

**W**hat do *you* do when the bottom drops out of your life? Shelter your pain? Share it openly? “Laughing on the outside, crying on the inside”—that’s the way of those who choose to hurt *quietly*. They hide their pain, playing the “everything is fine” game so nobody can see how bruised they are inside.

Those who hurt *openly* say, “I need help!” They wait to see whom God sends their way—the person who will lend some shelter, a listening ear, some understanding. When troubles strike, you need a place to cry, a person to care, the security of intimate friends who stick with you, reminding you that pain doesn’t come to stay. Your hurt will heal, your heart will mend, your life will go on...and so will you.

Most people look at the person in trouble and think, “Somebody should do something to help.” This Lent, try a better response: “*I’m somebody! I should help!*” We can all do something—call, listen, visit. Not difficult; but oh, the comfort they provide! Jesus is saying, “Look at the people who are *hurting*. Let me bring healing...through *you*.”

Life can slam into people. Nobody is immune to disappointments, setbacks, and heartaches. I don’t have all the answers. But I do know you must do something. So I offer my down-to-earth solutions to the common problems that can easily pickpocket your enjoyment of life.

I’m convinced if you roll up your sleeves and squeeze all you can out of these pages, when Easter arrives you’ll feel refreshed, renewed, and ready to open your *helping* heart to *hurting* hearts: gently nudging others to use their inner strength, perseverance, and determination to bounce back and get on their feet again, stronger and better.

## Get up, stay up, and take one more step

In the inspiring true-story movie *Conviction* (2010), Kenny Waters spends eighteen years in prison, wrongly convicted of the 1983 murder of Katharina Brown. Kenny's sister, Betty Anne, completes her GED, college degree, and law school while struggling through a divorce, raising two children, and tending bar. Her goal? To become Kenny's attorney and prove his innocence.

Betty Anne dedicates eighteen years to freeing Kenny, only to have him die six months later. "Those six months were the greatest six months of his life," Betty Anne declares. "He died a free man." She offers us three words that have the power to change our lives: "Don't give up!"

**"When you give to the poor, don't let your left hand know what your right is doing."**

MATTHEW 6:3

Divorced? Financially destroyed? Betrayed? Seize the opportunity this Lent provides: Fine-tune your determination to draw triumph out of tragedy, possibilities out of pain, healing out of hurt. Encourage others to share their pains, reveal their feelings, confess their failures, acknowledge their weaknesses. Choose to be an *explainer*, showing others how to handle their suffering effectively. Call on Jesus, who is less than a heartbeat away. He's gently nudging you to *get up, stay up, and take one more step*.

**Hearts reaching out** • When two people connect, something is poured out of one into the other, and that something has the power to heal the deepest wounds. This Lent, think of someone with whom you'd like to reconnect. Then take the initiative to make contact.

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**Hands reaching up** • *Jesus, through my eyes and heart, look with compassion on your broken brothers and sisters. Amen.*

## Chasing the dream-sneerers away

At our school’s spring art show, everyone marveled at Chris. He could paint, draw, and sculpt. Beautifully. Although he dreamed of one day having an exhibit at New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art, he worried about the perception his family and friends had of artists. So he didn’t follow his dream.

Years later, Chris decided to take his dream seriously. “For years, I wanted to study art,” he admitted to me, “but I was afraid of dealing with the fallout from family and friends. I pushed that dream deep down and remained a ‘good boy.’ But I *have* talent, and I refuse to hide that part of me any longer.” Soon after, Chris enrolled in art classes.

“Follow me!”

LUKE 9:23

Were his doubts and fears normal? Absolutely. When we decide to stretch beyond our comfort zones and follow our dreams, it’s inevitable that *dream-sneerers* will try to spoil those dreams. It’s up to us not to give them that power! Let’s kick them out of our lives and welcome *dream-cheerers*... people who inspire us to discover our potential.

When Jesus said, “Follow me,” some mocked his choice of disciples. Fishermen? Tax collectors? “You have something important to say?” the dream-sneerers snarled. “Get real...you sell *fish*!” But these people refused to listen; they chose to follow Jesus, a *dream-cheerer* who radiated encouragement.

We, too, can chase the dream-sneerers away, making room for dream-cheerers in our lives.

**Hearts reaching out** • Start doing what you’ve held off doing: Call about that new job. Look for the larger apartment. Meditate more often. Start exercising. Open up to that new relationship.

**Hands reaching up** • *Jesus, I made a grand discovery—that you believe in me...and my dreams. Amen.*

## Look to the source and follow the course

Are you a “joyologist”? You know, an ordinary person who believes joy is your birthright? It’s really not that difficult: All you have to do is look to the *source* and follow the *course*!

Begin with the *source*—God is the foundation of all joy. Grounded in God, you’re aware of his unconditional endorsement of your unique worth. When you’re less attached to possessions, power, and prestige, you can begin to crave a deeper relationship with God—a relationship that renews your strength and confidence, embracing each morning as a fresh start.

Next, follow the *course* of aligning your actions, interactions, choices, and behaviors with attitude and gratitude.

*Attitude.* Joyologists aren’t free of bumps or bruises. They navigate through negative thoughts by concentrating on positive ones.

*Gratitude.* Joyologists don’t worry obsessively, lament over the might-have-beens, or get caught up in “someday...” They slow down and appreciate the little things in life: a breathtaking sunset, an engaging conversation, a delicious meal. They treasure their relationships. Grateful for every moment, joyologists don’t put off the experiences that would add luster to their lives. Are you a joyologist? Well, you certainly *can* be—no degree required!

**“Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them?”**

**MATTHEW 9:15**

**Hearts reaching out** • Spread joyful words. Give a compliment or friendly greeting to a store clerk, waitress, janitor, nurse, or receptionist. Scatter joyful affection to those who feel God has passed them by.

**Hands reaching up** • *Jesus, you make my joy complete. Amen.*

## What's wrong with me?

“What’s wrong with me?” Most of us wrestle with feelings of doubt and failure, especially during and after our slip-ups and crises—job loss, relationship rejection, financial ruin, shattered dreams.

Failures have a way of weaving themselves into a sticky, powerful web of anger, control, confusion, intimidation, depression, and humiliation. However, there’s a way to break free: We can claim and tame our failures.

*Claim our failures.* If we acknowledge and accept our failures, they’ll become catalysts for change. In a *Frank and Ernest* comic strip, Frank stands before the employment officer, holding a stream of paper. “I don’t have any formal education,” he says, “so I brought a list of the mistakes I’ve learned from.” Avoid placing the blame for our failures upon others; that just limits our opportunities for growth. Who needs improvement when everything wrong is always someone else’s fault?

*Tame our failures.* Bring failure under control. Look it in the eye. Trust Jesus to turn failures into distant memories. We have a great gift: the “reset” button that accompanies our relationship with Jesus.

We aren’t defined by our mistakes. Spread out before us is a lifetime of exciting opportunities to learn and grow.

**“Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?”**

LUKE 5:30

**Hearts reaching out** • Create and distribute a daily diet of *success quote meals*. Write an inspirational quote about facing failure on an index card. On the other side, share a personal support prayer. Then give it to someone who’s fenced in by failure.

**Hands reaching up** • *Jesus, you always pull me out of my failure slump. Amen.*

## Our best friend

She was dying. As the nurse sat with her, the old woman said, “I traveled all the way from California by myself, stopping at every major city from San Francisco to Boston. In each city, I visited just two places: the police station and the hospital. You see, my son ran away from home and I have no idea where he is...” The mother’s eyes seemed to flash a ray of hope as she added, “Someday, he may even come to this hospital. If he does, promise me you’ll tell him his two best friends never gave up on him.”

“His two best friends?” the nurse asked, bending close to the woman.

With tears on her cheeks, she responded, “Jesus and me.” Closing her eyes, she drew her final breath.

Are you burdened with a lifetime of guilt for the mistakes you’ve made in relationships? One of the most difficult things we ever have to do is to let go of past mistakes. We need to liberate ourselves from our self-imposed prisons of guilt and remorse. We can ask Jesus to help us forget the past, move on, and stop wasting valuable energy on anger, resentment, and guilt. As prodigals, we accept the price he already paid.

**“Repent  
and believe  
in the gospel!”**

MARK 1:15

**Hearts reaching out** • During Lent write this ancient Aztec prayer, reflecting the wonder and brevity of life: “Only for so short a while, you’ve loaned us to each other.” Pass this prayer along to those who are close to you.

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**Hands reaching up** • *Jesus, how freeing it is to live with the sense of knowing that everything is on loan, to be cherished and enjoyed in this moment. Amen.*