

THE
ROCKING
CHAIR
PROPHET

MATTHEW KELLY

*“Behold,
I am doing something new!
Now it springs forth.”*

Isaiah 43:19



CHAPTER ONE

EMPTY ROOMS

You never really know who you are until you have suffered. Really suffered. But once you know, you can never forget, and from that moment on things you never considered become possible.

Daniel had never suffered. Not really. Like us all, he'd had his share of heartaches and disappointments. But he had never experienced the crucible of suffering that strips away everything that is superfluous and redefines what makes life worth living.

You thought you knew Daniel the moment you saw him. He reminded everyone of someone from their past. He was one of those people who made everything look easy. Gifted beyond belief, effortlessly good-looking, and with the whole world at his feet, Daniel was confident but never arrogant. And the instant you thought you knew

him, he would surprise you with uncommon thoughtfulness. It was unexpected because people expected him to be self-absorbed.

It was Friday afternoon. The valet casually tossed Daniel's keys through the air, and he palmed them with ease. Settling into his Maserati, he turned the key in the ignition, and the car roared to life.

Daniel loved cars. It seemed everyone on Wall Street did. He worked in an industry well known for an insatiable appetite for cars, watches, women, and homes. But this was another way Daniel defied the stereotypes. He had one car, one watch, one woman, and one home.

If Daniel had one fault, it was going with the flow. That's how he ended up on Wall Street. All men's lives have ambiguities and inconsistencies. This was his. It was the one piece of his life that just didn't seem to make sense.

The drive home didn't bother him. The end-of-week traffic was insane, with everyone trying to escape the city. But he cherished these days when he drove to and from work, and little by little, as he made his way toward home, the traffic fell away.

Daniel enjoyed the drive. It gave him time to decompress. It gave him time to call his parents. And it gave him time to listen to music, and few people appreciated music more than Daniel.

It was summer, and he was looking forward to spending the weekend with his girls. He had an amazing wife, Jessica, and they had two daughters—Julia, who was almost nine, and Jordan, who was seven. They reminded Daniel of all the good things life had to offer. And they often pointed out that he was working too much and missing out on hiking in the mountains, picking wild strawberries, and watching soul-shifting sunsets.

“You only get 365 sunsets a year, Dad,” Julia would say.

“Yeah, and I’m gonna be going off to college in about five minutes,” Jordan would tease.

Daniel was a practical guy with a wonderful sense of humor, so he would smile and say, “I know. And I’m working hard to make sure you don’t have any of those nasty student loans that plague so many people’s lives!”

Driving home that night, he was also driving toward his thirty-third birthday. It wasn’t until tomorrow, but he knew the festivities would begin as soon as he walked through the door.

He had never been one to get caught up in birthdays, but thirty-three had him thinking that he was creeping toward what his friends called “halftime.” And that had put him in a more reflective mood than usual this year as his birthday approached.

As he pulled into the driveway, a sudden chill went

through him. He sensed something wasn't right, but he pushed that thought aside. The sun hadn't set, but the house seemed dark and still. It looked eerily quiet, and Daniel wondered how a house could look quiet.

Surprise party, he thought and smiled.

He took the steps leading up to the front door two at a time and turned the doorknob. It was locked. *Weird*, he thought. Fumbling for his keys, he couldn't remember the last time the door had been locked when he got home. But he pushed that thought aside too, suspecting it was a tactic to let everyone get in position for the surprise.

Stepping inside the front door, he paused to give everyone a chance to jump out and scream, "Surprise!" But they didn't. The house was empty.

His suit jacket was flung over the watch on his left wrist, just above his briefcase. It was a navy soft-sided leather bag his wife had given him last Christmas.

Daniel reached for the light switch with his right hand as he called out, "I'm home." But there was no response. "Jessica! Julia! Jordan?" he called, but still no reply. He started wondering what he might have forgotten. School play? No, it was the middle of summer. Sport? No, it was that brief time of year when the girls were between sports.

The panic that perhaps he had forgotten something



quickly subsided as he recalled the last thing his wife had said to him on the phone earlier that day: “A whole weekend of nothing. No plans, no commitments, nothing to do but celebrate the man we love.”

“Where are they?” he mused.

Daniel didn’t like wondering, so he picked up his phone and dialed Jessica. It didn’t ring. It went straight to voicemail. *That’s strange*, he thought and dialed again. But the same thing happened.

He grabbed an ice-cold bottle of Coke from the refrigerator, turned on some lights, and headed out onto the front porch to wait for his girls to come home.

It was a magnificent evening. The colors in the sky were captivating. Daniel could hear children playing ball, an occasional dog barking, and the cheerful conversation of neighbors a couple of doors down. Sitting on the top step, he continued to wonder where his girls were. Perhaps they had gone to buy him a last-minute gift in town.

At that moment, Mrs. Turnbull walked by with her three Corgis. They always made Daniel think of the Queen of England. Pleasantries were exchanged, but she didn’t stop. She kept moving purposefully toward the park at the end of the street.

The sun was starting to set now. It would be dark in forty-five minutes, and Daniel was starting to worry. He

looked at his watch again. He had been sitting on the steps for almost an hour. It felt like four.

As the final moments of dusk were lingering, bidding farewell to the day, Daniel heard a car coming down the street. *About time*, he thought and told himself not to get into an argument about why his wife had turned off her phone.

That thought died when he watched in disbelief as a police cruiser pulled into his driveway. Two officers stepped out of the car and began to walk toward him. Daniel froze. His heart seized up. He couldn't breathe. He wanted to vomit. Tears started streaming down his face.

He knew. In some inexplicable way, he had sensed it the moment he pulled into his driveway.

"Daniel, I'm Chief Rigger, and I believe you know Sergeant Thompson." Daniel could see the officer's lips moving, but he couldn't hear anything he was saying. There was a ringing in his ears, and he felt numb all over. "Do you mind if we come inside?" Chief Rigger continued. But Daniel couldn't move. It was as if he were cast in stone. "Daniel?"

Daniel tried to speak, but no words came out. Sergeant Thompson took him by the arm, helped him up, walked him into the living room, and settled him in the big armchair where Daniel liked to sit and watch football.

“Daniel, I can tell by your reaction that you know something horrible has happened.” Daniel stared at him and through him. “We regret to inform you that your wife Jessica, and your two daughters, Julia and Jordan, were all killed in a car accident earlier this evening.”

The tears that had stopped began to stream down Daniel’s cheeks again. *This can’t be happening. There must be some kind of mistake*, he thought. “Are you sure it was them?” he asked, grasping hopelessly.

“We are sure. I’m sorry, Daniel,” the police chief said with an empathy that was practiced, and yet sincere.

“What happened?” Daniel stammered.

“It seems five or six deer came out in front of a truck. The truck hit the deer, throwing them onto the other side of the road. Your wife was driving in the other direction and struck the deer, causing her vehicle to spin out of control. Her car crossed the median and was struck by another truck.”

“Where?”

“Out on Route 12, about a mile from Johnson’s Farm Store,” Sergeant Thompson offered.

“The trucker?” Daniel mumbled.

“He has been hospitalized. He has no physical injuries, but he’s literally out of his mind with anguish. He had to be sedated at the scene, and they will keep

him sedated for at least twenty-four hours.”

“It wasn’t his fault?” Daniel asked.

The police chief spoke again now, choosing his words carefully, “No. It wasn’t his fault. It wasn’t anyone’s fault. Our analyst has been at the scene for hours, and she has concluded it was a dreadful accident.”

“I wonder what they were doing out that way this afternoon?” Daniel asked himself out loud.

“It seems they had bought a whole bunch of peaches at Johnson’s Farm Store,” the chief said.

“Ah . . . Jessica was probably going to make my peach cobbler. Her peach cobbler is not of this world,” Daniel muttered. And then lifting his eyes to a faraway place he said, “My peach cobbler killed my gorgeous girls.”

“Be careful now, Daniel,” Sergeant Thompson said, “that’s a dangerous path to start down.”

“You’re right. Yes, you’re right. I just . . .” Daniel said unconsciously.

Wiping his tears away, Daniel stood up. He thanked the officers for coming and walked them to the door, as if he were concluding a routine meeting at the office. It was a reflexive action brought on by shock and the early stages of grief.





CHAPTER TWO

SLEEPLESS NIGHT

Daniel didn't sleep that night.

As soon as he closed the front door, he walked over to the freezer, pulled out an unopened bottle of vodka, reached into the kitchen cabinet for the biggest glass he could find, and filled it with the cool, clear liquid. When he finished, he poured himself another, and then another. When the bottle was empty, he started in on the rum.

Daniel wandered aimlessly around the house, moving from room to room. The air was thick with memories. He remembered saying goodbye that very morning. He tried to engrave those last hugs, that last kiss, those last moments in his mind. Daniel was overwhelmed with a fear that he would forget them. Those last hugs reminded him that when he held his girls, the sweet smell of their hair drifted through the air.

Now, he stumbled toward his bedroom, grabbed the pillow from his wife's side of the bed, and buried his face in it. There it was, the smell of her face, the smell of her hair. Crying into Jessica's pillow, he wanted to hold on to that smell forever.

Daniel sat there with the pillow for a long time. When he finally got up, he went into Julia's room, grabbed her pillow, and did the same thing. *She will never go to college, he thought to himself. She will never get to see the world. She will never get to pursue her talents or chase her dreams. I will never walk her down the aisle. She will never have children. I'll never get to meet my grandchildren.*

After about twenty minutes, he went into Jordan's room and did the same thing. "My baby, my poor baby girl," he wept into the pillow, smelling her hair and her soft skin.

His grief was paralyzing. He wandered around the house for hours, bumping into memories and broken dreams. This was eventually interrupted by a knock on the door. He wasn't sure what time it was. Daniel stumbled toward the front door. It was Jessica's parents, Mitch and Amanda Ferguson.

"Sorry to knock so loud, son," Mitch apologized. "We've been ringing the doorbell for about ten minutes."

Daniel squinted at his in-laws. The sun was up. “What time is it?” Daniel asked, slurring his words and searching for something to say.

“Eight o’clock, son,” Mitch replied gently. “Can we come in?”

“Sure, yes . . . sorry,” Daniel said as he stumbled out of the way, realizing he was blocking the doorway. “How did you get here so fast?” he continued, very drunk and at a loss for what to say.

“We drove all night,” Amanda spoke now. “We tried to call, but there was no answer.”

Daniel looked around for his phone and seeing it on the kitchen counter, staggered toward it. “Seventy-four missed calls,” he said, again speaking to himself.

Mitch, Amanda, and Daniel stood in the middle of the living room. They glanced at each other before casting their gaze toward the floor. Three people desperately in need of consolation, but it was in short supply. Three starving people hoping the others had a crust of bread.

“You been drinking?” Mitch asked.

“Yep,” Daniel replied. “Would you like one?”

“Yeah, I think I would. Can I help myself?” Daniel waved him in the direction of the liquor.

“Have you slept?” Amanda asked. Daniel glared at her in a way that made it clear that he had not. “Would you

like to lie down for a couple of hours?" she persisted, but he didn't reply.

Amanda went into the bathroom, and both Mitch and Daniel could hear that she was on the phone, but not what she was saying.

Fifteen minutes later the doorbell rang again. Daniel, in a daze, didn't move, so Amanda got up and answered the door. It was Javier, Daniel's best friend since childhood.

Javier sat down next to Daniel. "I'm not gonna ask how you are or pretend that this isn't a brutal situation. I'm here for two reasons. First, because I'm your friend. Second, to help you get some sleep, because as a doctor, I know sleep is what you need right now."

"I don't want to sleep," Daniel said firmly.

"I know, man, but you also don't know what you want to do, or what you should do, or anything else right now. This might be the first time in your entire life that you don't know," Javier explained calmly.

Daniel didn't smile. Javier didn't expect him to, but he could see that his point had registered, despite the massive amount of alcohol Daniel had consumed.

"I brought something to help you sleep. So, there are two ways this can play out. I can wrestle you to the ground like in high school or you can walk down the hall,

get out of that suit, lie down, and let me give you the shot so you can drift into a deep sleep.”

Daniel didn't speak. He didn't move. He didn't look at Javier. He gazed off into the empty distance. Javier sat patiently, allowing the moment to unfold, waiting for his friend's response.

Two minutes later, Daniel got up and walked down the hallway. Javier followed.

“Nobody goes into any of the bedrooms,” Daniel barked. “Nobody!”

Ten minutes later he was fast asleep in the guest room.



CHAPTER THREE

CROWDED HOUSE

Daniel woke twelve hours later. He was dreaming he was lying on the sidewalk in a puddle of rain. Javier was sitting exactly where he had been when Daniel fell asleep. “What time is it?”

“About nine,” Javier replied.

“It sounds like there are a hundred people in the house,” Daniel said.

“Yep. Your parents made it back from their trip to California, and there are a lot of people who want to be here for you. They started showing up around ten o’clock this morning.”

The wet sensation Daniel had been dreaming about turned out not to have been a dream. “Did I wet the bed?” he asked Javier.

“Yeah, I’m pretty sure you did. All that alcohol had

to go somewhere,” Javier mused. “Do you want me to ask everyone to leave?”

“No, that’s okay.”

“I put a fresh set of clothes in the bathroom for you.”

Daniel got out of bed dazed and groggy, went into the bathroom, and turned on the shower. Javier went to the living room and let Daniel’s parents know that he was awake and would be out soon.

Twenty minutes later, Daniel’s parents made their way down the hallway. They met their broken son as he came out of the bathroom, and both hugged him at the same time. He melted into the love of their embrace, and all three wept. Neither Daniel nor his parents said anything. They all knew words were woefully inadequate amid such soul-crushing tragedy.

After the longest embrace of his life, Daniel made his way toward the living room, where he was greeted by a sea of family and friends that overflowed into the front yard and the backyard. He didn’t make it into the crowd. They started approaching him as soon as they saw him.

Few words were spoken. Those that were, Daniel didn’t hear. He had retreated into the traumatized daze Javier had found him in that morning. And there was a buzzing in his head. People hugged him, shook hands, and offered help, but he knew nobody could help him

now. Not yet. *Maybe in a few weeks, or months . . . but maybe never*, he thought to himself.

It was almost midnight by the time everyone left.

“I wish you would let us stay here with you,” his mother said. “But we will respect your desire to be alone.” She desperately wanted to stay with her son, but he had made it clear he wanted to be alone. Holding back tears, she continued, “We’re all staying at the inn. If you need anything, we can be here in five minutes. Call at any hour. I left the phone number and our room number on the refrigerator.”

Daniel turned instinctively to look at the refrigerator. It was covered with photos. His wife and daughters were smiling at him. It felt like someone had stabbed him in the heart. Feeling light-headed, he dropped to his knees and began to weep again. His mother immediately realized her mistake. She got down on the ground, wrapped Daniel in her arms, and held him tight.

After his parents had left, Javier said, “I’d like to give you something to get you back to sleep.” Daniel had no fight left in him. He walked back to the guest room, undressed down to his boxers and T-shirt, and got into bed. He had been wounded to the core, shattered into a thousand pieces.

“Happy birthday!” Daniel said sarcastically to himself as he felt the sedative taking effect.





CHAPTER FOUR

THE FUNERAL

The days that followed were a blur. Before he knew it, Daniel was sitting in the front pew at church staring at three white coffins. *My girls, my girls, my beautiful girls . . .* was all he kept thinking.

The Pastor was speaking, but Daniel couldn't hear. He didn't want to hear. He wasn't interested in words.

Getting up in the middle of the Pastor's remarks, Daniel began walking around the coffins, circling them in silence. When he came to the head of his wife's, he stopped, casting his eyes back and forth between it and the two smaller coffins on either side.

The Pastor stopped speaking.

Now, for the first time in almost a week, Daniel spoke. It was as if nobody else was there, just Daniel and the three coffins in a big, old, empty church.

Placing his right hand on his wife's coffin, he murmured, "My wonderful wife, what a blessing you were to me. Thank you for loving me, Jessica, even when I didn't deserve you. You were a better person than me. I miss you, my love." Then, leaning over, he kissed her coffin. It was closed, and yet it was clear he was kissing her forehead.

Turning to his right, he stood before Julia's coffin. The church was heartbreakingly quiet. Daniel placed his right hand on his oldest daughter's coffin and said, "My lovely girl, a life cut short is a brutal thing. A father should never have to bury his daughter, but here I am. Thank you for the immeasurable joy you brought me. I love you now, I loved you then, and I will love you always." Then he leaned over and kissed the coffin.

The church was no longer silent. People were weeping as softly as possible. Daniel was oblivious to the presence of anyone other than his girls.

Standing in front of the third coffin, he placed his right hand on it. He stood there silent for an awkward moment, and then he began to cry. When he spoke, his voice wavered. "My baby girl, how will I ever live without you? Thank you, Jordan. You reminded me of what matters most. I wish I had listened more, but I was a fool. I thought I had more time. I remember how you used to

hug me as if you'd never let me go. You'd wrap your arms so tightly around my neck that I could hardly breathe. I'd give anything for one more hug.

“Now I am the one who must let go, and I fear I'm not man enough for the task. I love you. I love you now, I loved you then, and I will love you always.” Leaning over, he kissed the coffin, turned, and walked straight down the center aisle and out the doors of the church.

Seconds later, his father followed.

The Pastor finished the service, and the congregation made their way to the cemetery. When they arrived, Daniel was sitting at the graveside in one of the chairs reserved for the family.

The coffins were lowered into the earth, prayers were offered, and Daniel disappeared once again.

Nobody saw or heard from him for three weeks. All attempts to contact him were ignored.

After three weeks, his parents stood at the door of his home as they had done every day since they arrived in town. They knocked long and hard. They knew Daniel wouldn't come to the door. They knew their son. Having knocked enough to get Daniel's attention, his father raised his voice and said, “Son, I know you are in there. I don't know what to say or do. I don't know how to reach you. Suffering has its own timetables and agendas. We

will give you the time and space you've requested, but we will be thinking of you every day." Daniel's father paused to catch his breath. He felt old and tired. "Your mother and I are going home today, but we're only two hours away and can come back anytime. Just call."

His fatherly intuition sensed his son on the other side of the door. Lowering his voice slightly, he said, "Please do me one favor, son. Never forget, I love you now, I loved you then, and I will love you always."

It was something he had said to Daniel since he was a little boy, and now he could hear Daniel sobbing on the other side of the door. But still, the door didn't open.



CHAPTER FIVE

WHEN NOTHING MAKES SENSE

The weeks passed, but Daniel was nowhere to be seen. The house was still and quiet, every blind and curtain drawn tight. He didn't leave the house, come to the door, or answer his phone. Everyone who knew him was worried about him.

Almost every day, someone would stop by the house, but Daniel didn't come to the door.

"What's he eating? He hasn't been seen coming in or out of that house for two months," someone was overheard saying at the local market. What they didn't know was that around midnight every Monday, Charlie would leave a week's worth of food and other supplies on Daniel's front porch.

Charlie had been his father's best friend since childhood. When he was a child, Daniel used to sit on one of

the tired old rocking chairs while his father and Charlie visited. Later, as a teenager, Daniel would stop by and visit Charlie on the way home from school.

One Wednesday afternoon, while most people were at work and the rest of the town was getting on with life, Daniel's front door opened.

Stepping outside, after more than two months in seclusion, he walked the three blocks to Charlie's house, where, as always, Charlie was sitting on his old, weather-beaten cedar rocking chair reading. Charlie was always reading. Looking up, he saw Daniel coming through the front gate and tucked his book between the side of his leg and the arm of the rocking chair.

Daniel was carrying a backpack, but Charlie didn't mention it. In fact, Charlie didn't say anything at all. Not even hello. Nor did Daniel.

Setting his backpack down against the white porch railing, Daniel sat on the other rocking chair next to Charlie, but still no words were exchanged. The two men sat there in silence for a while, rocking back and forth in their chairs. The gentle rock of the chairs was the only sound in the air in the middle of that Wednesday afternoon. After about forty-five minutes, Daniel said, "Thank you." Charlie nodded and replied, "You're welcome."

Another thirty minutes passed in silence. The only

noise was the creaking of their rocking chairs. Charlie broke the silence this time. His voice was a deep, warm baritone—reassuring and authoritative. “Setting off on a journey?” he asked.

“Yep.”

“Where?”

Daniel didn’t reply. He simply pointed toward the mountains above town. He knew Charlie already knew.

“Why?”

“Looking for something.”

“What?”

“Answers,” Daniel replied. Then he paused for a moment and continued. “Charlie, I know you are the wisest person in town . . .” Charlie raised his hand to interrupt. It was the politest interruption Daniel had ever experienced, and it struck him that in all the years he had been sitting on these rocking chairs, this was the first time Charlie had ever interrupted him.

“If that’s true, it’s only because your father doesn’t live here anymore. He’s certainly the wisest man I ever met,” said Charlie.

Daniel pressed on “Charlie, I know you’ve found all your answers on this rocking chair over the years, but I don’t think that’s gonna work for me. My answers aren’t here.”

“You won’t get any judgment or disagreement from me, kid.”

“Kid?”

“Yep. You’re still a kid. Your halftime whistle hasn’t been blown yet. Life has just dealt you a rough hand—a brutal hand, actually. But kid, you have to admit, up until recently, life was dealing you a whole bunch of aces: magical moments, opportunities, experiences, and incredible people. So, now you have to decide.”

“Decide what?” Daniel asked reflexively.

“Continue trying to numb the pain, or enter into it and allow it to transform you. You could drink yourself to death. You could end your life. I know you’ve considered that. No need to be ashamed. After all you’ve been through, it’s not unusual. Or you could go back to work, lose yourself in that world, and immerse yourself in the debauchery of the big city. Of course, you already know that none of that will satisfy you.

“Suffering gives birth to wisdom or foolishness. You’ve suffered horrendously, and now you’re at a crossroads. But I guess the backpack tells me you’ve decided something.”

“What does it mean to enter into my pain?”

“Well, that’s different for everyone. You know there are no cookie-cutter answers here on Charlie’s porch.

And I know your dad taught you that because he taught me too. You have to find your own answers.”

“What answers?”

“Well, I asked what you were looking for and you said ‘answers.’ But my guess is you haven’t met the real Daniel yet, the fullest expression of yourself.”

“Huh?”

“Don’t get me wrong. You were probably five years old when you first sat on that rocking chair. An hour later, I knew you were an impressive kid. But when we’re young, people load us down with expectations born from their own un-lived lives. Most of us respond to these expectations by being who other people want us to be. This is natural because we yearn for love, affection, and affirmation.

“So, we learn to please others, and too often we lose ourselves in the bargain. But you aren’t a child anymore. It’s time to break free from many of those influences and expectations. It’s time to work out who you are soul deep.”

Charlie and Daniel sat rocking in their chairs for the better part of the afternoon, and then Daniel stood up, hoisted his pack onto his back, and turned to leave. When he got to the bottom of the white steps, without looking back he said, “I’ll see you around, Charlie!”

“I sure hope so, kid! But I am old, you are young, and nobody is promised tomorrow.”

Daniel almost smiled as he set off on his long walk out of town.



CHAPTER SIX

SAY GOODBYE TO IT ALL

In the afternoon sun, people looked twice at the man walking out of town along Route 12. “Is that Daniel?” they asked each other.

Those who saw him standing at the site of the accident with a backpack at his feet knew for sure. He stood there for almost an hour, observing the crosses, notes, photos, and mountain of flowers. The flowers were dead now, except for three bouquets that had been placed recently.

Daniel looked around, his senses heightened, and images of the past and the present flashed through his mind. There were tire marks on the road, those last pieces of glass that accidents leave behind, and the road was stained with deer blood. He got dizzy for a moment thinking that perhaps the blood stains didn’t belong to

the deer. Imagining what happened that day, he went into a daze, lost his balance, and stumbled into the road. The booming sound of a horn snapped him out of his daze, and he stepped off the side of the road as a huge truck hurtled past, throwing up dust and spraying him with a gust of greasy wind.

Falling to his knees before the makeshift shrine, Daniel began to weep. He had cried more since that fateful day than he had in his first thirty-three years. When the tears stopped, Daniel stood up, wiped his face dry, hoisted his backpack, and walked out of town, across the bridge, and up into the mountains.

Later that afternoon, a man named Guy Sutherland walked into Murphy's, the bar in the middle of town, and announced, "I saw Daniel walking out of town."

Guy was seventy-two years old, and every day since he'd retired on his sixty-fifth birthday, he'd arrive at the bar at five-thirty, have one beer, then walk home for dinner with his wife.

"Really?" Brian, the bartender, asked. "Are you sure it was him? Where do you think he's going?"

"Well, I didn't talk to him, and I'm still working on my ability to read minds, so I can't be sure, but he looked like he was headed for the mountains."



CHAPTER SEVEN

THE LETTER

Walking out of town that day, Daniel was more unsure of himself than he had ever been. For the first time in thirty-three years, he didn't have a plan.

It became quickly apparent that his physical condition had deteriorated massively over the past couple of months. Almost ten weeks of drinking himself into a stupor, trying to numb his pain, had left him in a pathetic physical state.

After thirty minutes, Daniel was panting, but he was afraid to stop and rest. If he stopped now, he might turn back. The other thing he became aware of was that he seemed to be rushing. "Why am I in a hurry?" he asked himself.

It was an old habit. Daniel had been in a hurry to get somewhere his whole life. But now he intentionally

slowed his pace, saying to himself, “Find a comfortable rhythm, a pace you could sustain indefinitely.”

The cool mountain air began to fill his lungs as he got farther from town. “When was the last time I breathed so deeply? When was the last time I was conscious of the breathing that was keeping me alive?”

The doorway to negativity opened in his mind, and the voices of doubt, discouragement, and regret began their incessant chatter. He swatted them away with a litany of small things he was grateful for in that moment. The negativity fled, but he knew it would be back.

A few miles later, he stepped off the road he had been hugging, and made his way onto the hiking path that would lead him deep into the mountains.

People would think he was running away. Daniel knew that. He had written a letter and mailed copies to his parents, Javier, Charlie, other friends and colleagues at work, and Jessica’s parents.

The letter read:

In my teenage years, my father gave me some timeless advice. Whenever you are unsure what to do, he told me, consider if you are running toward something or away from something.

The soul-crushing circumstances of these past several

weeks have beckoned me away from this crazy, noisy, busy world. Most people will think I'm running away. It's not that. I hope you know that's not who I am. But I also confess that I don't know what I am running toward.

We go along in life. But if all we do is go along, then that becomes our life. I don't know where I'm going or what I'm doing. All I know is that I cannot just go along anymore.

I may be crazy. Who knows? I might be back in a week having come to that realization. What I know for sure is that I won't be sitting around ten years from now saying, "I wish I had done that."

Thank you for all your love and support, especially over these past few weeks.

Daniel





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