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## INTRODUCTION

Sixty-year-old Madeleine J. first landed in the world of Oliver Sacks, neurologist extraordinaire, in 1980, when she left the home of her doting and protective family to enter St. Benedict's Hospital near New York City.

Although blind from birth and afflicted by cerebral palsy, Madeleine was a spirited, eloquent woman “of exceptional intelligence and literacy,” reports Sacks in his best-selling *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*.<sup>1</sup>

Mystifying medical experts, Madeleine was also hampered by inexplicably inert hands that she described as “useless godforsaken lumps of dough—they don't even feel part of me.”

Perhaps the cause resided not in her body, mused Sacks, but in a family that had “‘protected,’ ‘looked after,’ ‘babied’ [her] since birth,” thus preventing the development of mind-hand coordination, or even of tactile intelligence. If objects had



never been plopped into her palm or between her fingers, how could blind Madeleine internalize any concept of a fork or a hairbrush or a cup?

Madeleine “had no repertoire of memory, for she had never used her hands—and she felt she *had* no hands—or arms either,” reports Sacks.

Suspecting that Madeleine’s genetic wiring might kick in if stimulated a bit, Sacks directed the staff to solicit, even provoke, impulsive use of Madeleine’s hands. They were to occasionally leave Madeleine’s food nearby but not to feed it to her.

Sure enough, one day the hungry Madeleine lost patience and groped around, grasped a bagel, and put it to her mouth. *At that moment, a sixty-year-old cocoon of imposed helplessness ruptured and a vitalized Madeleine emerged.*

When her mind and spirit were “deprogrammed” from disabling data, Madeleine’s body was set free. With pent-up appetite to explore the tactile world, Madeleine asked for clay to press and mold. Within a year she became famous locally as the Blind Sculptress of St. Benedict’s, producing artwork with “remarkable expressive energy,” says Sacks.

Like Madeleine, clients who come to me for counseling bring achy hearts and unhealthy relationships. They are often products of epidemic divorce or homes where their souls—not their hands—were neglected and untrained. Many describe their heart, as Madeleine described her hands, as *feeling* useless, numb, confusing, and, yes, godforsaken.

Just as insight into Madeleine’s early home environment proved crucial for her physical liberation, so can a study of your family history unleash new psychological and spiritual





freedom. Her story dramatically illustrates two principles flowing through this book:

1. It is possible to identify and correct dysfunctional family habits and break the cycle of pain and unhealthy behavior for future generations.
2. Psychological, emotional, spiritual, and physical functions are intertwined and interdependent. In Madeleine's case, an emotional jolt (frustration) triggered a mental shift (the idea to "grab some food despite these 'useless' hands!"), mobilizing inert limbs and revolutionizing her world. Through Madeleine we can see the transforming power of treating humans as complete mind-body-spirit packages—whether by a doctor, a minister, or a therapist.

Likewise, mounds of data show that *faith-based principles* are an important part of personal, marital, and family healing. Because of this, faith-energized folks have a proven edge in marital satisfaction, cohesion, and emotional and sexual intimacy.<sup>2</sup>

But on the flip side, Bible-quoting parents who aim authority at children with demoralizing, heart-pulverizing coldness or rage also should know that their behavior actually *increases* the odds that their children will become social deadweight—sexually promiscuous or psychologically and physically abusive.<sup>3</sup>

The third premise, unrelated to marvelous Madeleine, is this: While coercive, malevolent, or evil behaviors in families





are tolerated at great peril, there *are* ways to disengage the power of family villains.

On the following pages, we'll celebrate the numerous courageous souls who have embraced these principles and found great reward. Except in rare cases where permission has been granted to use personal stories, clinical illustrations are composites: a blend of cases with great similarities so as to preserve reality while protecting confidentiality. Thus, except for permission granters, any approximation of private (versus public) personalities is not only coincidental but also consciously avoided.

I often use historic or public figures as examples with my clients and in workshops, and I've included them here in an effort to depersonalize struggles common to us all. Their documented triumphs and tragedies are imbued with powerful credibility.

Adding a personal note, I cite the intuition of my ninety-one-year-old father-in-law, Joe, who concluded that this book project is partly about me. Indeed, it is—as is common among writers—partly autobiographical.

By my calculation, my own family actually launched production of this book in about 1847 when William F. “Billy” Hubble was born. Billy, my great-grandfather, rose among a gifted extended family distinguished by medical doctors, scholars, ministers, and PhDs—including his brilliant distant cousin, astronomer Edwin P. Hubble.

Billy was a gifted horseman and driver of four-horse logging wagons. He was, alas, best known for alcoholism and had serious crashes a century before sobriety checks came into vogue.





“Thank God for *Billy!*” some homeless men have exclaimed in my Washington, D.C., workshops when I’ve revealed my invisible roots. “*Billy* is why you understand *us!*”

Indeed, he is. Sorrow has flowed for generations from Billy, as family roles, communication, and relationships tend to spread in a contagion from an alcoholic patriarch.

Following a mutually gratifying discussion about Billy’s legacy just two days before I wrote this, my eighty-four-year-old mother expressed enthusiasm about this project because “we need concrete help for families” in pain. She *gets* Billy’s long reach from the nineteenth into the twenty-first century—an understanding that is part of healing.

Ironically, I am greatly indebted to Billy. His legacy, I believe, resulted in an inexplicable strength and radar within me.

The product of a deeply religious family sprinkled with generations of ministers, I am also grateful that my parents seeded within me a faith in Jesus Christ as Son of God and Savior. Transformed into my own rudder and anchor, this faith, I am convinced, holds the key to a life that has proven remarkably challenging, gratifying, and wonderfully adventurous.

The faith connection also offers an extra safety net when I fall into some of the very self- and family-wounding traps I explore in these pages. I confess happily (as it eliminates the pressure of any illusion or delusion of perfection) that I write as a fellow seeker, not as one who has arrived.

Finally, a few words about a research-proven secret to a vibrant, resilient, happy life, as documented by the Harvard Study of Adult Development: As it turns out, a *good marriage* surpasses other factors as key to personality advantages,





stability, and happiness throughout life.<sup>4</sup> This consideration alone is powerful motivation for young or solo members of our families to scrutinize the character and habits of potential partners; for miserably partnered readers to resolve agony and conflict within marriages; and for those who are happily connected to celebrate partners who have proven themselves a safe refuge from the turbulence of life.

My personal, joyful, technicolored proof of the study's point is wrapped up in Thomas Joseph Tauke, father of our two wonderful children, the love of my life, and cherished partner for twenty years.

So, yes, Joe. The book *is* partly my story.







## CHAPTER ONE

# ALL IN THE FAMILY

---

Leaving work for the day as a public-relations writer in Chicago, I headed for the subway and home. As I crossed LaSalle Street near the Cabrini Green housing project—notorious for muggings and murder—I was startled by movement toward me from the side.

“Could you help us, please?”

I turned to face two girls who appeared to be about sixteen.

“What do you need?” I inquired.

“Could you point us to a cheap hotel?”

Two years out of college myself, I was barely older than these girls. If they were roaming Chicago streets looking for a cheap hotel, I assumed they were in some sort of trouble. *Run-aways*, I thought, noting the sleeping bags in their hands.

I asked them a few questions, mostly stalling for time and for a sense of inner direction. Really, I knew of no cheap lodging in a city that seemed very expensive on my starter-job budget. So what were my options, other than leaving them to manage on their own?



“Well, I don’t really know of any cheap hotels, but I could try to help you find one.”

Two blondish heads nodded.

“Or,” I added slowly, calculating risks, “I could take you home with me. Free.”

“Really?” they asked, small smiles creeping up their cheeks.

“Look, it’s not much. A tiny little apartment. No extra beds. But you can have dinner and a warm bath. You can stretch those sleeping bags out on the rug. But you’ll have to leave with me for work early in the morning.”

“Sure,” they agreed in obvious delight.

As we settled into our subway seats, I looked at the girls and stated the obvious: “This is risky, you know. I don’t know you. You don’t know me. So we have to trust each other in a bit of an adventure here.”

*You’re totally nuts!* is what I was really saying to myself by then—perhaps quite accurately, I conclude years later. I *was* smart enough, however, to shoot up a few prayers for wisdom and protection.

At any rate, we aimed for the Chicago neighborhood where I rented a minuscule attic apartment from an elderly landlord. I pointed the girls to the claw-foot tub so they could take hot baths while I made dinner—chicken, as I recall, as that was the limit of my culinary expertise.

“So, where are you from?” I inquired as we munched dessert—cookies from a box.

They looked at each other tensely and responded that they came from outside Illinois but that was all they would say.





However, before we all drifted off to sleep in the wee hours of the morning, they did tell me about their families.

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*Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.* PROVERBS 22:6

---

Joanna had fled brutal beatings from her alcoholic dad. The risk of hitting the road with no money and no place to go had finally been eclipsed by the terror of facing her father after school each day. She was more sad than angry and more determined than scared.

Alcohol was no excuse for Bonnie's father, a teetotaler and Bible-quoting church deacon. She wept as she described the beatings he delivered daily, bruises and bloody gashes left not only on five children but on their mother as well.

"What's this?" I inquired, taking her hand and gently touching marks on her wrist.

She turned her head away, silent. Then quietly she murmured, "I did that last year."

"With what?"

"A razor blade."

Failing to leave her tormentor through death, Bonnie had finally summoned the courage to hit the highway. She predicted that one or more of her siblings would soon follow.

"Bonnie, I'm so sorry," I said quietly. "I'm especially sorry that God has been used as a cover for abuse. If you ever needed him you need him now. Please don't let your Bible-quoting, brutalizing father poison your heart against God."

A very strong faith was by then my rudder for life and had





been much of the motivation for giving brief refuge to these desperate young women. To me, it was blasphemy that a father would claim to speak with the voice of God while brutalizing a precious child entrusted to his care.

True to our agreement, Joanna and Bonnie rose for an early subway ride into the heart of Chicago. I celebrated that my bed-and-breakfast offer had comforted two young girls and turned out well. I also felt fear for them as they headed into the unknown, and sorrow for the violence to their bodies and souls that had led them to take such a risk.

Tears filled three sets of eyes as I rose to exit the subway before their chosen stop. "We're very grateful," said Joanna. Bonnie nodded, reaching out for a big hug.

Months drifted by and I nearly forgot the two young strangers who had shared that evening with me. Then a letter arrived from Bonnie. Mostly she wanted to alert me that her older brother was headed to Chicago. Could he call?

Sure, he could call, I told her, but not for bed and breakfast. My place wasn't coed.

Seventeen-year-old Bryan called soon afterward. He wondered if we could meet for lunch.

We talked over steak and eggs in a low-budget diner near the office where I worked at the time. Bryan's story was similar to Bonnie's. So were the marks on his arm.

"Bryan, I have to ask . . .," I said, touching the scar on his wrist.

This was a one-plot family. Just as Bonnie had lurched for death as relief from the family sadist, so had Bryan. Also like Bonnie, he was grateful to be alive and determined to be free.





A third sibling, Bobby, also connected with me through phone discussions scattered over the next several years. Unlike Bonnie and Bryan, the younger Bobby stuck it out at home with Dad. Recoiling from family violence, he used humor and appeasement, not suicide attempts, to deflect his father's rage. He also tried desperately to win acceptance by stuffing himself into a mold demanded by his father.

Bobby attended a Christian college and returned to his dad's church as youth pastor. The battering deacon finally had a child he found a bit worthy of himself.

Twenty-five years after that first overnight visit, after a decade of silence, I received a call from Bobby. He found me at a Virginia counseling center where I had been working for several years.

The small talk was brief. "I didn't know who else to call. I have to tell someone," said Bobby from his home two thousand miles away.

"I have time. What's on your mind?" I asked.

"I'm gay," said Bobby.

Silence at my end. I was trying to wrap my mind around disjointed images of fundamentalist youth pastor Bobby and gay Bobby.

But I got it. Immediately. *Of course he called me. He would have instantly become a pariah had he confided in his fundamentalist community.*

Not only was Bobby gay, he was also highly promiscuous. Not with a few favorite sexual companions. With strangers. And not just strangers who attracted him with charm, personality, intelligence, or physical appeal. Bobby hung out in





sex clubs where faces were hidden and identities protected, places where actions transpired anonymously between rented booths separated by curtains.

And, yes, he was still a fundamentalist youth pastor. No, he was not attracted to young boys nor had he ever had sexual relations with anyone much younger than himself. Yes, his relationship with his father had improved. In fact, he got along better with his father than did any of his four siblings.

No wonder. The deacon was a Christian-community variation of Romans 1:25 (KJV). He had clearly “changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator.” This father was an idolater who worshipped himself and demanded child sacrifice—the wrenching emotional evisceration of his own children—in his self-centered religion. *Bobby was the one child who agreed to what the idolatry demanded.*

Willing to pay any price in order to win his father’s love, Bobby had built his life around a faith of his father’s design, but one that could hardly be more alien to his inner world. His religion was merely a concoction of his father’s, lacking any independent struggle to know or understand God on his own. *But a relationship with the Creator requires connection between one’s soul and God, not between oneself and a god impostor.*

## SOUL MURDER

Bobby was an extreme example of many cases that have drifted into the counseling center where I work. As counselors, we strive to combine academic and professional training





in mental health with a strong commitment to Christ and to biblical principles. Most of our clients come from a broad range of local churches, usually fundamentalist or evangelical, but often Coptic or Catholic as well. Clients need help with mild to extreme emotional problems. Some ache from the inevitable grief of life—lost jobs, lost loves, marital crises, bereavement, loneliness, guilt, depression, or dull aches persisting from childhood.

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Others, like Bobby, are walking wounds. Victims of “soul murder,” as graphically described by Morton Schatzman in a book of that title, some seem to be the drifting dead, numb to emotions, to a sense of self, to hope for the future, or to any experience of reliable love—*ever*.

### Loveless vs. cherished hearts

Bobby's story is not unique. In fact, his life echoes the tragic outcomes of Harvard's Study of Adult Development, the world's longest prospective study of physical and mental health. The study followed Harvard graduates born about 1920, tracking their physical, emotional, mental, and social well-being for more than sixty years. The study also assessed the childhood environment of each subject, producing categories ranging from “loveless” children at one end of the spectrum to “cherished” children at the opposite extreme.

Despite superior minds and elite academic credentials, the





loveless Harvard men were five times as likely as their cherished counterparts to struggle with mental-health crises, including depression or addiction to alcohol or drugs. The loveless tended to navigate life as loners, isolated from close friendships.<sup>1</sup>

The loveless were also three times as likely as the cherished to die before age seventy-five from unnatural deaths, often self-inflicted by unhealthy behaviors (related to lung cancer, cirrhosis, emphysema, and suicide).

Bobby was no Harvard man, but his physically, emotionally, and spiritually treacherous childhood produced consequences matching the research. His sex addiction, which he at times loathed but used habitually to soothe a barren inner world, reflected various types of emotional trauma much more typical of Harvard's loveless than cherished subjects. So far, Bobby had sustained physical health. But in an age of AIDS, his frequent forays into cavalier, indiscriminate, often unprotected sex put him at the same risk faced by Harvard's loveless research subjects.

### **Destiny-changing habits**

What if Bobby's life had been shaped by a loving rather than a battering environment?

Harvard's remarkable research provides some clues. The study's cherished children seemed to be protected against adult depression, addictions, and other forms of mental crises; from chronic illnesses; and from premature death. By age eighty, the cherished death rate was two-thirds lower than the average for their age group.







Harvard's cherished have lived not just longer lives than the loveless, but lives filled with more relationships and enjoyment. The cherished were five times more likely to play competitive sports, to play games with friends, and to take enjoyable vacations. More so than the loveless, they were able to balance duty and obligation with stress-relieving recreation.

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PREMATURE DEATH.

While the loveless often reported friendless lives, the cherished had formed nurturing relationships and seemed to have been strengthened and energized by such connections.

An intriguing insight emerges here that goes back to the ancient parenting guidance to "train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it" (Proverbs 22:6). When early training is paired with loving relationships, a child is more likely to thrive throughout life due to stable emotions, secure social connections, and physical well-being.

Sadly, Harvard's cherished children pose a stark contrast to the quiet desperation of Bonnie, Bryan, and Bobby. As I listened to Bobby share his secret, I wondered, *How can such crippled lives be products of "Christian" homes?* It was the same question that had haunted me since college days.

I thought about the many traumatized clients who came to see me each week. Many of these people personally struggled





to know God and live by biblical principles, yet seemed to drift through life in personality-shriveling, relationship-crippling, spirit-stifling emotional pain. Where was the abundant life assured by Christ? Surely their tormented

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journey was *not* the vibrant life the Scriptures promise.

I could see that many of the wounded were suffering directly from sins of the fathers (or mothers), or even the toxic choices of grandparents or great-grandparents. As clients recounted their family

history, the evidence clearly mounted, proving that destructive ancestral choices often became habits of life. I could see how these habits then became the environment that shaped the personality and character of the next generation. And children whose personalities were distorted by their parents' destructive habits became a new parent generation, doing what now came naturally: poisoning the family tree.

*If the poor apples in each successive batch of children seemed shriveled and bruised—no wonder!* Was there hope for them? Could they break this multigenerational crash-and-burn cycle?

As I thought about Bobby and others like him, more questions followed:

- Can the loveless learn to live cherished lives?
- What are the family habits that produce cherished lives in the first place?





- Is it possible to transform personal and family destiny by importing those habits?

Such is the focus of this book.

If there were no hope for healing, I would not remain in the counseling profession.

If I had not experienced my own personal healing, I would not find the hope so compelling.

If a vibrant, authentic, God-driven, metabolized faith were not a major key, I would not be awed at the ability of some spiritually empowered clients to pry light from darkness and wring hope from despair.

And if true stories of tragedy transformed into triumph could not dance through these pages, there would be no book.





## ENDNOTES

### INTRODUCTION

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### CHAPTER 1: All in the Family

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