

BEN YOUNG

**SUR
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THE
DAY**

THRIVING in the MIDST
of LIFE'S STORMS

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DAVID  COOK™
transforming lives together

CONTENTS

11 PART ONE: THE CHALLENGE TO MOVE FORWARD

- 13 CHAPTER ONE WHAT ABOUT BOB?
- 23 CHAPTER TWO DROWNING TODAY
- 35 CHAPTER THREE FAILURE PLUS
- 49 CHAPTER FOUR YOUR SHADOW VOICE

63 PART TWO: THE CHOICE TO MOVE FORWARD

- 65 CHAPTER FIVE WHEN THE PAIN REMAINS
- 79 CHAPTER SIX CHOOSING GOD'S JIU-JITSU
- 93 CHAPTER SEVEN UNEXPECTED LOVE
- 113 CHAPTER EIGHT ESTAMOS CONTENTOS

129 PART THREE: THE CHANGE TO MOVE FORWARD

- 131 CHAPTER NINE WIN THE MORNING
- 147 CHAPTER TEN SILENCING YOUR SHADOW VOICE
- 165 CHAPTER ELEVEN STOP COMPARING
- 179 CHAPTER TWELVE TEN ESSENTIALS FOR SURVIVAL

- 189 GOING DEEPER
- 197 ACKNOWLEDGMENTS
- 199 NOTES
- 203 BIBLE CREDITS

CHAPTER ONE

WHAT ABOUT BOB?

*“Life is like riding a bicycle. To keep your
balance, you must keep moving.”*

Albert Einstein

When you meet someone on a plane or at a party, you typically ask the person three questions: What is your name? Where are you from? What do you do?

The first two questions are easy. My name is Ben Young and I'm from Houston. The third question is a bit tricky. I could say, “I'm a writer” or “I'm a professor.” Those are interesting jobs that often open doors to various conversations. People are curious about what you write about or the subject you teach. Another response I could give would be, “I'm an evangelical preacher,” which is a conversation stopper, a closed door in the face. It's a surefire signal to insert earphones and check out. No one wants to carry on a conversation with a “preacher” on a long flight.

SURVIVE THE DAY

Perhaps a better way to describe what I do would be to say, “I’m a professional crisis manager.”

For the past three decades, I’ve worked with families and individuals struggling to cope with the harsh realities of major life crisis. I’m a first responder when they receive a diagnosis of a terminal illness, when they’ve lost a loved one to suicide, when a family is in the long-term battle and heartache of addiction, or when someone close to them was killed in a violent crime. Divorce, mental illness, and depression come across my desk on a regular basis. I never know what life storm will come my way when I pick up the phone or read the next text. Each and every call is heartbreaking, and I count it a privilege to walk through some of life’s most jarring moments with those struggling to make it through the day.

More than likely, you picked up this book because you’re in the middle of a major life crisis. Someone you love left you with a house full of kids to raise alone. You’ve received a life-threatening diagnosis that requires long-term medical intervention. Your son relapsed and is out on the street again. You’ve lost your job and are struggling to pay the bills. You feel afraid, devastated, and hopeless. You wonder how in the world you’re going to make it through this relentless storm that seems to only get worse with every passing day. I know what it’s like because I’ve been there.

One of my closest friends is a gifted psychologist. We’ve known each other for about thirty years, were roommates in college, and have collaborated on several different projects in our careers. We live in different cities, but over the miles and years we’ve made an

effort to get together for a meal once in a while. I would often show up at his office before one of our lunches and plop myself down on his couch, demanding, “Fix me.” During these visits, we would joke about the movie *What about Bob?* starring Bill Murray as the neurotic OCD patient Bob Wiley, who consistently becomes addicted to his therapists.

There is a classic scene from the movie when Bob first meets his new psychiatrist, Leo Marvin (played by Richard Dreyfuss). He sits across from Dr. Marvin and, after describing his myriad phobias, screams a chorus of cusswords and obscenities to fake having Tourette’s syndrome. In his showcase of fears and neediness, he even feigns cardiac arrest and then begins talking about his divorce while lying on the floor. I asked my friend, “Have you ever had a client do that, lie down on the floor during a session?” He calmly responded, “Yes, I have.” Little did I know that some years later I would find myself on the floor of a therapist’s office crying my eyes out because it felt like my life was completely over.

During that horrific season of my life, I felt like Bob Wiley. Needy. Afraid. Unable to make it through a single day without begging someone to help me. I had two different therapists on speed dial. Every Monday morning, I had a standing 8:00 a.m. appointment with a counselor, and every Friday, I had another appointment with a clinical psychologist. I needed both. I needed a lot. I called my counselor during off hours, one time taking him away from his daughter’s birthday party. I had become Bob, and it felt so shameful and embarrassing. But I was desperate. I was drowning. And I had to reach out for help.

SURVIVE THE DAY

My goal for several weeks, months, and truly years was just to survive the day. “One day at a time,” as they say in recovery groups. Every day I battled to make it to 8:30 p.m. when I could hopefully fall asleep naturally without the aid of vitamin A (Ambien). But most nights I needed some help overriding my anxious thoughts to get to sleep.

How I morphed into the Bob character and ended up on the floor of my counselor’s office would require a novel-length explanation. We all have our sad stories, and I will come back to mine as this book unfolds. But trust me, as the old television commercial put it, “I’m not just the president of the Hair Club for Men; I’m also a client.”

Of course, it’s not really the Hair Club. It’s the Pain Club. When fear floods your heart every waking moment, when you feel so depressed that you can barely pull yourself out of bed, when your anger boils through the pores of your skin because of the unfairness and injustices of life, you’ve become a member too. Live long enough and we all find ourselves in this same Pain Club. The question is not *if* you will be a member, but *when* and for *how long*? Some days the pain feels so heavy and intense that we struggle to just carry on.

We all have our life storms, our crises that qualify us for this club no one wants to join. I’ve discovered we cannot control the relentless storms that rain down pain and frustration on our lives, but the one thing we can control is our response. We can control the choices we make that help us survive the storm. These choices will make us or break us.

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SURVIVE THE DAY

Imagine you're standing on the banks of a wide, raging river. All you want to do is make it to the opposite riverbank, but the rocks, the crocs, and the current keep you stuck right where you are. You have no idea how you will get to the other side. But then you notice some people on the far bank. People just like you who've weathered this same predicament. They've waded through the same river, been snapped at by the crocodiles, and been nearly pulled downstream over the waterfall. They made difficult choices along the way, good choices and bad choices. And yet somehow they are standing on the other bank now. They've navigated that rough water. They can tell you where to step and point out dangers to avoid along the way. If you listen to them, they will guide you to the other side.

Over many painful years I received life-saving words of advice, encouragement, and hope from experienced guides who helped me get to the other side of that river. I am grateful for the many counselors, writers, and wise mentors who spoke the truth in love to me when I needed to hear it. I am not some flawless hero or super Christian guy who made all the right choices and was so full of faith that nothing could stop me when storms bore down on my life with unceasing regularity. I am far from that. But I have listened to and learned from others who have gone before me. And they shared time-tested strategies on how to endure and thrive in the midst of life's storms taking it one day at a time.

This book is about how to survive those days. Not just survive the day by hook or crook, but to survive the day in a way that allows you to draw from the strength and power of God. It will empower

you to survive the day in a way that makes you stronger, wiser, and more at peace. *Survive the Day* is not a *Why, God?* book, but a *What Next, God?* book. What do you do next in light of the life storm that's hit you? How do you respond to the difficult challenges and relentless circumstances that surround you again and again?

Survive the Day gives you effective strategies that can help you make it through each day and navigate the challenges in your life storm. These tools will help you feel open, empowered, and more at peace to face the turbulent waters. No matter how long the storm winds blow, these guidelines will help you not only survive but get you to a place where you are thriving again. When you find yourself in circumstances beyond your control, that's when you start to connect to God on a deeper level than you ever imagined. Pain has a way of stripping the layers of pretense and complacency to force you into the presence of God. C. S. Lewis accurately said of pain, "It is [God's] megaphone to rouse a deaf world." It's in these moments that you feel and experience God in a way that you never knew was possible as you choose to access the strength and revitalization that only He can give.

Here's where we are going—or, here's how we will attack it: *Part 1: The Challenge to Move Forward* looks at the various ways we strive to survive. We will meet our enemy called the Shadow Voice, who threatens to take us down and keep us stuck. *Part 2: The Choice to Move Forward* will introduce how humility, grace, and surrender can ground your day in God and His purposes for your life. You will get the tools you need not only to make it through each day but to have the confidence that you'll survive and even

SURVIVE THE DAY

thrive. *Part 3: The Change to Move Forward* unpacks how to apply these concepts on a day-to-day basis and how to deal with the debilitating internal dialogue that attempts to drag you back into the mire of your past.

The final chapter gives you ten essentials to daily survival, which will help you build momentum to bring positive changes to your life. The chapters in this book are short for a reason. During a crisis you simply don't have a lot of extra time when life is pounding you to the ground. That's why I included a brief Survival Prayer, Survival Passage, and Survival Practice at the end of every chapter; these are spiritual and practical tools to help you survive and thrive in the moment.

You will meet some fellow survivors in the pages ahead. They will help you glean insights as they have weathered brutal storms of all kinds, including physical pain, parenting special-needs children, drug addictions, cancer bouts, divorce, and the loss of a child. They are my survival mentors, and they will soon be your survival mentors too. These men and women are in the grandstands cheering us on. They speak to us and fill us with courage and power to follow God in the midst of our difficult circumstances.

We're going to pursue this challenge with every ounce of energy, passion, and grit we have inside of us. We're going to give up all the reasons for why we can't have a wonderful life and discover a new and different kind of wonderful. Let's wade in the water together, following the True Professional Crisis Manager who will see us through. And the only way to get to the other side

WHAT ABOUT BOB?

of that riverbank is to get in the water. You are going to make it through this. You are not alone. Let's get after it.

SURVIVAL PRAYER:

Oh God, I thank You for this new day. Help me to receive and apply the tools and strategies I will encounter in the following pages. I surrender my life to You today.

SURVIVAL PASSAGE:

Dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us.

Philippians 3:13–14 (NLT)

SURVIVAL PRACTICE:

Take a walk, and as you're walking, thank God out loud for everything that comes to your mind and the power to move forward today.