply were not on the same page in terms of risk abatement vs. faith.

Genesis 31

The Principle:

Having a spouse who does not share your spiritual journey is hard, but it is no excuse for not walking out

what you were called to.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

God designed marriage to be one of the most spiritual facets of human community. Often however, the reality is far from God's ideal.

Soul, you are right in being keenly disappointed if you are in hot pursuit of God and your partner is ambivalent or even antagonistic. It is a keen loss for sure. It will certainly make many facets of your spiritual journey more challenging and less fulfilling, because you were designed to have your spiritual and social intimacy blend richly.

If you are walking that path, I bless you with a double portion of endurance and creativity to rise above the obstacles and to create an immense spiritual legacy for your children.

Bi Racial Marriage ~ Moses and the Cushite

The Story:

Strong man rescues damsel in distress! Moses' first marriage started off like a fairy tale but ended up in a bloody mess when he tried to serve God. She took the kids and went home. He walked through the drama of the Exodus without a wife at his side. When they reconnected, there was no fire. He never did manage to restore that marriage.

Eventually, he found a foreigner who shared his passion for God. They married. His family reacted violently. And so did God.

In the presence of the entire nation of Israel, God dressed down Moses' siblings for their attitude about his marriage. God was downright savage in his defense of this bi-racial couple.

Exodus 2 & 4; Numbers 12

The Principle:

God REALLY hates racism!

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

Admittedly there are a lot of poorly thought out marriages, and admittedly, parents are sometimes right in saying two people should not have married. But if the only issue is race, and your community is rejecting your spouse because of their skin when their heart is right before God, they are on dangerous ground.

Racism is not apt to go away any time soon. And neither is God's hatred of racism.

I bless you, soul, to walk with grace in a bi-racial marriage in spite of the storm. May you find deep pleasure in savoring God's pleasure over the enriching of two family lines with the treasures of disparate races and cultures.

HEALING
THE WOUNDED SOUL

4. Family

Failed Parenting ~ The Prodigal's Father

The Story:

For the Prodigal Son to ask for his inheritance early was tantamount to saying, “Dad, I wish you were dead.” Clearly the boy had an inability to relate to his father and could only see life through the grid of money.

The older brother had the same issue. When Dad threw a party for the brat, Older Brother's biggest issue was that Dad had killed the fattened calf, a very significant family asset. In other words, there was no difference between the two boys. Both spurned family relationships. Both were about money.

And that says to me that the real problem was Dad. Any chance they were mirroring his values as he passionately pursued wealth while marginalizing the boys? And how could he fix a lifetime of wrong values, when the boys were grown? The answer is, he kept trying.

Luke 15

The Principle:

Stay in the game, no matter how badly you failed at parenting.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

Got regrets over your parenting style? Most of us do. And then our kids add some pain to our guilt as they either assault us or erase us out of their lives.

Rebuilding a broken relationship is hard work. It is doubly hard when you are in deep personal pain. I bless you with being able to take your pain to the Heavenly Father and receive from Him strength and strategy to reach out to your kids one more time.

I bless you, soul, with hope from Father, when hope in the natural is beyond gone.

The Misfit ~ John the Baptist

The Story:

As an adult, John the Baptist was high energy and not very user friendly. Can you imagine what he was like as a teenager? You add the fact that his parents were quite elderly and you can only shake your head at the mismatch.

Then there was the clash of values. His father was so proper that seeing an angel was too much for his theology. The community was so proper they wanted to control his name. The boy was so improper he wanted to tear the whole mess down and start over!

It appears from the story that the mismatch was never resolved. John was a bit of a wild child who raised himself in isolation in the desert.

Luke 1 & 3

The Principle:

When your calling is so far beyond what your birth family can accept, you have to fight hard to retain your identity while pushing away the identity they invented for you.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

Why does God create people with a distilled passion and then place them in a proper, bland family? I have no clue, but I know John the Baptist was not the first, nor the last.

I bless you, soul, with the strength to forgive God for placing you with parents who didn't get you, and to forgive them for not being able to figure out how to parent a child who didn't seem to come from their genetic pool!

And I bless you with being able to feel Father's pleasure over the gift He placed in you, so that His joy in you is more dominant than your rejection by society.

Family Scandal ~ Hosea

The Story:

After dinner Dad cleared his throat and said, “Kids, I have an announcement. Your mom has had a long series of affairs, and I am done with hoping she will change. I have kicked her out, you will not see her any more and I am going to publicly break her for what she did to me.”

Ummm . . . how exactly do you switch off love for Mom just because Dad did?

In the end, Dad won. He broke Mom. And then he reconciled with her. And he rebuilt her life and brought her home a new woman. But the interim sure was awful.

Hosea 1-2

The Principle:

Public shame that leads to healing is better than

defiant denial that allows the problem to continue to fester until it kills.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

I wonder who you are as you read this – the parent or the child. I wonder if you are wrestling with blowing the cover off the secret or whether it already happened.

I bless you with knowing that God does not share the emotions of the community. He is not shocked when the secret becomes public, and He does not have to take sides. He is vested in recovery, not blame, and doesn't have to protect His reputation by not associating with someone.

When you cannot face the community because of what your family has done, know that you can still go freely to Father and share your pain and confusion. He has not flinched at all over the scandal.

Betrayal ~ Isaac and Rebekah

The Story:

They were twins. Dad loved the older boy. Mom loved the younger. At first it was only slightly messy. But then it came time to deal with the inheritance. Dad planned to give the good stuff to his favorite and to stiff Mama's Boy. Mama had other plans.

Mama's Boy was not very excited about the embezzlement, but he was, after all, Mama's Boy. She schemed it all out and he executed the colossal theft.

In the end, the cover was blown and Dad was left with a bleeding heart over the fact that the whole thing was driven by his helpmeet who didn't have his back.

Genesis 27

The Principle:

God can achieve great things in spite of a dysfunctional family.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

Have you ever stood stunned as you watched one person effectively destroy something that matters a lot to God? You are not alone in that shock and horror. From the first couple onward, family has played havoc with God's plans.

God has tenacity and creativity far beyond that of your gnarly family, and He has resurrected and redeemed endless dreams that died a brutal death. In fact, one could say it is His specialty. There is no excuse for Rebekah. She betrayed her husband. But she didn't block God from changing world history.

I bless you, soul, with a heart full of faith, to be more impressed with God's resilience and creativity than you are with your family's destructiveness.

HEALING
THE WOUNDED SOUL

5. Church

Pious Passive Leadership ~ Samuel

The Story:

Samuel was a legend in his own time. His love of God and faithfulness in serving Him was over the top. Aspiring spiritual giants wanted to be like him – the ultimate blend of priest and prophet.

It was baffling to the general public, though, how a man this close to God could turn a blind eye to the sins of his sons. Why did he leave them in the priestly/judicial office when they were so horribly, obviously, openly corrupt? There were no answers.

Since they did not want to confront Samuel over his passivity, they demanded a change of structure, thereby making the problem a whole lot worse.

I Samuel 8-10

The Principle:

A wrong response to pain is not the solution to a

leadership problem.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

Have you ever been there? Isn't it wild how someone can be in touch with God in ways we only dream about while being so paralyzed about the lack of integrity on his team?

If you have been through the melee of a board fight or church split over the issue of integrity in leadership, I bless you with the courage to see where you were wrong and not just see the sins of the other parties. As you clear your conscience before God for doing too much, it will help you heal from leaders who did too little.

Confronting Male Chauvinism ~ Paul

The Story:

Paul came from the ultra-conservative religious stream that was racist and chauvinist in the extreme. When he converted from Judaism to Christianity, he planned to infect the new faith with his old viruses.

The Head of the Church had other plans. After making Paul THE champion of racial integration in the early church, Christ addressed his view of women.

Paul had a dream of a man from Macedonia calling for ministry. He rushed there, only to find a businesswoman was waiting for him with a heart full of questions. And so began Paul's relationship with the church at Philippi that loved him more and longer than any other.

Act 16; Philippians 1-4

The Principle:

God values women regardless of whether the men are smart enough to.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

Have you sat under the teaching of a man of God, writhing silently as he illustrated his teachings with stories of women being foolish? Try this. Imagine Jesus sitting next to you listening to the same teaching and feel His anger over the travesty.

Soul, there are always those who miss God's heart. I bless you with finding His anger on this issue to be a balm for the wounds you have picked up in the house of God over the years.

Now ponder the end of the story. When Christ gathers His beloved church into eternity, He embraces them as the Bride – and every Christian male chauvinist will be included in the Bride. Women will be stupendously vindicated!

Broken Teamwork ~ Barnabas and Paul

The Story:

Barnabas was an inveterate gambler. He picked up people who were rough around the edges and walked with them while they grew up.

One of his prizes was Paul who was so rejected by the early church that he went and hid in Tarsus. Barnabas went to find him and brought him back to Antioch where they ministered together for years. A triumph for the gambler.

Another time he gambled on John Mark. The soft, rich, city boy blew out his first road trip. On the next trip Paul refused to gamble on him a second time while the gambler insisted on gambling. Neither would budge, so they split after a decade of teamwork. So sad.

Acts 11-15

The Principle:

Strong people who gamble on high-potential, messy people have produced most of the best people in the church over the last 2,000 years. The church needs more gamblers.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

Gamblers! What a contentious issue. I watched a pastor take a serial adulterer onto his church staff and shuddered at his gamble. On the other hand, many of my close friends have shuddered at the people I gamble on! *Touché*.

If someone gambled on you when you were still messy, why not bless them today. And if you ever sat in judgment on someone who gambled on a mess you wouldn't have touched, perhaps you could release them from your judgment.

I bless you with a soft spot in your soul for the gamblers in our midst, even if you play it safe.

A Dead End Assignment ~ Zadok

The Story:

Somehow, Israel ended up with two high priests: Zadok and Abiathar. When David brought up the ark to Jerusalem, he now had two tabernacles! He assigned Abiathar to the cushy job in Jerusalem. Zadok got stuck with the Tabernacle in Gibeah that God would never visit again.

After years of service, Abiathar got swept up in the politics of Jerusalem and committed treason. Zadok was called up from the minor leagues to crown Solomon king. In return for his faithful service in obscurity, he received a promise of a timeless dynasty. Abiathar was defrocked and excommunicated.

2 Samuel 15; 1 Kings 1

The Principle:

You can't possibly know what God is protecting you

from or preparing you for when you are in a boring assignment.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

Do you feel like a V8 diesel engine stuck in the back of a Volkswagen bug?

I bless you with faith, soul, to trust the processes and timing of God. What if you are doing something far bigger than you know? Or what if God is developing one particular character quality in you? Or what if he is protecting you?

Soul, if you know God sent you there, take your eyes off the things that are keeping you there and lean into the task with vigor. It is easy to bless tomorrow by faith because it looks so grand. It is heroic to bless the small place where you are by faith, when it looks so . . . well, pointless.

HEALING
THE WOUNDED SOUL

6. Death

Death of Hope ~ Habakkuk

The Story:

Habakkuk was a gentle Mercy priest who wrote extraordinary poetry. He loved his Lord and his land, and when Judah began to disintegrate into lawlessness on both sides of the Bench, he queried God about His inactivity.

God replied that He had a plan. He was going to shatter Judah's national security, government, economy, religion and society. No person or institution would be safe.

The Mercy was staggered at the thought. HIS God was not offering him the slightest guarantee that he would survive the coming disintegration. His theology was shattered, but his faith was not. In the end, he declared he could trust God even if the worst came to him personally.

Habakkuk 1-3

The Principle:

Corporate judgment will test the reality of your relationship with God.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

When God does a corporate judgment – spanking a family, a company, a church, a school or a city – innocent people get hurt along with the guilty. It seems terribly unfair to the righteous that they should not be exempted from the judgment.

I bless you, soul, with the courage to face every kind of devouring, even death, without judging God. I bless you with being able to keep your knowledge of God's goodness central in your focus, when fear is clamoring for primacy.

Death of a Lifestyle ~ Queen Esther

The Story:

She had a pretty simple plan for her life. Grow up, get married to a fine Jewish man, have kids and enjoy her extended family a lot. Not complicated. It didn't work. Through no fault of her own, she was beautiful. Through no fault of her own, one of the king's minions discovered her and forcibly took her to the Gentile king's harem.

There was no turning back. She was a prisoner in the palace and would not be allowed to see her relatives again. Never. Ever. No way. She could not have any of the Jewish lifestyle she expected. She would never have a husband of the kind she envisioned. The finality of her transition from one world to another was staggering.

In the end, God met her in her unwanted, unloved, new lifestyle in an epic way.

Esther 2

The Principle:

God has a branch office in the most ungratifying places you can end up in.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

So your whole life was wrecked by the drunk driver, or the cheating spouse, or the special needs child. There is no turning back, no recapturing the lifestyle you poured your heart into.

I bless you, soul, with grieving deeply and well. The losses are real, and they will remain losses, no matter what else God gives you. Grieve a healthy grief so you can be free to go on and discover where God is in this new, unwelcome, challenging lifestyle that was forced on you.

Soul, you probably took a hit for the good of the spirit and the Kingdom. I bless you with finding your own flavor of joy in this new lifestyle, in the midst of the bigger agenda.

Death of a Dream ~ Naomi

The Story:

Her dream was coming along nicely. Husband? Check! Children? Two sons. Check! Get them grown up and married? Check! Move to a neighborhood with more economic opportunity? Check!

And then disaster struck as husband and sons died. Money dried up. All she could do was to crawl back to the 'hood and face her childhood friends as an abject failure. So she did.

Her daughter-in-law tagged along. As they struggled for survival on a very basic level, some doors opened for Ruth. Naomi leaned into making a way for Ruth and in the process found a full, rich life for herself, once again.

Ruth 1

The Principle:

When your dream has died, invest in someone else's dream.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

Hard fact: you need a dream. Your body doesn't. You were designed by God to move toward something. When all your dreams have died but your body stubbornly refuses to, it is simply ugly.

I bless you with looking outward when life insists on being, but you have no reason for being. Mere existence is brutal. I bless you with the courage to find some measure of life for you, the soul, by engaging in the dream of someone around you who has life in their soul.

Death of Self-Respect ~ Peter

The Story:

Peter was rock solid on his self-awareness. He was a man's man. Feared no storm. Carried the heavy end of the log. Was swift to respond to any challenge. He was loyalty incarnate and loved a good fight. He was the rock that Jesus could count on. Simple, clear, indisputable.

Then, he ran like a coward and violently, publically, profanely, repeatedly denied he had any clue who Jesus was. Peter became rock solid in his new self-awareness: he was an absolute loser. Simple, clear, indisputable.

Jesus cheerfully disputed his new identity and gave him a path back to dignity. Learn to feed lambs. Learn to shepherd sheep. Learn to feed sheep. Master those three skills and it will unpack the real you. Guaranteed.

Mark 14; John 21

The Principle:

God offers a road back to dignity no matter what your failure was.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

Been rocked? There are few disasters as devastating to you, the soul, as discovering you are not as good as you were sure you are. What happened? Well, generally, you were reading your potential, but it was not unpacked yet. You were part right.

Soul, the odds are that you will actually be much bigger than even you know, when you get it unpacked. Each person's life is designed by God to unpack their whole potential. Each unpacking is a mysterious, one-of-a-kind masterpiece.

I bless you with finding the strange path that will help what you know about yourself become indisputably evident to all – even you.

BLESSING
your Soul - PART I

II. NURTURING
THE NEGLECTED SOUL

NURTURING THE NEGLECTED SOUL

1. Wife

Wisdom Disdained ~ Cindy and Chuck

The Story:

Cindy grew up on a farm where her gender was almost a non-issue. She cared for the stock, drove a tractor and participated in endless business discussions around the dinner table just like her brothers. Summer vacations were spent camping in rugged areas.

Chuck was a city boy who played sports all the way through college and became an engineer almost as an afterthought. His most memorable vacations involved playoffs for the major leagues.

Cindy's background made her exceptional at long range planning and effortless execution. Chuck's degree made him think he was the ultimate planner, when in reality, he was just tolerable at fixing the messes his wife could have helped him avoid.

The Strategy:

Be faithful on the playing field God has given you, no matter how small, and let God validate you in His time and in His way.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

Wisdom is not the private reserve of the male tribe, even if some of them feel that way. If the particular flavor of your wisdom is not a valid currency in your marriage, I bless you with the courage to reject the disdain and to celebrate your treasures with God, calling them good, precious and useful.

I bless you, soul, with being able to walk without bitterness, in anticipation and wonder over how God will some glorious day make space for your wisdom to shine in your marriage and vindicate you for the years of waiting and disdain.

Potential Devalued ~ Conrad and Jody

The Story:

Jody was a dreamer and a doodler. Somehow she muddled through school with her dream of doing art intact. She and Conrad married young, then she worked sundry jobs to get him through college.

His first pay check with four digits before the decimal point was a thing of total wonder to them. They bought their first pizza without a coupon to celebrate.

Soon she got out her dreams and began looking for the right school. He asked her to wait a bit longer before quitting her job. A year later, the same. Finally it became clear that he saw no value in unpacking her treasure even though she had invested in his.

The Strategy:

First, weep over the reality. Then bless your treasure when no one else does. Then invest in it however you can now, even if you cannot make the big investment

it deserves.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

First of all, you are in good company. Most of God's finest gifts to mankind have been ignored. Second, build deep intimacy with Jesus because those around Him didn't invest in unpacking His treasures either.

I bless you, soul, with pursuing intimacy in your marriage in spite of this reality. I bless you with finding deep intimacy with Christ as you share the pain of being devalued. And I bless you with growing in sonship as He coaches you on how to become exceptional in a deficient environment. He did! So can you.

Beauty Over-valued ~ Christine

The Story:

Christine was the princess, born after four boys. She was a cute kid, a lovely teen and a stunning young woman. She discovered math and it became her first love. She aced the AP courses and the SAT, landing a full scholarship to study engineering at Stanford.

Because she had four brothers, she was adept with the male tribe. She married a guy from the MBA program, looking forward to a rich intellectual partnership.

To her dismay, she was relegated to being eye candy at his social gatherings. He gained legitimacy with the guys because his wife was beautiful. He cared nothing for her brain and neither did they. Her beauty hid her treasure.

The Strategy:

Don't curse your beauty or their stupidity! War

against the mantle of invisibility, and wait for God to showcase the treasures He gave you in the setting of His choice.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

I bless you with fighting a relentless battle to be celebrated for all of the treasures God gave you. I so understand that men will celebrate your beauty and be intimidated by your intellectual prowess. I so understand that women become catty when a woman has both beauty and brains.

Nonetheless, I passionately affirm your right to be everything God made you to be, and to be seen as He sees you.

I bless you, soul, with intense inner pleasure over your mental abilities, even when you have to celebrate alone, because those who know you best, don't know you at all.

Parenting Delegated ~ Derek and Janice

The Story:

Derek graced the title “Man of God.” He was profoundly saved at age three and grew rapidly in his knowledge of the Word. Everyone at high school knew he was destined to be a preacher, even though he played a superb game of football.

Seminary enjoyed him and he it. His first church assignment came easily, so he and his young bride leaned into the wonders of his calling.

Babies and promotions showed up often. By the time little Joey was a teenager, Janice was a single mom as Derek was blissfully married to the church, cluelessly committing bigamy in the name of God.

The Strategy:

Appeal to your husband and then to God. In spite of the unjust situation, God can provide the grace for you to be mother and father to your children.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

I profoundly appreciate the frustration of a pastor's wife. He is doing the work of God, and if you complain about anything, you are deemed to be a disloyal helpmeet.

But God is not blocked by injustice on the earth. I bless you, soul, with rising above the pain and the pressure to find treasures from Father as you do the work of two people. May you have uncommon wisdom as you introduce your children to the Father heart of God.

You are surprised and disillusioned by the current situation but God is not. His supplies are sufficient to give you strength AND joy in your process. I cheer you on to do a noble deed in a difficult scenario.

NURTURING THE NEGLECTED SOUL

2. Counselor

Ugliness ~ Chrissie's Ambiance

The Story:

Chrissie was in demand whenever there was an event. She didn't need a title or a job. She just showed up, drifted around and effortlessly added beauty to the event. Somehow, it just happened. Beauty flowed from her.

Her first office was a drab box in a frumpy dump. It cost her a lot of meal money, but she made the interior lovely. As time went on, she moved to better locations and was able to invest much more money into making the settings an accurate reflection of the beauty in her.

But no amount of external beauty could mask the fact that she spent her days listening to toxic souls bleeding their pain, shame and filth all over her.

The Strategy:

You can't change the defiling nature of your calling.

You must therefore, make time to cleanse your soul regularly and to pamper it with the flavor of beauty that feeds you most.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

Nobody wants to go to a counselor who enjoys ugliness. You are exactly the kind of person who belongs in this field – someone driven to restore beauty to a life. But – it costs you a lot to walk this road.

As someone who has benefitted from having a listening ear when I needed to offload some toxicity, I express a heartfelt THANK YOU to you and your tribe for the treasure you offer us. May God reward you with uncommon beauty after hours and the joy of seeing some of your people walk all the way from brokenness to the fully congruent life you crave for them.

Failure ~ Tony If Only

The Story:

Tony was a bundle of potential. And excuses.

It is true that his childhood was pretty damaging, but no more than millions of others. And it was true that his circumstances at present were less than ideal, but no more than millions of others.

It was also true that he had vastly more potential inside him than millions of others, and if he would only apply himself to the healing work at hand, his treasures could easily trump his past and present.

Sharon worked with him at length, showing the resources within and the life he could have. In the end, he opted to wish on a shooting star and blame his failure on the world.

The Strategy:

Dig deeply to see the treasures behind the brokenness.

Hope largely as you celebrate them. Dream immensely when they can't. Grieve deeply when they won't.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

Don't you just love the privilege of being the one to see and put language to the treasures in someone else? They think they are poor and you get to show them their riches. It is the most fun part of sharing someone's journey – until they make the soft choices and opt to stay stuck.

I bless you, soul, with being free to grieve deeply when it happens. The foundational right God gave man was to be stupid, but His foundational right was to grieve for those who are. May you meet your God in a tender place as you and He share the pain of other people's choices and grieve that your best was not good enough.

Risk ~ Millie's Battle

The Story:

Millie learned her lesson well. The psychologist asked whether she had thoughts of self harm. In an attempt to facilitate her healing, she said yes. Half an hour later she found herself in a locked down psyche ward. She cursed the therapist, made some inner vows and set to work to game the system.

After that she avoided all licensed therapists and lied briskly if the subject of suicide ever came up.

Eventually she got a good thing going with Jeannie, a prayer minister at a church. What she didn't know was that Jeannie came from a long struggle of cutting, burning and trying to end it all, so she read Millie like a book. Jeannie wrestled for months with the terrible burden of holding Millie's life in her hands.

The Strategy:

The burden of risk can take you down if you carry it

yourself, endlessly. You will need to share the load with the Lord – He is no stranger to gambling on high risk people.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

Counseling is marked by repeated failure. No counselor has ever been good enough to get everyone where they want to go, much less where they need to go. However, the failure of having a client commit suicide is daunting in the extreme.

Soul, I honor you for the price you pay in taking the risk of working with unstable people. I know there is no riskier proposition than betting on human beings. I bless you, soul, with deep wisdom when you are playing brinksmanship and seasons of respite from the heavy load.

Futility ~ Impossible Ian

The Story:

In all her years of counseling, Frances never had a better client. In fact, he was so compliant she once wondered if he was phony – setting a trap for her.

Eventually she came to believe Ian simply wanted desperately to be free. He was transparent. He worked hard on memories. He encouraged her to try any new technique. And he was diligent in all of the growth exercises she gave him. He was a therapist's dream.

In the end, her best was not good enough. She played her heart out, and her skill set was not good enough to unlock the chains from his gnarly past. She and he struggled with denial for about six months but finally faced the fact she had nothing more to offer. Something died in each when he walked out the door the last time.

The Strategy:

Use the pain of coming up short to build a bridge to intimacy with Christ. He came up short with a lot of people, even though He had superb skills and played hard.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

You know in theory that you don't have all the answers for everyone, but you take pride in your craft and invest deeply in learning your particular niche. At the end of the day, though, the human psyche is too multifaceted for you to solve all the riddles, even though you stay in a narrow niche.

I bless you, soul, with finding the narrow path where you still have a deep drive to learn more and be better, without becoming driven by the impossible goal of always having an answer.

NURTURING THE NEGLECTED SOUL

3. Pastor

No Closure ~ Pastor Ed and Jenn

The Story:

Thursday night was a potluck for a new pastor in the district. Pastor Ed and Jenn arrived a bit early and enjoyed a few personal minutes with John and Cheryl who were simply amazing hosts.

One of the ice breakers for the evening was for everyone to share the worst job they had while going through seminary. Todd took top honors for his job at the mortuary. While they were all ribbing him, Ed thought back to that assembly line job he had hated so much.

Tonight, he would love to go there again for one day. It offered the blessing of closure at the end of each shift. In this job, he had never done enough. He never loved enough, prayed enough, studied enough, worshipped enough or evangelized enough. No closure. Oh, and he had never invested enough in his wife or kids either.

The Strategy:

Celebrate the first downs more intently when the games and the seasons never end.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

Let's face it. This job is never going to change. It was tailor made for people who live an open ended lifestyle. It will always be a rub for those who NEED closure.

I bless you with finding so much joy in the moments of God's intervention that it offsets the constant drain of needing to do more. I give you permission to stop the relentless pace for a few minutes here and there throughout the day, in order to savor the life of God that just flowed through you.

May those hugs from Father hugely transcend the slow drain of endless things you do.

Messy People ~ Wobbly Wayne

The Story:

Wayne came from a messy background. His parents were a mess. His grandparents were a mess. His school was a mess and so was his neighborhood. By the time he turned 18, he had made his own messes. Then he got saved and was still pretty much of a mess.

There was no question that he wanted to grow and was very different from the mess who first walked in the church doors. There was also no question that he still made messes. I mean really: sharing his porn videos with the youth group?!

Pastor agonized over Wayne. It was amazing he was not doing 25 to life right now. And he WAS growing – in some areas. But in others . . . How long should he tolerate Wayne's wobbles before drawing the line?

The Strategy:

First, be sure there is no anger in your heart. If they are in denial, consider justice to get their attention. If they are not, consider mercy.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

Most of your congregation is wounded and needs love, and most are also naughty and need discipline. It is tough to know when to hug and when to holler. Will showing mercy for this sin, this time, foster deeper repentance or more sin?

Soul, I bless you to walk with confidence when you know you cannot be right all the time. Dealing with humans who are on a journey is complicated. I bless you with being joyful about your good calls, honest about the bad ones and able to recover quickly when you do damage by giving too much mercy or not enough.

Emotion on Demand ~ Pastor Howie

The Story:

Monday – it was a divorce and a bankruptcy. Tuesday – a long awaited promotion. Wednesday – cancer and two amazing salvations. Thursday – a fellow pastor resigned. Friday – a missing child and a closed escrow. Then comes Sunday, when he did face time with his congregation.

Pastor Howie loved people and his people loved him, but he felt a lot like an app on a phone. He was broadly ignored by his congregants until they had an emotional spike – up or down. And then, he was expected to synchronize with them intensely.

The social contract to be compassionate or exuberant on a second's notice, no matter where he personally was emotionally, was wearing him out.

The Strategy:

Teach your congregation to synchronize to your

emotions like you do to theirs.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

You have a tough one there. Most leaders solve the problem by building walls and hiring gate keepers so they can push the raw emotions of the congregation down to their underlings. They avoid pastoring the people so they can effectively pastor the church. But you have carefully nurtured your brand as someone who is accessible and who cares about your people.

Kudos to you, soul, for an awesome brand. You will take a lot of heat for not having “better boundaries.” So did Jesus. But He played His heart out to the point of complete exhaustion and then went out and did it again! You are in great company!

No Life ~ Pastor Graham

The Story:

God had gone totally silent for Pastor Graham. No matter where or how he studied the Word, there was no illumination. His sermons were nothing more than new illustrations of the same stuff. He was boring himself with his sermons.

He searched his life for sin and asked his prayer partners about blind spots. He went to the best prayer team in town to see if there was a spiritual attack against him.

Things were so flat he asked his wife if his call to the ministry was over and he needed to do something else. She felt strongly he was to stay. So he did. Going through the motions. Feeling like a hypocrite. Wondering what happened.

The Strategy:

Be real! It is fine to let the church know that the Spirit

has gone AWOL and you are preaching from an empty well.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

The Holy Spirit gets to withdraw from the game anytime He wants. And your personal spirit is allowed to shut down and not show up for work when it wants. But YOU get stuck holding the bag when the calendar says it is Sunday morning and they don't show up to do their job. What's up with that?

There is not much to say, soul. You are the Steady Freddie with the character to do what needs to be done when the fire has gone out. I bless you with the grace to hold the fort until the others come back and with the candor to make it plain that you are subbing, not faking. Your job is hard enough without getting busted for fraud.

NURTURING
THE NEGLECTED SOUL

4. Invisible Soul

Church Member ~ First Church of Opportunities

The Story:

Apostle Henderson was a builder. He had vision for ministering to everyone from the tribes of Papua New Guinea to the leaders of the G8. To build, you need people and money. And he wasn't half bad at finding both!

Leroy came to FCO for exactly that reason. He had been to Bible college, then got an MBA and repped Xerox in South America. He spoke three languages, was affable, loved God and brought fierce loyalty to the table.

He came in the usual way: The Apostolic Training Center. After finishing the course, he was given a minor assignment in the church. Ten years later, he was still there, watching dozens of visionaries be sent out to do jobs he thought he could do better.

The Strategy:

Find out whether it is God who is delaying your deployment or man. If the former, drill down on personal disciplines while waiting. If man, move on. Inappropriate loyalty will stop the work of God. Ask Samuel!

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

Feels like being chosen last for the playground team, doesn't it? And that isn't supposed to be the way the game is played in the church.

I bless you, soul, with finding the currency of heaven. The currency of loyalty you are using at the church is not buying you a ticket out. But God is greater than church politics. May you have eyes to see what it is that God requests from you so HE will launch you in spite of all man's machinations.

Child ~ The Cheerleader's Bro

The Story:

In all fairness, she was some kind of special kid: personality plus, A- average, an agile body, high character and a joy to have in the family. Oh yeah, her faith was a cut above too.

Her bro was a freshman. He looked and sounded like what he was – a guy going through the teenage spurt. Nothing to please the eye or ear there. And in all fairness, he was a bit on the morose side even before his body went weird. Sad Sam. B-. Invisible.

But he could whistle 19 different kinds of birds to him in the forest. And he had four squirrels he could call by name that would eat out of his hand. He wanted to be a vet when he grew up. But who knew?

The Strategy:

Leverage the lack of attention to do even more radical experiments with your gifting, while no one is

watching.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

Off Broadway is cool when you are an actor, but life is not a play. When you are an animal lover in a non-pet family, you are not cool.

I bless you, soul, with coming into agreement with God that the way He made you and the gifts He gave you are pretty wonderful. Even though your big sis casts a long shadow over you, God sees the treasure He placed in you, and He so enjoys watching you walk it out in the forest.

Although kudos from the culture are lacking right now, keep on being you, honing your skill at communicating with a wide variety of animals. Trust God to make a way when your time has come.

Employee ~ Ken the Closer

The Story:

It was a hodgepodge job – mostly the tasks other people on the team didn't want to do. He made up his own title: Director of Malarkey. He took the job because it involved some negotiations and he loved that! It made up for the rest of the time when he was the team trash can.

He paid his dues, working hard to make himself valuable. The extras he negotiated into the CRM software package were amazing but no one noticed.

He heard the big boss wish for a better credit line. He went for it and scored! A three million dollar increase in credit with a .75% decrease in interest rate. A stunning achievement in hard times. But no one gave him one sentence of validation.

The Strategy:

When we are invisible now, it is usually because at

some point in the past we chose to be invisible – and forgot to un-choose after the circumstances changed.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

I agree! This is not natural. Even in a self-absorbed society like ours, THAT should have gotten noticed somewhere. So it looks like you are trapped in a spiritual invisibility zone. And the tools to fix that are spiritual tools, not a bigger, more dramatic achievement.

I bless you, soul, with using the tools you have – keen attention to details and an ability to track patterns – to find the point in your life where you stepped into this zone, and then to get out of it. May your accumulated excellence be retroactively noticed by the team, once you solve this riddle.

Dad ~ Dinner Time Drama

The Story:

Sarah was a bit late emerging from her cave. During the fuss of getting people seated and served, Sean observed her quietly and concluded something had gone awry. He had a real touch with people, both sensing where they were, and getting them to open up and share.

When he probed kindly, she poured out the whole story: her geography class, the midterm project, the pervert on the team, the prof . . . Before she was done with her story, Michelle burst in with an angry rant. She had dealt with the same punk a year earlier and knew the prof as well. Within minutes Michelle and her mom had conceived a four step plan to deal with this problem once and for all.

Sean ate dessert pondering the familiarity of the scenario. No one asked him for input. But when the two firebrands in the family had started the firestorm, he would be asked to go put it out.

The Strategy:

You need time to ponder before speaking. That won't change. Learn to punch pause in a discussion so the decision is delayed a bit.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

Fact #1. In our culture the fast talkers whup the deep thinkers. Not sayin' it is right. Just is.

Fact #2. Often the deep thinkers have a lot to offer that never gets said in the smog of high intensity words.

I bless you, soul, with learning the skill of jumping on the moving train so your valuable ideas get heard. And may God also shine His light on the treasures you have, so people pursue them.

NURTURING
THE NEGLECTED SOUL

5. The Professional

Business ~ Trade Show Trudy

The Story:

Most of the other vendors were half done setting up when Trudy arrived at the convention center. Those who didn't know her looked at her with pity over the daunting task of setting up her booth on time. Those who did know her were more inclined to jealousy.

She kicked into gear with her flawless system and was kicking back drinking her trademark kiwi juice long before the others were ready. She did logistics with precision and speed. And yes, she **was** showing off to the smart mouth on her left.

Now people? That was a horse of a different color. Each person is unique and she worked **HARD** to read their body language and tailor her pitch to where they were. She was really good at her art, but it cost her a lot more energy to engage 1,843 unique individuals than to do the set up and tear down. Stuff she could dominate. People? Well, she earned every sale!

The Strategy:

When you have given out too much to too many, refresh your soul with isolation or with someone who will synchronize to you.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

I get you! We are seen as really good with people, but at the end of the day being an extrovert is just a shirt we put on. That isn't who we are and it costs us.

I bless you, soul, with experiencing the refreshment that comes when the Lord synchronizes to you. When no one else has a clue what you need and where you are emotionally, He reads you like a book. His finesse in tailoring a hug to you is incomparable.

Educator ~ Joanie

The Story:

Joanie was legendary for her ability to dial into kids and find a way they could go forward in spite of their handicaps. It brought her immense fulfillment to grow the children who were labeled as unreachable.

Today included a tense meeting with the reading specialist. She had her own way of doing things, and they did not work for Shane. Joanie modeled a different tool that did work but made no progress teaching the intractable teacher.

After class there were head butting contests with the administration and then with a cranky parent. Joanie limped home wearily wondering how she could be so exceptional with kids who had defective brains and so ineffective with adults who had functional brains. Or did they?

The Strategy:

Flush futility at work from your soul by finding a task at home that you can dominate.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

The endless compromise of negotiating drains most of us. That is why God gave us tasks that we can do exactly to our standard. Whether it is as fun as making music or as plebian as laundry, being able to impose our will on something takes the edge off defeat.

I bless you, soul, with learning the art of recapturing your sense of dignity by savoring those areas where you **are** free to be fully yourself. Whether you are a fixer of things that were broken, or a creator of the new and lovely, you were made to imprint yourself on some area of creation, without being edited.

May you find time every day to be unedited.

Nurse ~ Cynthia

The Story:

Third Floor East was quiet today. No one was asking the same question 29,000 times. By the end of the shift, Cynthia was depressed over the absence of emotional energy. Sometimes even anger was welcome because it was a sign that someone had hope for at least a tiny bit of change.

Cynthia was the embodiment of hope. She entered nursing school with deep fascination about partnering with a living thing as magnificent as the human body.

This Alzheimer's unit ground her vision under foot. In oncology, at least some survived. Here the failure rate was right around 100%. The patients had no hope of their own and the staff had none to give them. What a mockery of her dream and her design!

The Strategy:

Restore your soul fiercely by consciously savoring

areas in your own life where you have hope of seeing the broken things repaired, or the great things released.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

Investing in yourself when you are depleted is tough. It feels like pulling yourself up by your bootstraps. Sometimes you just have to do it because there is no one who will notice your need and give you a helping hand.

I bless you, soul, with being able to see through the smog of pain to identify the pockets of hope that still survive the grinding cruelty of life. Even if the object of your hope is far off and the road there seems obscure, reminding yourself that you still have hope is a vital form of emotional hygiene. Hopeless despair is the Alzheimer's of the soul.

Child Care ~ Lily

The Story:

Check them in. Take the jacket. Settle the fight. Change the diaper. Separate the fighters. Wipe the nose. Serve the snack. Yard time. Meal time. Nap time. Do it all over again. Match the jacket to the kid. Check them out.

Lily described child care as an eight hour basketball game with no time outs and 25 pound balls! But, she was a master of the cadence of group child care.

Touching the kids' souls was her challenge. Building character at the sink. Healing heartbreak while putting shoes on. Celebrating design while mopping up the orange juice. She tried to imagine Freud or a pastor doing a bang up job of healing or building during a basketball game!

The Strategy:

Celebrate the successes. Notice where God set you up

to make a high impact from a small contact.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

You are right. It is flat out an aberration. Laying the emotional foundation for an entire life should be done with large blocks of time and concentrated effort. But, this is about reality, not justice!

Soul, in the natural, your only choice is to lower the standard. Expect less and do less. But fortunately, you do not live in the natural! You are in partnership with Almighty God, and He has infinite resources. The Lord who multiplied the loaves and the fishes is able to make a life-time impact through your brief connection.

I bless you with seeing Him at work through you and feeling the joy of the partnering with Infinity.

NURTURING
THE NEGLECTED SOUL

6. The Inventive Soul

The Gardener ~ Harley

The Story:

Fine Gardening. Organic Gardening. Garden Design. Country Garden. Garden Gate. Magazines from North America, Europe and Down Under. How could all the writers in all the magazines get it so wrong?

Impose your will on your garden, they scream. Irrigation. Compost. Hybrids. Beneficial insects. Fences. Deer whistles. Netting. Stakes. Rings. Even hot houses to triumph over normal seasons!

Was he the only person in the world who had a garden in him, waiting to be expressed? Where were the articles that would coach a guy on how to listen to his inner voice to find out what he wanted? The only thing he heard was frustration at the end of each season. This certainly wasn't a Harley garden. But what was?

The Strategy:

Break gardening down into little pieces to find the ones that matter to you. Is it soil, color, texture, the ecosystem, geminating, pruning, grafting? Find your piece, then go deep.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

I am so there. The earth is just a canvas. And it is maddening when you desperately want to “paint,” you have time, money and your knees still work, but you can’t figure out what you want to paint. It is humiliating. Worse than writer’s block.

I bless you, soul, with finding your own way, when there is no one to lead you. May you be able to dial back the frustration so you can hear where the pleasure is in your soul. May you have tenacity to follow the clues to the sweet spot at your core.

The Skateboarder ~ Mikey

The Story:

Mikey could do an ollie north by the time he was nine and he pretty much owned the local half pipe by eleven. Big air was old hat. He knew all the hot shots on YouTube and moved relentlessly toward each new milestone in skateboarding.

While he was the pace setter for his tribe, it brought him no lasting joy. He never entered a competition even though he could have won, because as good as he was, he knew this wasn't him.

And then it happened! He saw a unicycle and it dawned on him. THIS is what he was made for. Two hours later his favorite skateboard had only two wheels in the middle. Twenty-three minutes after that he was in the ER surrounded by endless, odious adults bagging on his dream.

The Strategy:

Make a choice, dude, and never look back. Are you going to fit the culture and be small inside, or are you going to be a misfit in the culture and unpack the treasure within you?

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

So you are swimming against the stream. Big deal. Most of the people who left their mark on history had to battle the boo birds with one hand while they experimented with the other. The Wright Brothers, Thomas Edison and Henry Ford were all derided as fools.

Soul, I bless you with shouting more loudly than the culture outside. Dial up the craving to express what is in you so that it is more dominant than the natural drives for self-preservation and for community approval. If you are a trailblazer, then blaze!

The Writer ~ Missy

The Story:

She never wanted to be in business, but here she was. Leading and kerning. Printers and shipping. Websites and social media. E-commerce and sales tax. Royalties and 1099s. All this to keep from being yet another starving artist. Bleah, yuck and ick ten times over!

Now an e-mail from a dweeb wanting insight on the importance of “knowing your audience.” Audience, schmaudience, Dweeb. Journalists write for the audience. You write your passion.

Missy raged. Why, why, why did the purity of expressing your passion have to be invaded by the tawdry world of commerce? And where, oh where were the articles, workshops and mentors who would help you grow into a bigger story instead of capturing a small story better?

The Strategy:

Look at each job in the want ads. Find something that you would hate about it and something that you would like. You will learn much about your passion from that exercise.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

It is a wicked, cruel double bind – be a starving artist, or spend too much of your day working far outside your design. Back in the Dark Ages, artists of all kinds had wealthy patrons who spared them the indignity. But now we are so much better off. Or not!

I bless you, soul, with learning just enough business not to starve. More significantly, I bless you with energy and creativity to discover the depth and breadth of the passion God put in you. May the lion roar as only yours can – even if it is 15 books down the road.

The Creative Child ~ Terrible Tom

The Story:

He wondered.

And when he did, the world shuddered.

He wondered if that fascinating can of air Dad used to blow the dust off his keyboard would blow the icing off the cake. He wondered whether the lawn mower would run on Mountain Dew since it looked the same color as gasoline. He wondered whether his birthday balloons would lift a trash can full of burning leaves into the air at night since his dad wouldn't trust him with fireworks.

Tom also wondered why everyone hated him. Mostly he wondered why no one else wondered since it seemed the most ordinary thing in the world to do.

The Strategy:

Take your lumps. Then get back to wondering as

quickly as possible.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

I love ya, man! And I really don't think we are at risk of your ending civilization as we know it. I suspect your wondering will cost some people more money and grief, but I am willing to bet that in the end, you will give the world a treasure.

I bless you, soul, with wondering. It is a treasure that must not be taken away from you. Where a thousand have cursed your wondering, I bless it and say I am happy God put you in our midst with your wondering. May your tribe increase and may it be unleashed.

BLESSING
your Soul - PART I

III. CALMING
THE HARRIED SOUL

CALMING THE HARRIED SOUL

1. Expectations

Marriage ~ Mark and Julie

The Story:

Mark thought he was pretty well positioned to be a spectacular father and that this was the prime role of a husband. He was highly relational and dreamed of being deeply vested in the kids: helping with homework, tucking them in bed, teaching them to ride their first bike, going camping and a thousand other things.

Julie's dad was a fixit guy. His major focus was on keeping the cars and the house in top notch shape. And that is how SHE defined a good husband.

Mark was admittedly mediocre in the fixit department. And Julie's expectation of Mark staying out in front of every maintenance problem was wearing him out. He was baffled at finding himself framed as a poor husband when he thought he was bringing immense value to the marriage.

The Strategy:

A good marriage requires you to be true to yourself. You may need to learn some new skills, but don't diminish or devalue the treasures you DO bring to the table.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

Maddening, isn't it? It is like wandering around the food court at the mall, starving, with a pocket full of Russian rubbles, and no one will sell you a bite to eat because they don't value your currency.

I bless you, soul, with being seen for who you are, instead of who you aren't. God can frame your daily life to highlight your strengths. May you find again your peace and dignity, even if the outside expectations never change.

Mothering ~ Fran and the Ex

The Story:

When they were dating, Fran downplayed the stories Cody told about his ex. While she had never been a mom, she felt that she had enough skill and love to heal the three young ones and enough sense of boundaries to deal with the ex. At the end of the day, it would be messy, but doable.

And then she met the ex and entered the zone of Perpetual Judgment. She grew to dread the Friday and Monday encounters. The ex could find the most cutting illustrations for Fran's real and imaginary imperfections.

So what to do? Fix the ex? Fat chance. Leave Cody? No way! Endure the ex for another 12 years, seven months and 22 days? Please, God, NOOOOOOOOOO! Attack the ex and put the fear of God in her? Oh, wouldn't that do wonders for her and Cody. What to do?????????

The Strategy:

Change what is inside you, not outside. Become confident in your mothering so her snipping no longer lands.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

You can't meet her expectations so quit trying! Go rouge. Parent boldly in your own style. Let her rant about the dirty dishes on the table while you privately savor the precious time you had with Jade over homework.

I bless you with the courage to hammer out a standard of parenting that reflects you and your husband's values. Define your home's culture so strongly that the assaults from the outside just bounce. Enduring relentless expectations is the fastest way to not have a life.

Live big in your own way. And let it show.

Pastor ~ Josh

The Story:

He thought the nightmare would be over after the business meeting, but it had only begun. The “other side” left after the vote. Offerings dropped. Staff was cut. Expectations skyrocketed.

The unseen admin work had to be done, whether anyone understood or not. His pastor’s heart leaned into healing the wounds caused by all the nastiness. That was labor intensive in the extreme.

But the leaders who had backed him in the church split were frantic for visible church growth – immediately. They desperately wanted to be vindicated in the face of all the statements that the church would never survive if “they” pulled out. The massive legitimacy issues created a blizzard of short-term expectations that warred against the long-term process.

The Strategy:

DON'T DO IT! Pouring your life into sustaining someone else's legitimacy crutches is NOT good leadership.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

Ah, the horrors of legitimacy battles. Few things push the panic button so deeply, and few things will create more impossible expectations.

In the midst of a frenetic tug of war to harness you to their stone sledge, I bless you with the courage to refuse and the wisdom to stay on task. It is hard to lead the sheep when they are passive. Harder yet to lead them when they are scared and scattered.

Pastor, I bless you with living from the sweet spot of your design during the season when everyone is reactive due to pain.

Newly Divorced ~ Sonia

The Story:

She wept into her pillow in absolute despair. Two hours ago she had one friend left in the world. After baptizing the aforementioned friend in hot flowing lava, she was down to none.

All Annie did was say she missed Sonia and wished they could get together more often. How cruel and mean is that, anyway? But it was the last straw. One more expectation to add to the expectations from her ex, from her children, from their grandparents, from her boss, from the kids' teachers and from the church leaders who expected her to sail through this savage season with grace and a smile.

Oh, NO she was not even going to look in the direction of her own expectations for herself. She absolutely was not, under any circumstances, going to let the stress of her life affect the child in her womb. NEVER!

The Strategy:

Well, doing an inventory of all the expectations was a great start. Now you need to prioritize them and decide which ones you will keep trying to meet and which are optional.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

Welcome to the world of slavery. A word of wisdom: wanting to achieve all those good things is noble. Having to achieve them is crazy making.

I bless you, soul, with a triple portion of reality. There is no way you can do what you want to do, much less what everyone else wants you to do. I bless you with being able to accurately assess your resources and then courageously spend them in the areas of your choice – not others' expectations of you.

CALMING
THE HARRIED SOUL

2. Health

Humiliation ~ Ashton

The Story:

It was just an ugly rash on his hand at first. People asked if he had gotten into poison ivy. Then Jeremy in accounting started the rumor that it was highly contagious.

People who used to pop into his cubicle for a quick question now wrote e-mails or called. When he went into the crowded lunch room, the table he sat at yesterday was completely empty. And no one picked up the copy of the written report he provided for the team meeting.

The bad part was he couldn't push back. The doctor didn't know what it was. It is possible that he was contagious. No one knew. All he knew is that this was forcing the reframing of a lot of relationships. Ashton took the hint and dropped out of the bowling team.

The Strategy:

When people react to the external, go deep inside and identify your core design. What is your essence that hasn't changed, that you still love?

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

Having friends who like what they see about you is a very legitimate dynamic. After all, God said it wasn't good for Adam to be friendless, and when God brought a companion, the first thing Adam did was to comment on her visual beauty, not her personality or intellect.

Nonetheless, it is a heroic milestone when you are so confident in the beauty of your inner man that the loss of outward beauty is merely an irritation, not a crisis. I bless you, soul, with leveraging any humiliation over physical losses into a solid rock of certainty that your core is priceless.

Accident ~ Dave

The Story:

It was a \$3,400 bike. Amazing titanium frame. \$350 discount. Plus \$775 in accessories. And sales tax. And assembly/tune up charge. \$4,531.67 out the door.

Second week. The front carbon tubular rim twisted inexplicably, dumping him into a passing minivan. Surgery to rebuild shattered left arm. Five cracked ribs. Concussion causing continued dizziness and double vision. Road rash all over.

Off work for months. Totally dependent on others to even get out of a chair. Might lose his job. Might lose the house. Completely lost his manhood. Can't do one single thing to help the family. He, the ultimate gentleman, watches while his wife does all the heavy lifting, and he is powerless to help.

Why????????????? How????????????????? And now what?????????????????????

The Strategy:

Learn a new game. You used to define manhood as anticipating and meeting physical needs. Now you have time to master the emotional dynamics of each person and learn to meet those needs in your usual superlative way.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

It sure is tough losing your A game. Most guys have to be begged to take the trash out and you were MISTER Proactive. Now you have gone from Olympic class provider to being massively needy. Really harsh.

I bless you with the tenacity to pull a Bo Jackson. While you sit for hours in your recliner and watch the world go by, may you learn 1,000 nuances of reading the emotions of your family and crafting exquisite gifts to meet their needs.

Pregnancy ~ Tina Marie

The Story:

This couldn't be happening. She won her first gymnastics prize at five. State champ eventually. Cheerleader. Rodeo queen. Basketball forward. Three kids later, she still ran a 5K every month.

Three months bed rest? Insanity. This is the 21st century. There has to be some way to treat Placenta Previa besides to stop doing life. Three months! There is no way! None.

Never mind the fact that her body would slowly decompose into a blob of flab, she simply could not go three months without smothering her kids in her world class touchy feely mommy love. And Dave! She lived to craft tender little surprises for him, tucked into his day with her uncommon knowledge of his pleasure points.

The Strategy:

You are competitive and a strategist. Craft a plan that will allow your soul to be supremely intense and relentlessly engaged in life, while your body isn't.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

You are entitled to some serious whiplash. You walked into a routine appointment a free woman and walked out a prisoner of your body. That'll yank you!

I bless you, soul, with triumphing, not enduring. Get over that “why me” stuff and hammer out a plan. Your body is spectacular, but you, soul, are no slouch. Make a list of all your resources for engaging with people and then commit to living big for the next three months.

Simple fact: it is possible to hug with words as powerfully as you used to hug with custom crafted pancakes and your strong arms.

Chronic ~ Eddie

The Story:

He never did learn to pronounce Myasthenia Gravis. He just told everyone that he got sick from “My sister’s gravy.” Since he was an only child, no feelings were hurt. And since he was an only child, he was accustomed to having people synchronize to him.

It was all he knew. His parents did. Since he was the only grandchild, four more adults doted on him. He wasn’t spoiled or lazy. He worked hard enough in college to land a respectable first job.

He pulled his weight there, relishing solving problems. That is what he was hired to do. There was simply absolutely nothing in his life that prepared him for a problem he couldn’t solve. To have to build his life and work around a random weakness in his body, that was unpredictable . . . ? Nuts, man!

The Strategy:

Establish priorities. Separate the must dos from what you would love to do. Embrace a season of limitations.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

Boundaries you can live with. But boundaries that move every day and don't announce themselves? What's up with that nonsense? How can you live life with that crazy variable?

I bless you, soul, with solving the problem of how to live big when you have to live small. You will need to reinvent yourself to find immense joy in fewer successes. You can't live widely like you once did. But fulfillment is still within reach if you learn to see life as a riddle to be solved, not a mountain to be conquered.

CALMING THE HARRIED SOUL

3. Work

Hard Company ~ Amber

The Story:

People whine. And you learn to discount their whining. So Amber took the job with Predators, Inc. figuring it couldn't be that bad, even though the talk on the street was a bit rough.

She was soooo wrong. It was ruthless, sexist and lawless from top to bottom. And that was just the work environment, plus what they did to their customers.

\$200K a year seemed awesome pay . . . for about a week. Could she endure the degrading environment and not become crude? Could she retain her integrity in business deals in spite of the insane pressure from a rabid boss? Could she keep her relationship with God in the midst of such a toxic waste dump?

The Strategy:

Either consider the extreme pressure to be Marine

Corp boot camp that can make you professionally extraordinary, or get out. Don't stay in the company and then whine to your family every night.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

This is not an original problem. Daniel had to get straight As in the study of occult power while serving God, and Esther had to keep her soul simple and pure in the context of a harem saturated with lust, jealousy and hopelessness.

I bless you, soul, with clearly determining whether this is the season to embrace mega pain. This job would be the equivalent of the Iron Man triathlon for the soul. At the end of the day, both your job and training for a triathlon are voluntary. But if you embrace either one, do it with a defiant roar, not a whimper.

A Dumb Job ~ Sarge

The Story:

Three tours in the big sand box moved him from E1 to E8. He absolutely dominated logistics. His patrols were the envy of the base because he worked the system so they had the best gear.

He was amazing with relationships too. Forget security clearance. Sarge was a one man intel agency. Somehow, mysteriously, when they were in the field, he knew a whole lot more than was ever said in the briefing.

Then he retired and looked to bring his veteran's skills to the marketplace. After a brutal year of rejections for being overqualified, he ended up stocking shelves at Home Depot. For someone used to thinking wide, it was killing him to think about just Aisle 27 and to listen to the guys thinking about their next break.

The Strategy:

Excel in your lame job, and find areas of fulfillment outside work that better match your design.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

It's really quite simple. You have a big engine. You need a big transmission. So go find it. If work is mindless, see what you can do to make it more challenging. And if that is out of reach, then find something outside work where you can volunteer your vast talents that the marketplace is spurning.

Soul, you absolutely have a right to be challenged. I bless you with eyes to see problems to solve so you can have a life again. At war, you were a consummate problem solver. Now your problem to solve is to find a problem to solve that satisfies you! Go be dangerous. And fulfilled.

The Salary ~ Stacy

The Story:

Stacy wobbled between anger and depression. Also between blaming Dynamic Software and herself. How on earth could someone with a degree in computer science be so clueless as to not see the scam that was offered in broad daylight? How? She was stupid, stupid, stupid.

In the end, she decided she was much more angry at herself. Livid actually. Even though it only stoked the fire, she crunched the numbers for this week. Forty hours of pay, thanks to the abominable salary. Seventy-two hours of work. Twenty should have been at time and a half. Twelve at double time. In real numbers, she was making \$2.76 an hour more than the minimum wage kid at the hamburger joint!

The Strategy:

Hey Stac, rage doesn't write great programs. Lay

down the injustice of the matter and crunch the numbers. Do you need money or time more? Adjust accordingly.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

I'm with you. The stuff we do to ourselves hurts more than the mugging we did not contribute to. And the salary = slavery scam is older than the hills. So have one last monumental blaze of self-condemnation, then do something productive.

Soul, I bless you with extreme reality here. May your mind clearly weigh each of the variables: your bank account, your time and your resume. If there is a good reason to endure the scam for a season, then I bless you with the ability to do it with grace and dignity. If not, then I bless you with courage and tenacity as you make a change.

Ethics Issues ~ John

The Story:

John was an army brat who enlisted. After living in five countries as a kid, and fighting along side men of every race, he valued the quality of a man's loyalty, and not much else.

The ops guy at Mack's Oilfield Engineering made no effort to hide his contempt for Sam Wong and his fury at HR for having sent him a highly qualified minority. The plan was simple. At the first 360 review, Sam would be ripped for lack of team work and would be put on probation. After the second, he would be fired. Simple. Problem solved.

Except for John! He knew that the supposed confidentiality of the 360 was an utter, absolute myth. And that if he scored Sam honestly, John would be next in line for the unemployment office.

The Strategy:

Quit, or risk the wrath of management for being
integrity, but don't compromise or cave.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

Fact: People who lack integrity and are in a position
of power, can do a lot of damage. But they can only
damage your inside world if you let them. So don't!

I bless you, soul, with never second guessing your
choices. A clear conscience and an empty wallet are
worth more than a job purchased through cowardice.
Whether you survive in a context of hatred or you
transition to a new place (voluntarily or
involuntarily), may your priceless treasure of self-
respect carry you through.

I bless you with knowing whether to stand alone or to
rally the troops. May you emerge a bigger man!

CALMING
THE HARRIED SOUL

4. Family

Passive Aggressive ~ Harold and Judy

The Story:

Judy came from a family of four boys. She knew how to fight loudly, passionately and often, but she understood what it was to fight fair. No cheap shots, no lasting wounds and rapid reconnection after the big noise.

Harold came from a proper family that ran an elephant farm in the living room. Proper people didn't fuss. So when Judy began to fuss, he retreated. He became punctiliously polite, very helpful and oh, so completely, totally shut down and inaccessible.

Judy had never really come up against denial or passive aggressive behavior before. She thought she had consummate skills for doing relationships because she could rebound so quickly from a ruckus. She had no clue what to do with a man who took weeks to thaw.

The Strategy:

Address his root legitimacy issue first then teach him how to fight productively and fairly.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

You married him because he was mellow – not like your brothers. So how did **this** happen? His greatest strength is suddenly a major flaw? Really?! Did you blink and miss one frame in the movie? WHAT HAPPENED!?

I bless you, soul, with working through the frustration of having to lay down your A Game and learn something new. You know how to fight. Now you need to learn how to build. And you have to lead from behind which is a real pain. But, pain or not, that is the job before you. I bless you with processing your own pain quickly and leaning into the new challenge.

Holidays ~ Rick

The Story:

Christmas as a kid was awesome. Now that he had his own kids, Christmas was wretched. He was reduced to negotiating impossible schedules between two sets of grandparents who were more demanding than he ever remembered being back in the days when he was called The Brat.

And competitive?! Talk about defining Christmas around power giving! If their competitive spirit could be bottled and sprayed on the local football team, they could go all the way to the state finals!

Where did all these social contracts come from? His grandparents certainly didn't act like that. And when everything is wrapped in a glowing cloak of love, how do you tell your parents they are wrecking your home?

The Strategy:

It is your issue. Find out what needs to heal or mature in you so you can confidently confront both sets of parents and then form your own family traditions.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

Nothing manipulates more powerfully than the word “love.” Yet, to be blunt, this is not an original problem. Messy? Yes. New? Not hardly. Fixable? Sure, but it probably won’t be pretty along the way. But first you have to find and fix the soft spot in you.

I bless you, soul, with growing to the place where you can challenge manipulators. This pressure could make or break you. If you grow to the place that you can fight for your own family and build them up, you will be able to lead others as well. I bless you with growing beyond damage control into real leadership.

Rebellion ~ Curt

The Story:

She told him to go upstairs and start his homework. He spent the time building a playlist. She confronted him and called it blatant disobedience. Curt patiently explained to her, as though she were retarded, that he needed the right playlist to be able to do his homework. Therefore he was actually being precisely obedient.

Her life in four frames.

Over and over and over. He wasn't exactly defiant. He quietly took whatever punishment she dished out, then went right out and did what he was going to do anyway. And his choices always made perfect sense to him. He "needed" to do this, or that and any trivia like maternal instruction was just brushed away like a cob web.

The Strategy:

He is a riddle to solve, not a bronc to be broken. If you weren't trying to fit him into conventional society, who would he be and what would he do?

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

Many of the men and women we celebrate in history were problem children. They were different and grew up to be change agents. They were not pliable as kids but eventually had the strength to imprint themselves on the culture. What if your son is one of those?

Soul, you are clearly a builder. You plan, prepare and have great vision for the future. I bless you with a sense of dignity, not frustration over your son. God gave you a different kind of child because He trusts you to be able to find the code to unpack his different kind of treasure. Go build! It is who you are!

Molestation ~ Mandie

The Story:

Mandie and Andy had been a two-some since third grade. One summer Mandie went on vacation with Andy's family and that was when his Uncle Frank caught her alone. She eventually found out he had messed with two of Andy's cousins and she had suspicions about three more.

She dodged Frank for three years after marriage, but then she made a scene about not going to the grocery store with Frank at a family gathering. Andy confronted her at home. She told the whole sordid story and implored him to deal with Frank. He flat out refused. In his family, appearances were everything. To send Frank to prison would destroy his family. He assured her he would protect her and the kids.

She felt horribly devalued. It was more important to him to protect the lie of a beautiful family than to protect her and the other girls.

The Strategy:

You may have to endure the wretched code of ethics from the past generation, but be sure to fix it in yours.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

Family loyalty is a beautiful thing – some of the time. And the rest of the time, it is awful. And a family's name is a wonderful thing, when it is based on reality. And you love your husband, but . . .

I bless you, soul, with wisdom and endurance as you protect your children, and with huge skill as you change the values of your own family. May your family name become synonymous with transparency and integrity because you triumphed over the past, twisted heritage.

CALMING
THE HARRIED SOUL

5. Relationships

A Fun Sinner ~ Doug

The Story:

Doug always had a story to tell. Assuming at least half of his stories were at least half true, Doug got in and out of a lot of mischief. He never landed in jail, although there were a few times he should have, but he certainly didn't mind breaking the law while having fun.

He seemed to know someone, everywhere. And if he didn't, he could make a new friend in a heartbeat when he needed help with some unconventional escape. He was fun to be around, and the guys liked to brag about the things they did with him.

Wilson was vaguely troubled about their friendship. He never got in trouble with Doug, and Doug loved to include him, but the utter lack of reverence in Doug was a caution.

The Strategy:

Get in or get out. Either turn your relationship with Doug into a platform for building truth and life into him, or walk away. Don't kid yourself that you will be untainted by his values.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

In a world of couch potatoes, whiners and sycophants, people like Doug are a breath of fresh air. You are highly justified in enjoying his enjoyment of life. But his values are far from yours, and one or the other of you will cause a shift in values.

I bless you, soul, to know when to shuffle your deck of friends for each season of your life. Every friendship is an asset and a liability. They bring value and viruses. Many are there for you to impact deeply. Beware of those who impact you with stealth.

Just Plain Lazy ~ Jill

The Story:

If something was going on in the church, Jill was there. She never wanted to miss any action. Whether it was a baby shower or business meeting, potluck or someone down on their luck, Jill was sure to wander by.

To the outside observer, she brought an affirming attitude for whatever the goal was, coupled by sensitive compassion for the hard parts of the task. To those involved in the task, she brought nothing – she came to find out since she didn't want to be left out, but she contributed nothing – especially labor!

It was awkward. No worker bee enjoyed her standing around, watching and cheering them on. But no leader wanted to tell her to just get lost and leave them alone. Seemed so rude.

The Strategy:

The big problem is the community, not her. With everyone knowing her issue and no one willing to confront her, it is just plain your fault. Deal with yourselves.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

Weird isn't it? It is so much easier to confront a drug dealer, child molester or heretic than it is to sit down with a friend and tell them they are just plain old lazy to the nth degree and that their emotional mooching off other people's sweat is simply inappropriate.

Soul, I bless you with the skill and the willingness to confront blind spots in a way that is productive. Many people will not address the issues when confronted, but some will. May you make deep friends by being gently honest with those who will grow because of your honesty.

Synchronization ~ Big Mack

The Story:

“Phil, Im in twn Thurs. Time 4 golf?”

“Sure. After wrk?”

“Yeah. Cul. Ill get back 2 u.”

Mack loved sports. Whether it was hitting the links or watching the big screen, he was up for it. And he had a bazillion friends to do it with. Whenever he changed jobs, he never lost a friend, only gained another 50.

The problem was he tried to keep in touch with all bazillion which meant that any promises he made about time were pure fantasy. Phil cleared his schedule and heard back from Mack on Sunday with an apology. Again.

The Strategy:

Whatever behavior you reward, you will get more of. Stop committing to being on standby until he stops

stiffing you. Simple.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

Big Mack (and his entire tribe) are a challenge. He has surrounded himself with so many friends that if you challenge him to step up to basic good manners, he will simply fill his life with his other friends who continue to enable him by ignoring his selfish behavior.

I bless you, soul, with choosing your friends wisely. It is right and proper to surround yourself with good people who will enhance your journey. And it is crass to only see your friends as assets who will enhance your journey. May you find a way to weave those contradictory perspectives together.

No Friends ~ Jerome

The Story:

It was hard to explain Jerome. Everyone respected him. No one had anything negative to say about him. But no one really liked him. It isn't that anyone disliked him, it was just that . . . well . . . there was no chemistry.

He watched thousands of people spontaneously pair up and go get a bite to eat at the Student Union. They talked. They studied. They sat across from each other and surfed the web. But in three years at the U, no guy or gal had asked him to join anything.

He asked the Dean of Students what he needed to fix about himself and got a bunch of hot air for his trouble.

The Strategy:

Your soul is not inviting. You need some extensive exposure to children or highly wounded adults to get

your soul to engage. Go read to second graders in an inner city school. Volunteer at the rescue mission or an AIDS hospice or the local prison.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

A life of loneliness is not worth living. And a soul that is smooth like an egg, with no connection points, is a tough problem to solve. So if you want to have a life, plan on investing a huge amount of time with really messy people who will help you unlock the treasures that are in you.

I bless you, soul, with the courage to use the resources you have to get the resources you need. It is counterintuitive to think that you will learn relationships with people who do relationships badly, but it has worked for many others and should work for you too. Are you up for a gamble?

CALMING
THE HARRIED SOUL

6. A Healing Journey

Too Long ~ Margaret

The Story:

The newsletter from Dazzling Ministries celebrated another speedy recovery. Their client, who had a wheelbarrow full of problems, began in February and by October was declared to be all put back together.

Margaret could not find a shred of emotional energy to celebrate. Her head knew she was happy for the other lady, but her experience was anything but fast. She could never seem to connect with anyone who was on the cutting edge.

She was first diagnosed with D.I.D. back in the 70s when the know it alls announced that there were only twelve cases of this in the world. She was an oddity – a specimen to be studied carefully as therapists explored a new paradigm. For 40 years now she had been handed off from one well meaning incompetent to another.

The Strategy:

Time to leave the pros. Start exploring the unpaid, unofficial experimenters. Some of the best cutting edge work is done by them these days.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

The single biggest problem with the therapeutic community is their general lack of urgency. They have made up their minds that it will take a long time, so it does. It is really unfair, but it is the reality. I feel for you on your journey.

I bless you, soul, with the courage and the ability to change the counseling dynamic so you lead instead of being acted upon. May you have eyes to see the best way forward and words to create intensity and speed on their part to pursue progress, not just activity.

All Alone ~ June

The Story:

This was probably the 178th time she had made the inner vow not to read the blogs any more. The phrase “my prayer partner” caused her to feel very strong emotions and none of them were listed in the Fruit of the Spirit!

She lived 100 miles from the nearest city with an airport, and even if she were to drive there, the counseling community was dismal and the Christian community was archaic.

June read her symptoms in so many other people’s stories and knew the healing protocols were out there, but when she tried to be her own therapist it just never worked. Oh, for a partner for one month!

The Strategy:

Reach out. Ping the people on those blogs and find someone who will work with you. With today’s

technology, the whole world is accessible to you.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

I already know your push back. When you are broken like you are, initiating with strangers is so hard. I know. Been there. Really truly. Talking to strangers was extraordinarily hard for me. And fully half the strangers I did engage with were a whole lot too strange for my tastes.

I bless you, soul, with the courage to embrace productive pain. If you have to reach out 30 times to find one valuable relationship, it is better than living another 30 years with the inner conflict. Send a cautious e-mail today. Minimize the risk. Keep an easy off ramp available. But do start. It is possible to heal long distance. May your courage be rewarded.

Sausage Factory ~ Cameron

The Story:

Admittedly, Cameron was a ministry junkie. He had sampled every new modality from Theophostic to Sozo and a host of different flavors that weren't big enough to have their own brand name.

He was intrigued by the universal inability of therapists to hear what he was saying. When he shared his experiences, they were listening for something familiar. As soon as they found something that fit their paradigm, they went off in that direction, ignoring the things he brought up.

He tried to be grateful for all the peripheral healing he had received, but after 20 ministries ignoring what he shared because it was unfamiliar to them, he was about to give up and live with it. Except, it was eating his lunch.

The Strategy:

Use social media to find someone who recognizes the clues you put out there. Often the eager beaver amateurs are the best sleuths at finding the root issue.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

I so know the drill: “Go to Midas, get a muffler.” Each counselor is probably going to find what they know how to fix, while walking right by what they don’t have tools for. It is a common problem but should only be a nuisance, not an obstacle for you.

I bless you, soul, with creativity instead of more endurance. There is a huge pool of people on a journey and within that pool is vast wisdom. I bless you with skill in working the networks of relationships until you find that person who says, “Oh, yes! Had that. Here is what you do . . .”

Powerlessness ~ Carl

The Story:

Carl hated his life. It was so inconceivable.

He had been an athlete in childhood. Went to war as a young man. Started a business at 26. Bought a house at 30. Crashed and burned at 37.

And now he switched. Unpredictably. How he hated, hated, hated that word. He could get up in the morning, go to the office, do excellent work for three hours and suddenly, a random e-mail would switch him into a puddle of mush.

They say it is due to childhood trauma. Fine. So why was he able to do so much, for so long if he had all this junk in him all the time? Why was he going backward so fast and so far when working on his healing?

The Strategy:

When you can't trust yourself, you have no choice but to trust community to help you through this tough, tough season.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

Yep. It is brutal. Not knowing what is going to trigger you, when, or where, and not being able to do anything to get yourself out of the hole is an especially cruel kind of insecurity. And for someone who has been highly effective in the culture to suddenly be powerless over his own mind and emotions is doubly cruel.

I bless you, troubled soul, with the dignity of knowing that all of the treasures you had as a young man are still in you and will emerge again, in due season. May the excellence of your good work on the good days reassure you that your brain is just fine – it is just your soul that is wobbly right now.

BLESSING
your Soul - PART I

IV. GROWING
THE HUNGRY SOUL

GROWING THE HUNGRY SOUL

1. Beauty

Craftsmanship ~ Rob

The Story:

Rob was made for precision and craftsmanship. However, his first week teaching Jr. High disabused him of any fantasy of being able to display it there. The excellence of his preparation meant nothing to the kids.

He migrated from teaching to finish carpentry, doing custom wainscoting and crown molding for those trying to turn their plebian tract homes into something vaguely resembling lovely.

Then he discovered the intriguing world of blending wood and sound. As a luthier working for himself, he finally had the freedom to be as exquisite as he desired. It was a balm to his soul to select fine woods, design a new instrument in his mind then execute the plan with old world precision and craftsmanship.

The Strategy:

Ignore the market as much as possible. Focus on unpacking your own design. Look inside, not outside, for the next step in raising the bar of excellence.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

You wandered a long time in the desert of unfulfillment. This is your hour. Lean in and fill the empty cup to the brim with the joy of seeing your very own hands produce delicate beauty out of a rough assemblage of lumber.

I bless you, soul, with redefining beauty for your trade. May your brand become synonymous with a better sound and an unequalled level of finesse and excellence in both design and execution. May your name be spoken with awe in the music industry.

Hope ~ Jennie

The Story:

Jennie went into counseling all starry eyed. She quickly learned about all the legal constraints and the fact that most people don't want to get well – they just want pain relief.

She was twelve years into her career drifting from marriage counseling, to children, to addictions, to workaholics with a nervous breakdown. She even dabbled briefly with counseling baseball players who were in a slump. She got results but she never found fulfillment.

Then against the advice of her colleagues, she experimented with survivors of ritual abuse. It was there Jennie discovered who she was. She was made for giving hope and each time she saw a tiny wisp of hope dare to rise above the toxic smog of hopeless despair, she knew why she lived. There was nothing as beautiful as new hope in her eyes.

The Strategy:

Hope has 100 faces. Start a catalog of all the different facets and flavors of hope.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

You are awesome. The first act of the enemy was to rob a woman of hope and his final act will be to give mankind false hope. In between, he has relentlessly warred against real hope. You, however, are partnering with God against His ancient enemy in bringing the flavor of heaven back to earth.

I bless you, soul, with receiving from the hand of God uncommonly hopeless people so that you and He can partner with incredible strategies to snatch back the Father's treasures from the darkness of hopeless despair.

Presentation ~ Jesra

The Story:

She was made for dressing women but being a saleswoman grated. Most women followed the fads because they were not secure enough to express their uniqueness. Jesra raged at the “lemmings” over dinner. The costuming job was better, but she was tasked with expressing an artificial persona.

Then she discovered “Hope and Beauty.” The fund raiser had secured a wonderful wardrobe of pretties. And she, Jesra, got to take girls who had never owned a pretty in their entire life and robe them in beauty that matched their design.

Jesra LIVED for those four hours each Thursday night as she met a new young lady, trembling with anxiety, and left her a more confident woman.

The Strategy:

Have some of the young ladies you have graced with

dignity circle back around and bless the gift you carry.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

Presentation has gotten a bad name over the years. Too much money spent on too much vanity and endless competition among women, spiraling down into indecent exposure in the name of fashion. That is simply not how God envisioned it, and you are redeeming a treasure He gave to women.

I bless you, soul, with growing in skill as you dig beneath the unfinished healing to see and capture the essence of your young jewels. May you have in your hand just the right accessories to visually express for them who they are at the core. May the work of your hands, during four hours one night, leave an imprint on each jewel for the rest of their life.

Spirit ~ Granny Bird

The Story:

It amused her that she could get to 87 years of age, enjoying her pastime without ever knowing what it was. During all those years she taught high school, she simply called them her special ones. There was just 'something' about one or two kids each year that captured her.

Come to find out she had some strange thing called spiritual discernment, and she was a connoisseur of remarkable spirits. Who knew?!

She always referred to public high school in the ghetto as spring training. Her last 25 years had been spent in deliverance. Even there, others saw all sorts of darkness, but she could pick out someone each month who was special. A connoisseur of spirits. Huh!

The Strategy:

OK, English teacher! Try putting language to each spirit that grabs your attention. What is different about this one or who are they like? This will help you migrate the data from your spirit to your soul.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

Since you are a wordsmith, let's refine this. They called it spiritual discernment. But really it is a form of worship. All of your life your spirit has been able to see what God sees about these individuals. You, the soul, have been celebrating by faith what you could not personally see.

I bless you, soul, for worshipping by faith. A thousand times you wondered what the spirit was partying about, but you joyously stepped up and joined the celebration of spiritual beauty you could not see. THAT is a noble soul. I honor you

GROWING THE HUNGRY SOUL

2. Life

Purity ~ Clara

The Story:

Clara's childhood was defined by boundary violations that left her revolted by her own body. Her young adulthood consisted of repairing her life at the core. She understood purity for the spirit to mean being forgiven. She saw purity in the body as a blend of abstinence and eating cleanly.

It was jolting for her to consider the possibility of purity for her soul. It took her weeks of chewing to come up with a definition: no deviousness at all. Could she purge the deeply embedded childhood survival tricks and the polite evasions of adult culture from her soul? Surely not.

She decided to embark on a tentative experiment to live with a pure heart and a transparent life. It took ten years to weed out every last subterfuge. Now, to her utter shock, she was wildly popular from the grass roots level to leaders of leaders. Everyone treasured an hour with Clara and craved her presence at their events.

The Strategy:

It only looks like you are at the top of your game. To kick it up a notch, start mentoring others in the art form.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

Kudos to you for embracing an unknown discipline alone. Few succeed on a long hard walk without a mentor or a cheerleader. You had none.

I bless you, soul, for believing **you** were worthy of redemption. The restoration you have achieved is a gift to the thousands who come behind you, wondering if there could possibly be dignity for them after their treasures were desecrated.

Flavor ~ Everett

The Story:

The definition of a paradox: Everett.

He taught engineering at the university where he was distinguished for being boring. He was deemed unfit for research in the marketplace. He was a drone, crunching numbers and filling in the specs for projects others had designed.

Then, there was his kitchen. For Everett there was no metric of what was right and proper. There was only the relentless pursuit of better. No cookbook was allowed in his kitchen. Every tasty dish that emerged was the product of his agile imagination.

He knew most small farms in a 25 mile radius and personally coached the farmers' wives on how to plant their herb gardens each spring. He bought 4H prize animals, was buddies with the skippers of fishing boats and Skyped with spice merchants from Sri Lanka to Iceland to Uzbekistan.

Everett defined the good life as raising the bar on

good tasting food three times a day.

The Strategy:

Most people's taste buds are wretchedly corrupted. Learn the art of detoxing the tongue so you and your people can taste the full breadth and depth of what you cook.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

We live in the Age of Chipotle but **you** know there is more to flavor than fire. I celebrate your passion for the new and the nuanced.

I bless you, soul, with the ability to develop new facets of the world of flavor. Your supply chain is unrivaled. Your innovation is legendary. I bless you with finding ways to go wider, not just deeper in those two areas.

Birds ~ Jackie

The Story:

At nine, Jackie subjected the Vet to a six minute lecture on proper health care before she surrendered her parrot to him. At 14 she repeatedly embarrassed the ornithologist leading the summer project in Ecuador. At 27 she had four birds nesting around her tiny apartment deep in the city.

Mere bird watching was for ninnies. Jackie engaged with birds. She lived lean all year, then rented a cabin in the wild for two glorious weeks each fall and earned the trust of the birds. She disdained bribing them with food. Her skill at bird whistling earned her their presence.

Last fall she scored her all time personal best: a Violet-crowned Hummingbird landed on her finger and preened itself for over a minute.

The Strategy:

You have overcome enormous auditory challenges. Now isn't it time to overcome the economic challenges and get out of the city and into the country? Really! You are too competitive to remain stuck in a survival job. Break out!

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

Imagine that! Interfacing with living creatures without traps, fences, leashes or cages! You go! May your tribe increase.

Soul, you have redefined the range of the human vocal cords. Learning to buzz like a hummingbird was extraordinarily difficult, but you did. I bless you with ever increasing pleasure over seeing up close and personal birds most people don't even see with binoculars.

Diversity ~ Robert

The Story:

Robert developed ecosystems. Some were obvious. His gardening ran the gamut from earthworms, to compost, to heirloom plants, to preying mantis eggs. The short growing season required hothouses, and the seaweed fertilizer from the Arctic waters off Nova Scotia provided extra gibberellins to induce early germination.

He also built ecosystems at work. He would huddle with HR for three days then form a new team. A couple of weeks of finessing their chemistry and the new relational ecosystem would lean into their task with uncommon grace.

For all the sophistication of his longer term ecosystems, Robert found the most fulfillment out of creating meal time ecosystems. The more diverse the group at his table, the more he enjoyed introducing topics that surfaced surprising passion and wisdom from those present.

The Strategy:

It is time to teach! Tuck a mentee under your arm in each arena and coach them on the art that you love.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

In a world of abrasive segmentation and extreme compartmentalization, you are gloriously counterculture. I celebrate your ability to exponentially increase the quality and quantity of life through vibrant ecosystems.

I bless you, soul, with breaking the poverty spirit that ravages our middle class by producing better and richer ecosystems using components or people that others would discard. May your mastery of synergy make a place for those with no place.

GROWING THE HUNGRY SOUL

3. Redemption

Birthing ~ Jenna

The Story:

Abel's birth was so brutal it took Jenna two full years to get her strength back and at least four years to recover from the emotional debacle. But, being someone accustomed to a journey, she did recover and she did restore a sense of family to her family.

And now it was time for revenge. Jenna began to read – voraciously. A model emerged from her facile mind where she would start working with parents a year before conception. Great idea, but there were huge obstacles to her execution.

On Abel's tenth birthday she had some silent tears in the bathroom. Still no viable business. Should she start with a tiny fragment of her dream and hope it would grow, or wait until . . . ?

The Strategy:

Check your design. Are you a holistic person who

struggles when any portion of your life is out of order? Then wait. Are you historically very uneven in your lifestyle? Go for it and grow it out.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

Engines are a dime a dozen. Building a transmission that will express the power of your engine – now that is a horse of different color. And actually producing the size change you desire, with people who often don't want excellence, is harder.

Soul, I celebrate your passion for redeeming the field of birthing far beyond midwifery. Being a social entrepreneur is one of the most expensive goals a person can embrace. It normally costs you everything you have. May you choose only once and never regret your choice.

Church ~ Derek

The Story:

“Lemme tell you what the American church is like,” Derek raged at his buddy. “It is like a football team playing baseball on a basketball court, wearing scuba gear and snow skis, while trying to get a hole in one by spiking a hockey puck over a zip line using a badminton racquet.

“And trying to get any Kingdom work done is like trying to go out with 19 points by hitting a Frisbee toward the dart board with a pool cue.”

Jeff smiled at his friend’s familiar melodramatic reaction to life, then asked, “So what would it look like to do it right?” Mentally Jeff was placing bets. Would Derek start with Athanasius or the Council of Chalcedon in his rant about what went wrong?

The Strategy:

Start over with ten people and no money. If your

model doesn't work on that scale, it won't work on a larger scale.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

I bless your passion and your frustration. It is the seed from which most of the world's greatest advances came. But history shows that you are wrong in attributing the condition of the church today to either aberrant theology or twisted structures. The key is the leadership – you, for example.

I bless you, soul, with becoming the kind of person other visionary people want to follow. May your emotional integrity and your wisdom in dealing with people wonderfully supplement your spirit's theology and vision.

Land ~ Frank

The Story:

The banker he had been with for 22 years refused to loan him the money to buy Burt's old place, so he cashed in most of his retirement fund and bought it anyway. His CPA was mad at him for a year. Frank accepted that as the emotional price he had to pay.

What the money people would never understand was the emotional pleasure he gained from healing bad land. Once the deal was closed and all the farmers in the county had something new to gossip about, he set to work.

The conventional cost per acre for pivot irrigation was \$1,200. He cobbled together a system for around \$400 per acre to start three years of irrigation and plowing green manure under with no harvest. He could absorb that cost since the other fields were in fine shape.

The Strategy:

Do it! The banker spends money on cars and vacations for his emotional pleasure. You spend it on broken land. What's the issue? Be true to yourself.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

The world doesn't have to understand and agree for something to be right. You love the process of healing land. God made you that way so enjoy being exactly who God made you to be.

I bless you, soul, with your pleasure being unsullied by the boo birds who don't get it. You must hear them, but may the hearing never mar your pleasure in wrapping your heart around a wounded piece of land. Love of land is a scarce commodity these days. I bless you with seeing yourself as a treasure in the community.

Central Casting ~ Grady

The Story:

The foundational concept behind Hollywood was false, Grady mused. Acting, at its core, means being not yourself – putting on someone else’s personality. Being false. Those who are the best at becoming something they are not, made the most money.

He invited Jake and Georgio over for some Santa Maria tri-tip and spun his idea. What if they cast an entire film with people who naturally fit the parts? He built it out: factor in the redemptive gifts; birth order; laterality and niche anointings so each “actor” was a natural for the role.

Jake said, “You need to find the actors first, then write the script around them.”

Georgio added, “Great tri-tip. It’ll have to be an indie.”

Grady said, “Sundance, here we come.”

The Strategy:

Grady, you missed the principles. Have Jake write the script around how well or poorly each person is living out the principle that matches their gift.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

You are right. Nothing has changed since the first set of fig leaves – we are all thespians. Yet behind our relentless acting out of roles assigned to us is a craving for the real deal. You will be tapping into the most fundamental psychic memory of mankind – the joy of being real.

I bless you, soul, with redefining “reality shows.” The culture aches for reality, but the reality they get is crude. May you find great joy at releasing the treasures that are in your cast, rather than imposing a burden on them to become what you need

GROWING
THE HUNGRY SOUL

4. Confluence

Secular and Sacred ~ Paula

The Story:

Paula loved complex elegance. She could never have too many layers and nuances. As she served tables in her boring black outfit, she dreamed of the B & B she would run some day.

She would dominate best practices. Check in would have no paperwork. Her Skype call with them beforehand would allow her to customize their room. A gifted chef with a fragrance anointing would add to excellence.

Ah, but the spiritual texture! The maids would each have a land anointing and be intercessors. The B & B would be positioned on a fragrance portal. Each room would have a specific fruit of the Spirit imprinted into the land by the interceding maid. A prophetic psalmist would come sing over the rooms each week.

The attached spa would have practitioners who were highly gifted at working with the human spirit so, whether you were having hands, feet, hair or muscles

worked on, your spirit would be receiving as well.

And there were at least 150 more ideas she could weave into a hugely complex, elegant spiritual environment! That was Paula.

The Strategy:

Keep dreaming! Build more complexity into your vision. Focus on what could be, not the obstacles.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

The number one complaint about me is that I am too complicated. As someone who thrives on multilayered complexity, I joyously celebrate and bless your passion for adding endless layers of the presence and power of God into a superbly run business model. Go be dangerous!

Efficiency ~ Sarah Jo

The Story:

Sarah Jo could crank it out. Setting up international conference calls? A cinch. Arranging flights, hotels, and ground transportation? Done. Spreadsheets? Pivot tables purred like a kitten under her nimble fingers. She knew at least 150 people at Jaxson, Inc. and could find the information her boss needed with ease.

Unfortunately, most of the information she needed to find for him was why some other department had not gotten their stuff done right or on time. She wondered how on earth the company made a profit with the level of incompetence and downright laziness she saw daily.

And in between being the bearer of lame excuses to her boss, she wondered what it would be like to work for a company where people loved what they did and did it well. Was she the only person in California who enjoyed working hard?

The Strategy:

Quit fussing and start growing people. Changing values in living people is the real art form that will eventually produce a dynamic team of task doers.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

I have been there and whined the whines. I changed jobs and each one was the same. Eventually I began to change the people instead of the job, even though it wasn't my job to change the people while doing my job.

I bless you, soul, with finding as much joy in growing people as you now do in dominating tasks. It is a much harder learning curve, but the best way to have a team of efficient people is to grow them.

Research Team ~ Danny

The Story:

They acted like Danny asked them to put an outboard motor on a Cessna. Or have a pitcher throw a touchdown. Or have a race car driver push a shopping cart for his wife. Was it really that outrageous to expect a Biblicist and a scientist to think in analogies so they could create a new paradigm?

Danny was surrounded by world class brains from both sides of the great divide, but he was the choke point since all information had to flow through him for integration.

It was truly maddening. When he did his own research, it was invariably shallower than what the pros brought to the table, but he saw so much more application for the data he did get. When they researched, they brought vast amounts of data to the table, but missed most of the salient points. What to do?

The Strategy:

Find some right brained researchers who drove their teachers crazy with “irrelevant” questions, just like you did. With that original design, you could train them.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

Most credentialed people are pretty boring thinkers. Most free spirits got expelled by the issuers of credentials. So your pool of highly competent people who can think in non-linear ways is miniscule. But it does exist.

I bless you, soul, with divine connections. You were placed in the right time in history. May you have eyes to see the wonderfully eccentric treasures God has created to walk alongside you in this project.

Academics ~ Elizabeth

The Story:

Elizabeth had an attitude and she had absolutely no intention of getting inner healing for it. She was quite content to nurse her grudge against formalized education.

Her revenge was to build what she called the Mayo Clinic of education. She believed most kids could learn. She envisioned a team of sundry disciplines that would craft a unique strategy for each set of parents.

Brain scans. Biofeedback. Laterality. Pediatric vision therapy. Spirit work. Fractals for health. Diet specialist. Physiologists. Experts in the redemptive gifts. Learning styles. Land dynamic experts. Music, art and hippo therapy. All this woven together in one package for each child who comes.

The Strategy:

START! Begin with the skills you personally have and one family who you can help on the weekend while you keep your day job. Add the other disciplines as you go along.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

I absolutely agree. The time is right for someone to assemble the glorious explosion of technology from the last 50 years into a functional package! And the need is immense since God is gifting us with uncommon treasures who will not thrive in the common sausage factory.

I bless you, soul, with the business acumen to assemble the available parts into a dynamic organization. Dreamers merely dream. Visionaries build and thereby change reality. May your structure be vibrant, formidable and replicable.

GROWING THE HUNGRY SOUL

5. Intensity

Competition ~ Jackson

The Story:

Jackson would compete with anyone. Whether it was playground sports or who could hold their breath longer, he was up for it. He would even compete against the clock as he did his homework.

It wasn't that Jackson needed to win in the sense of beating someone else. He was just obsessed with the outer limits of anything. If he could hold his breath 45 seconds without practice, how long could he hold it ultimately if he practiced?

Jackson was broadly considered a pain in the neck by his family and most of his acquaintances. He was surrounded by admonitions to just chill out. And his father swore he was going to sell the family cars and buy everyone a bicycle before Jackson turned 16.

The Strategy:

So . . . how good can you be in fitting into

community? That will help you immensely as you go forward in your uncommon life.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

I love your drive, although your style might need a little help. At the end of the day, people who wonder where the limits are produce vast change in the culture. Most of the great inventors and change agents were not fun kids to raise because their parents simply could not reduce them to the societal norm.

I bless you, soul, with testing the limits of the right things. Whether it is your spirit, your soul, your body or your equipment, life holds endless possibilities. I bless you with focusing your time on the most valuable areas, then raising the bar spectacularly for generations to come.

Sound ~ Elaine

The Story:

If she could not **feel** the sound, it didn't really count. Therefore the speakers in her bedroom were desk sized, not desk top. They were guaranteed to vibrate the dishes out of the cupboards – three houses away.

Elaine disdained simple bands. Her Christmas gift each year was tickets to a philharmonic orchestra playing some robust piece of classical music. In between she relished thunder, trains pounding by and the F-18s which took off from the nearby naval air station. Only once did she make the mistake of saying she loved the sounds of a big California earthquake. She almost got committed for that *faux pas*.

By temperament Elaine was moody. Her kids joked that they should buy a Harley to put in the kitchen. Whenever Mom was grumpy they could fire it up, rev it a few times and get her back in the game.

The Strategy:

Study your addiction, don't just feed it. You are not the first. What are the good things that happen to body or mind from exposure to intense sound?

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

People don't have to understand for it to be right, but you may need to understand for it to be immensely beneficial to you. What portion of your body or brain thrives on vibratory sound?

I bless you, soul, with permission to enjoy your love affair with sound, even though others rag on you. It can't be a bad thing because there are several incidents in Scripture where God spoke to mankind with the kind of volume and intensity you crave.

Ideology ~ David

The Story:

David was a strange bird. He had no ideology of his own but enjoyed reading the great speeches of passionate leaders. He loved the tightly reasoned arguments of brilliant minds delivered with fiery passion, but if he had to choose, he preferred the fire.

Lincoln was the better thinker, but Douglas had the fire. In practice, he was more of a Quaker, but he loved the passion of the great Covenanters. In Isaiah he found precise logic married to deep rivers of emotion.

He stared at the barren landscape of today's intellectual milieu. It grieved him that most people with fire devoted themselves to sports, the arts or business. Where were the passionate thinkers and speakers of this generation?

The Strategy:

Could you find a young firebrand to mentor? Most kids with passion scare off the adults around them. Could you weave some depth into their passion?

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

Most passionate people intimidate their peers and are only celebrated decades or centuries later. You are never going to be a passionate orator on the world stage. But you could shape one with your immense knowledge of the passionate ones from yesteryear.

I bless you, soul, with the joy of savoring today's white lightening, not just yesterday's vintage wine. Like moonshine, you may well have to grow your firebrand in secret, but in the end, his or her passion will probably be more treasured by the culture than the wine from licensed vintners.

Motion ~ Jimmie

The Story:

Jimmie was quick to point out that he had only gotten one speeding ticket in the last 22 years and that was for going 67 in the 55 zone. He was not a danger to the community.

But he did crave intense motion. He rode the highest roller coasters with glee. His swing from the giant oak was 19 feet high, and he still found it hugely relaxing after work to kick it high. He set up a bar in the barn and learned how to do a giant.

It fed something in him to watch all kinds of exceptional motion from a BMXer catching big air to the tightly choreographed marching bands that moved with complex precision across a football field. But nothing lit him up like the intense motion and precision of the Blue Angels. It was a must, every year.

The Strategy:

Diversify. Expose yourself to as many different kinds of personal motion and spectator motion as possible. Look for your sweet spot. Do you sky dive yet?

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

A design based craving enlarges your whole soul when you feed it. If you delete all motion from your life, it will make you a worse husband, father, employee, etc. Conversely, if you will invest in unpacking the outer limits of motion, it will refine and enlarge your whole being.

I bless you, soul, with permission to invest in feeding that spot in your soul that craves being in motion or seeing sophisticated motion. It is right for you to acknowledge your design and enjoy it, whether anyone sees utilitarian value or not!

GROWING
THE HUNGRY SOUL

6. Immensity

Sight ~ Zack

The Story:

Proverbs 27:20 was Zack's defense for being the way he was. ". . . the eyes of man are never satisfied." In his mind, it was a statement of design and a license to endlessly feast his eyes on immensity. His mother insisted that it was a wicked thing and he needed to work on his carnality.

The annual vacation argument was predictable. Mt. Denali. Mount Rushmore. A tour of an aircraft carrier. A helicopter tour of the Grand Canyon. Victoria Falls. The Matterhorn. The Great Wall of China. The Panama Canal. Sky diving.

Zack's idea of a good time was seeing something bigger. He didn't need to do anything, he was just passionate about immensity and needed to see, see, see. His leisure time was spent on the web searching for extreme sports, immense engines and buildings or anything else that fed his passion for immensity.

He was such a misfit in the back woods of Michigan.

The Strategy:

Envision your place in each immensity. Are you a designer? Builder? User? Do you want to be within view of immensity, or part of it?

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

Eisegesis aside, allow me to celebrate your passion for immensity. You are a reflection of God. While most people are easily satiated in their soul, you are not. It **is** a beautiful thing.

I bless you, soul, with finding some kindred spirits who can run the marathon of life with you, rising above smallness and feasting on some immense task that you were designed for.

Complexity ~ Roger

The Story:

Roger's challenge in life was to avoid boredom. His strategy was to immerse himself in complexity. He thrived on playing six chess games simultaneously. His beehives had 19 sensors per hive, and they fed into a computer program he wrote that was the equivalent of a 42,000 cell spreadsheet.

He enjoyed reading the logistics side of a war – getting beans and bullets to the front. His theology was also complex. No one would allow him to ask questions (or answer them) at a Bible study.

It grated on his wife just a bit. She found no pleasure in exponential complexity and could not go there with him. Yet she knew that it was his core design, and he simply could not shut it off. Even on vacations. Two worlds. One couple. What to do?

The Strategy:

Rog, old buddy, there is nothing more complex than the female psyche. You could find some fulfillment by developing a complex strategy to bring extraordinary life to every nook and cranny of her poly-variegated, multifaceted, asymmetrical personality. Get on it.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

God didn't get a migraine developing the complex ecosystem we call the universe. He had fun. Lots and lots of it. So be free. Enjoy the craving He gave you for complexity. It is a reflection of Him.

I bless you, soul, with developing a taste for the complexity of community. You dominate the apian community. May you find fulfillment in applying your skills to nurturing the human community at your disposal.

Majesty ~ Anna

The Story:

In a world of cheap and tawdry democracies, iron fisted dictators and places of ruthless lawlessness, Anna was an anachronism. But it didn't matter to her that few people could share her joy. She treasured monarchies.

She had watched every coronation and royal wedding around the world since she was four. Even though most monarch's annual speeches to Parliament were just hot air, she still watched each one that was televised. She knew the next in line for each throne in Europe. She read historical fiction, from the Caesars to the lairds of the Western Highlands.

Anna had no aspirations of marrying into a royal family. She just knew that exquisite pageantry, perfectly orchestrated, watered a dry spot in her soul that the Girl Scouts' awards banquet didn't touch.

The Strategy:

Break a big event down to small pieces to see if you can put language to the sweet spot at your core.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

Every effect has a cause. The deep fulfillment you experience when observing majesty expressed visually didn't happen because of a chigger bite when you were a kid. This is hard wired into your core and it came from God. Enjoy it with gusto.

I bless you, soul, with relishing the fact that you were made to appreciate the Kingship of Jesus. Our culture knows Him with a plethora of names, but the end game is the name King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Most of us will have to grow into that name. You are already there and it is a beautiful thing.

Legacy ~ Rosie

The Story

Her great-grandparents left a farm to each of their five children. Her grandparents lost theirs in the Depression. Her parents made a middle class living, but wouldn't leave much for their kids.

Rosie was determined to leave an immense legacy for her children even though her husband had died at 34. She had spent 1,000 hours thinking on this after losing Teddy.

For their spirit, they would learn to feel the love of God. For the soul, it was courage. Her kids would see her wrestle with life in the raw and learn to be afraid of nothing. She would marinate them in tales of God's love and of courage.

This she could do. The rest would sort itself out. But no economic disaster or opposition from hell would keep her from sending out into the world three young adults who lived the love of God and were unafraid of anything life could throw at them.

The Strategy:

Live it yourself, big! Talk it nonstop with the kids. And shamelessly inflict yourself on all their friends. No one hangs with your tribe with immunity to your values.

A Blessing:

Dear Soul,

In a world that can't see the value of investing in tomorrow, you are a treasure and a delight with your vision for the generations. May your tribe increase and multiply.

I bless you, soul, with having the tenacity to defend a narrow focus. Your enemy will be myriad good things that will dilute the core things. May you not be distracted or diminished by the good in your relentless pursuit of the best.

About Sapphire Leadership Group

Sapphire Leadership Group, Inc. is a think tank for the Body of Christ. We look for gaps in the existing theology of the Church and seek to find in Scripture new tools that round out our tool kit.

We are especially sensitive to those who are playing their hearts out in pursuit of the King, but what works for others does not seem to work for them. There have to be answers. Christianity as Jesus conceived it did not come with an asterisk.

We have a passion for the principle of design. How did God intend things to work, and how can we recover from poor choices and return there?

We are also passionate about possessing our birthright. People should be progressively discovering their birthright and be gathering the tools they need to win the battles on the way.

Mostly we are passionate about passion. If you are on a journey, have some fire in your belly and are looking for a bit more fuel for that fire, we would be delighted to have you rummage through our resources.

As of the release of this book, we have five

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