

FRAGMENTED WORLD | KEN BAUGH

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# UNHINDERED

RESTORING OUR SOULS IN A



Ken Baugh is well trusted for his decades of insightful teaching, practical coaching, empathetic counseling, and authentic pastoring. Now, in this wonderful new book, Ken has distilled much of his wisdom for a wider audience. I hope everyone reads this book and then buys a copy for a friend.

RICK WARREN, author of *The Purpose Driven Life*

Many believers feel stuck between a desire to live the abundant, full life that Jesus taught and the realities of personal struggles. We don't see how the one relates to the other, so we continue asking God to help us grow while "trying harder" to be better people. That just doesn't work—it leaves us more stuck and discouraged. Ken Baugh reveals the solution: a workable system in which God wants us to walk with him through grace and intimacy, bringing him our struggles and pain as we do so. Using clear, biblical teaching and the latest neuroscience, Ken will give you practical steps to come to a place where you are all God means you to be, where you walk in peace, and where you can become free of the obstacles that keep you from moving forward. Highly recommend.

JOHN TOWNSEND, PhD, *New York Times* bestselling author of the Boundaries series

I have been anticipating Ken's inspiring, gentle guide to the Christ-formation process. This new classic is such a welcomed resource, equipping us to flourish and live as a whole person, in *shalom* as God intended. May you experience great joy on the journey.

DR. CATHERINE HART WEBER, director of Flourish Center for Wellbeing at Sierra Madre, California, author of *Flourish*

*Unhindered Abundance* is a health-food "smoothie" for the soul. Ken Baugh has managed to blend solid cognitive neuroscience into the healthiest spiritual traditions and practices. Not only do we enjoy the flavors that changed his life and ministry, but we also taste traces of attachment love and relational life that transform identity into the sweet taste of Jesus.

JIM WILDER, author of *Renovated*

With Scripture, life experience, and insights from brain science, *Unhindered Abundance* skillfully charts the path to Christ-formation and abundant Christian living. This carefully researched and eminently practical work shows how healthy spiritual habits rewire the human brain from spiritual apathy and addictive behaviors to the Spirit-filled life we long for but often fail to achieve.

BRUCE DEMAREST, senior professor of Christian formation at Denver Seminary

Over the years, I have learned to trust those who experience the truths they teach. Ken Baugh is such a person. When he teaches that “knowing, believing, and abiding in God’s love fuels Christ-formation and the abundant life,” he knows this from personal experience. I want to strongly encourage you to apply the principles in this book so you, too, can experience more of the abundant life that is available through Jesus Christ.

BILL THRALL, cofounder of Trueface, coauthor of *The Ascent of a Leader* and *The Cure*

Most of us desire to hear from God but do little to minimize the noise and distraction around us long enough to learn how to listen to him. Ken reminds us that God created us for relationship with him and those around us. God is passionately pursuing us. *Unhindered Abundance* provides the opportunity to explore the availability of that deeper experience with God.

MIKE PARKINSON, director of Trinity Ranch Ministries

Ken Baugh provides a clear guide to help us get more out of life through Christ-formation. You need not be a theologian or neuroscience scholar to understand and practice his life-building techniques. Baugh does an amazing job elucidating where science and Scripture align. I began reading this book hoping that I might use it with my graduate students, but as a clarity-providing lens, Baugh helped me realize my own desperate need for restoration—so that I, too, might live more abundantly by God’s design.

DAVID A. STEVENS, EdD, professor of education and neuroscience at Tabor College

Through careful exposition of biblical teaching combined with insights from psychology and neuroscience, Ken Baugh lays out a path to holistic spiritual, emotional, and relational Christlikeness. Regardless of where you find yourself on your journey, he offers pastoral and personal guidelines toward your own unhindered abundance of Christ-formation.

MICHAEL J. WILKINS, distinguished professor emeritus of New Testament language and literature at Talbot School of Theology (Biola University)

I had the privilege of ministering with Ken Baugh for two week-long retreats and saw the positive impact of this material on people serious about progressing toward spiritual maturity and conformity to the image of Christ. The book is centered in Scripture and takes God's truth seriously. It incorporates essential insights from psychology and neuroscience. *Unhindered Abundance* provides a balanced treatment of a topic that is essential for the church in these days of uncertainty and chaos.

DR. ED CURTIS, professor emeritus of Old Testament and biblical studies at Talbot School of Theology (Biola University)

Ken Baugh provides a gushing stream of insights and grace-infused disciplines from the Bible, supplemented by findings from cognitive psychology and neurology, to invite you to experience spiritual and emotional health through "Christ-formation." Along the way, he offers his own story of brokenness and life change. Open your heart to Jesus as you read, and this book will light up your brain with God's words of life.

BILL GAULTIERE, PhD, psychologist, founder of Soul Shepherding, author of *Journey of the Soul*

If you are looking for a single book to serve as your guide to greater Christ-formation, *Unhindered Abundance* would be a good choice. It blends helpful insights together and provides concrete steps for moving forward on the journey of heart-focused discipleship.

MARCUS WARNER, president of Deeper Walk International

This is a book of great encouragement, wonderful insights, and practical tools. Rooted in robust theology, it explores the role of psychology and neurology in the transformational process, offering a deeper understanding of this pathway to spiritual growth. Ken Baugh shows us how the abundant life is possible for all of us through the work and power of the Holy Spirit. I highly recommend you read it—you will be glad you did!

**TOMMY HILLIKER**, president of Rockbridge Seminary

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## Foreword

AN IDEA THAT DEEPLY GRIEVES ME is that some people perceive God's interaction with people as near-scoldings about our faults. It's as if God is relentlessly focused on how we're not measuring up to a standard of always doing things good Christians are supposed to do. The result is that people experience God as a demeaning "Eternal Nag," though they would never put it that way, much less say that aloud. The Christian life, at bottom, becomes one of constant striving and inevitable failure.

Ken Baugh is determined not to let this lie gain more momentum! He insists that soul restoration and mind reorientation result in unhindered abundance. Following Jesus into that good and flourishing life is a relational process that fills our loneliness. Continual conversation with God makes our life so adventurous that watching TV seems boring.

The transformation of our souls is God's creative project. And God is good at it—he progressively changes every dimension of our persons: mind, emotions, will, body, social context, and soul. Ken wisely yet gently guides us into discipleship of the mind. I say "gently" because he understands that God *woos* us into goodness. For example, Ken shares the "accidental memorization" method of learning Scripture by heart. That is how spiritual practices work. At their best, they are organic, not forced. God invites us into a Scripture passage, and we resonate so much with it that we begin to live and breathe it. Then, committing it to memory is not taxing but as luscious as eating a candy bar.

Another misconception many people have is that this growth process pits the mind and emotions against each other, as if the mind has to corner the emotions and whip them into shape. But in truth, these two aspects work together so closely that they cannot be separated. What I choose to think about gently pulls my emotions along. What I feel can lead me to talk to God about possible solutions. As I consider what I'm grateful for in this present moment (thinking), I find my face grinning (body), and in the next moment, my mood is lifted (feeling). This is not closing our eyes to facts but opening them. For gratitude is living in reality—noticing the good things happening around us that this fragmented world trains us to overlook. This marriage of mind and emotions helps us experience God's love (a theme which Ken often comes back to) as a whole-brain experience—objective and intuitive, thinking and feeling.

Such energetic discipleship of the mind leads to oneness with God. We must never be fixed on how we're doing with spiritual practices or our character transformation. Those are crucial issues, to be sure, but the focus of attention in spiritual formation is not on us; the focus of attention is on God and what the devotional masters called "union with God." We set our minds on constant companionship with God—"God with us"—and experience the oneness with God that the apostle John loved to write about (John 1:1-2; 5:17, 23; 8:58; 14:9, 23; 16:15; 17:10, 21). We experience that need-fulfilling oneness in unhindered abundance as we intermingle our thoughts with the thoughts of God.

May your mind find great joy and adventure in doing so!

*Jan Johnson*

author of *When the Soul Listens*

# Introduction

A FEW YEARS AGO, I was feeling frustrated with the lack of spiritual growth in my life. At the time, I had been a Christian for thirty-five years and a local church<sup>1</sup> pastor for over twenty years, but there was still a huge gap between where I was and where I thought I should be in Christ. Truth be told, the fruit of the Spirit was woefully lacking in my life.

I struggled to love others, I lacked joy, peace, patience, and kindness, especially while driving or when I experienced any inconvenience. I caught myself engaging in dehumanizing practices—sizing up the cashiers at the grocery store, for example, to decide which could get me out the door the fastest. I'd noticed an insufficient display of goodness, faithfulness, and gentleness in my life, and an ongoing problem with anger.

As for self-control, it was pretty much out the window—especially if there was a gallon of vanilla ice cream in the freezer.

That gives you a snapshot of some of my struggles and why I was feeling so frustrated. But things have been changing.

Six years ago, I was terminated from my position as a senior pastor. The elders decided I lacked the leadership skills to take the church to the next level. This devastating experience became the catalyst for a season of unprecedented spiritual/emotional growth.<sup>2</sup> I felt like I had been born again, again.

This difficult season has been a personal laboratory for me to work out the principles in this book. It has produced some significant breakthroughs for me. Don't get me wrong: I'm still a work in progress. I still struggle with criticism, feelings of insecurity, and fear. I still have a few too many masks

in my closet to help me present the right image in a given situation. I still struggle at times with inconsiderate drivers and get frustrated when I'm in a hurry and the line at the grocery store is too long. But I'm experiencing new freedom from spiritual/emotional conflicts that have caused problems for me throughout my life. These problems acted like barriers to my formation in Christ, but they are becoming less and less a hindrance as I put the principles found in this book into practice.

The more I study the Bible, the more I understand that God's will for my life is to become more like Jesus in his character and to experience his quality of life. The character traits of Jesus are most easily recognized as the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23), while Jesus' quality of life is represented by the abundant life he mentions in John 10:10: a life characterized by love, joy, peace, and hope (to name a few).

The apostle Paul refers to our formation into the image of Christ when he writes: "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit" (2 Corinthians 3:18). Scholars and spiritual leaders refer to this process variously as progressive sanctification, spiritual formation, or spiritual growth. Personally, I like the term *Christ-formation*.

### **What Is Christ-Formation?**

Christ-formation is the overarching goal of the Christian life. It's the result of a partnership between us and the Holy Spirit and is the practical outcome of what Jesus invited people to when he called them (and us) to be his disciples.

But if you're like me, sometimes you feel like you're not making much progress in becoming like Jesus. To be honest, the whole idea of living an abundant life seems impossible. So, what's the problem?

The problem is sin—less an act of outright rebellion against God and more a desperate attempt to avoid shame and numb unresolved emotional pain with behavior that is contrary to the will of God. Regardless of why we sin, sin itself hinders the Christ-formation process because it grieves the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:30) and quenches his work in our lives (1 Thessalonians 5:19).

When emotional pain is allowed to linger in the heart, it can not only

drive sinful behavior but also promote spiritual/emotional conflicts that distort our perception of God, self, and others, hindering our ability to experience the abundant life. Identifying and resolving these spiritual/emotional conflicts is what this book is all about. It's an interactive guide that will help you understand your direct involvement in the Holy Spirit's work to grow you in Christ. None of us will become fully formed in Christ in this life, but I believe that more transformation is possible than we realize.

### **What Makes This Book Unique?**

The principles for Christ-formation found in this book are grounded in a robust biblical theology—but that's not necessarily new or different. What makes this book unique is its holistic approach to progressive sanctification: the lifelong process of being formed into the image of Christ. The progressive sanctification I'm laying out here is based on a robust biblical theology and infused with findings from psychology and neurology. These findings deepen our understanding about how Christ-formation works and the changes you can expect.<sup>3</sup> Sadly, many people think science and Scripture are at odds with each other. I believe there are points of intersection, as the regular reference to Scripture in the book will reflect.

As you study the information and apply the biblical principles in *Unhindered Abundance*, you will discover that Christ-formation is not a passive process. Like any relationship, our discipleship to Jesus is dynamic and interactive—God at work in us, and us participating in that work with God. Neither does Christ-formation happen in isolation; you need to join with others on the same journey. So I encourage you to work through this material with a friend or in a small group. (At the end of each chapter, you will find questions for personal reflection and questions you can use with a small group.)

This material has been forged in the fires of my own life experiences. You will find some chapters fairly rigorous as we explore and apply findings from theology, psychology, and neurology to our understanding of Christ-formation, but I promise I will walk you through the practical implications, step by step.

My greatest desire is that this book will help you identify and resolve the spiritual/emotional conflicts that have hindered your Christ-formation so that you will experience a greater degree of the abundant life that Jesus has made possible for you.



## DEFINING THE DISCIPLESHIP PROBLEM

IN A WORLD INFECTED WITH SIN, emotional pain is a universal human reality. Whether this pain is self-inflicted due to poor choices or it comes at the hands of other people or through difficult circumstances, emotional pain is real and can be as debilitating as physical pain. Allowed to linger in the heart, emotional pain will often produce additional issues, such as depression, anxiety, loneliness, fear, anger, unforgiveness, and a range of other problems that can wreak havoc in our lives.

Many believers in Christ attempt to numb their emotional pain through sinful behavior and addictions. These responses create barriers to transformation. Whether we sin or are sinned against, the spiritual/emotional conflicts sin produces keep us stuck and hinder our ability to experience the abundant life available in Christ.

### **The Greatest Barrier to Spiritual Growth**

I have been shocked to discover the large number of Christians who feel stuck in their spiritual growth as a result of sin and unresolved emotional pain. About a decade ago, Willow Creek Community Church in South Barrington,



Illinois, conducted a survey of their congregation. By 2015, the *Reveal* study had been administered in approximately two thousand churches, including an estimated 425,000 participants.<sup>1</sup> The findings were alarming:

- Of the people surveyed, 16 percent described the condition of their spiritual lives as stalled or unsatisfying.
- Additionally, 27 percent of those surveyed confessed to a variety of addictions, including overspending, gambling, excessive drinking of alcohol, pornography, and overeating.
- Another 16 percent of those surveyed admitted to having affairs or inappropriate relationships that pulled them away from God.
- Another 48 percent admitted to struggling with emotional issues, such as depression, anger, and suppressing painful emotions.
- A total of 89 percent of those surveyed acknowledged that they were not making their spiritual growth a priority.<sup>2</sup>

These findings present a very real problem that is not being addressed by traditional means of discipleship: Bible study, prayer, small-group participation, church programs, Christian service, and financial generosity. There is more Bible-study curriculum available today than ever before, more books pertaining to spiritual formation and growth, more biblical teaching available on Facebook Live, Vimeo, and YouTube, and an ever-increasing number of excellent Christian podcasts. Yet large numbers of believers confess to being stuck in addiction and behaviors that hinder their growth in Christ. The vast amount of good biblical *information* is not facilitating much in the way of *transformation*.

To put it simply, the great barrier to spiritual growth among many Christians living in North America is due to *unresolved emotional pain*.

In order to address this problem, we need to understand how spiritual growth and emotional health influence each other. We need a more holistic and biblical understanding of the heart—one's inner being, composed of thought, emotion, and will—to discover how unresolved emotional pain

contributes to the spiritual/emotional conflicts that hinder the transformation process. Until we develop a more whole-hearted approach to discipleship, we will continue to perpetuate the problem.

Maybe you're aware of a gap between where you are and where you think you should be in your life as a Christian. I've been a Christian for over forty years and a pastor for twenty-seven years. I have advanced degrees in theology. And yet I still struggle spiritually and emotionally. I can assure you that these problems are not due to a lack of biblical knowledge, spiritual-growth practices, or a desire to be a godly man. As with so many of us, the barrier to my growth in Christ is unresolved emotional pain.

### **My Story**

When I was five years old, my parents divorced. Of course, it was never their intention to cause me harm—my parents loved me and did the best they could in a very difficult situation. However, I'm tenderhearted by nature, and following their divorce, I experienced intense feelings of rejection, abandonment, and fear. These feelings promoted spiritual/emotional conflicts that distorted my perception of God, myself, and others. They were held together by a deep sense of shame.

My feelings of rejection, abandonment, fear, and shame increased during my early adolescent years. I struggled to fit in with other kids at school, and my insecurities made me an easy target for bullies. My neediness and hunger for adult approval was annoying to my teachers.

A few years after my parents divorced, they each remarried. My stepmother was kind and nurturing, but my stepfather, while being a good provider and husband to my mother, was stern and emotionally unavailable. His gruff impatience only contributed to my feelings of rejection, abandonment, fear, and shame.

When I was twelve, my mother and stepfather sent me from California to Utah to live on their ranch with my grandparents. This was meant to be temporary while my stepfather waited for a job transfer to a new power plant under construction, but the approval process dragged on and the project was eventually canceled. I ended up living with my grandparents in Utah for three years. While I'm grateful that during that time I became a Christian (I responded to an invitation given by Billy Graham during

one of his TV crusades), my emotional turmoil continued as I struggled with my peers in school.

My classmates didn't take kindly to the new kid from California. I was teased and physically bullied incessantly. No matter what I did, I just couldn't fit in; there was no place where I felt like I belonged. I only had two friends, but even they were reluctant to eat with me during lunch or sit with me on the bus ride to and from school. Most of the time, I just sat by myself feeling sad and alone. I was experiencing extreme anxiety from being separated from my mother, and the emotional hurt I experienced from the kids at school reinforced my feelings of rejection, abandonment, fear, and shame. My grandparents did the best they could to love and console me, but it just wasn't enough to ease my emotional trauma.

I moved back to Southern California to live with my mother and stepfather while I attended high school. I was good at basketball, and I made the summer league team before my freshman year. The coach replaced one of the starting players with me, which I thought would help me be accepted by my peers and find a place to belong. Sadly, it didn't turn out that way: Most of the guys on the freshman team resented the fact that the coach played me more than their longtime friend. This situation intensified my feelings of rejection, abandonment, fear, and shame; these feelings seemed to follow me everywhere.

After graduating from high school, I lied about my age and took up bartending. For the next three years, I tended bar for yacht parties, corporate functions, and banquets at a gourmet restaurant near where I lived. During these years, I numbed my emotional pain with alcohol and sex, but any brief experience of relief was followed quickly by more guilt and shame. As a believer, I was in turmoil about my behavior; I knew without a doubt that what I was doing was wrong, but I wanted to numb my pain. I can remember times when I clearly sensed God's loving presence and the invitation to turn away from my life of sin, but to no avail. I was stuck in a relentless cycle of sin and sorrow.

After a few years, my world came crashing down on me. The woman I was living with came home one night and told me she had just had an abortion. It seemed like a matter-of-fact decision for her, but I was devastated. The pain of the abortion drove us apart, and not long after, we split up, bringing my feelings of rejection, abandonment, fear, and shame to a tipping point.

One day I was walking alone on the beach, feeling a great sense of despair as I thought about how I had made such a mess of my life. I literally fell to my knees and cried out to God for help and forgiveness. It felt in that moment like God lowered a rope to help me out of my pit of despair. I recommitted my life to following Jesus and began my journey to becoming a pastor.

As I look back today, I realize that the mess I had made of my life had less to do with a hard and rebellious heart and more to do with a broken heart—damaged by years of emotional pain that fostered an intense longing to be loved. Obviously I had made sinful choices for which I was responsible, and those choices had produced grave consequences. Sinful choices are always a matter of free will, but they may be influenced by unresolved emotional pain and distorted thinking. They may be motivated by shame. Shame distorts your identity and undermines your sense of value as a person created in the image of God. People who live with deep shame feel defective and unworthy of love.

I am grateful for God’s mercy in my life. But even though God forgave my sin, he did not remove my distorted thinking nor the spiritual/emotional conflicts that followed me from my youth. Those feelings of rejection, abandonment, fear, and shame would not be addressed until years later, when I learned about Christ-formation.

### **What Is Christ-Formation?**

In 2 Corinthians 3:18, Paul writes, “We all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.” Some scholars and church leaders refer to this process of transformation as progressive sanctification. Others describe it as spiritual formation, spiritual growth, or spiritual maturity. I prefer to use the term *Christ-formation* because it is more descriptive of what is taking place: We are becoming more like Christ.

To become more like Jesus Christ includes two lifelong experiences. First, it involves taking on facets of his character that are most easily identified as the fruit of the Spirit: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23). It’s important to recognize that the fruit of the Spirit is singular, not plural. The first fruit of the Spirit is love; the by-product of this love is joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

This understanding of love as the fruit of the Spirit takes us to the second experience of Christ-formation: the abundant life. As we internalize the reality of God's love in increasing measure, we will begin to experience a different quality of life—a life characterized by joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. This is the abundant life. The more we abide in Jesus' love, the more like Jesus we will become and the more we will experience the abundant life.

In the next chapter, we will look at qualities of the abundant life and the lies that keep us from experiencing it.

### Restoring My Soul with God

1. How have you seen unresolved emotional pain hinder spiritual growth in others? How have you seen it affect your growth?

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2. In your own words, write out the problem this creates for following Christ:

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3. Circle all the emotions you have experienced in your life from the list below:

|            |            |            |              |            |
|------------|------------|------------|--------------|------------|
| Rejected   | Abandoned  | Sad        | Lonely       | Fearful    |
| Depressed  | Unpopular  | Envious    | Resentful    | Hateful    |
| Angry      | Regretful  | Spiteful   | Disappointed | Devastated |
| Inadequate | Helpless   | Shamed     | Hopeless     | Guilty     |
| Worthless  | Humiliated | Threatened | Shocked      | Trapped    |
| Terrified  | Tense      | Tempted    | Anxious      | Furious    |

4. Pair the above feelings to the situation that caused them and write out what happened as best as you can remember. Be as specific as possible: How old you were at the time, names of the people involved, where the situation occurred, who you have shared this experience with. Use a journal if needed.

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5. On a separate sheet of paper, make a list of all the major life events (positive and negative) you can remember under the age categories below:

|                 |                 |                 |
|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| 0-5 years old   | 6-10 years old  | 11-20 years old |
| 21-30 years old | 31-40 years old | 41-50 years old |
| 51-60 years old | 61-70 years old | 71-80 years old |
| 80+             |                 |                 |

### Restoring My Soul with Others

1. Does it surprise you that there is little statistical difference in the daily lives of believers and unbelievers? Why do you think so many believers continue to struggle with addictions?
2. In keeping with the *Reveal* study referred to in this chapter, how do church programs help and hinder the Christ-formation process?
3. How do you think emotional health contributes to spiritual growth?
4. How would you describe the Christ-formation process? What is the goal of Christ-formation? How long does it take? How does it take place?
5. As you think about your own painful life experiences, how have they helped or hindered your Christ-formation process?