

Chapter One

A Series of Unfortunate Events?

There is no chance, no destiny, no fate, that can circumvent or hinder or control the firm resolve of a determined soul. —Ella Wheeler Wilcox

Have you ever had a feeling that something is holding you back? Have you ever wanted to do something different, be someone greater, or go somewhere you've never been, but you don't because of one reason or another? What trips you up? What is it that keeps you from being your best self and living your best life filled with joy, peace, and happiness? What could it be that is holding you back, weighing you down, and keeping you from forging ahead and achieving your goals? Is it your environment, your circumstances, or is it *you*? Could things be the way they are because you are the way you are? Has your success been hindered by a series of unfortunate events—or could it actually be a series of unfortunate decisions?

If you picked up this book, you are among the few “courageous souls” bold enough to take a deeper look into their lives and face some potentially painful and maybe even embarrassing—yet liberating—truths. Too many cruise through life unwilling to read the signs posted along the way. “No matter

The 40 DAY Soul Fast

who you are, no matter where you live, and no matter how many people are chasing you, what you don't read is often as important as what you do read," wrote Lemony Snicket, the author of *A Series of Unfortunate Events*. Snicket opens chapter one of book seven in his series with this extremely insightful concept. "For instance," he continues, "if you are walking in the mountains, and you don't read the sign that says, 'Beware of Cliff' because you are busy reading a joke book instead, you may suddenly find yourself walking on air rather than on a sturdy bed of rocks."¹ I am reminded of David's resolute prayer in Psalms:

Barricade the road that goes Nowhere; grace me with Your clear revelation. I choose the true road to Somewhere; I post Your road signs at every curve and corner. I grasp and cling to whatever You tell me...I'll run the course You lay out for me if You'll just show me how (Psalm 119:29-32).

David knew there was no better signage available on the road of life than God's Word. The above verse is preceded by, "*Build me up again by Your Word*" (Ps. 119:28). Most people, even believing Christians, don't give the Word of God much mind. They go through life so engrossed and pre-occupied with what is convenient that they miss what is truly valuable and necessary—and as a result, they stay on the road going nowhere, building their life on air rather than on a sturdy bed of rocks. Jesus taught: "*Whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock*" (Matt. 7:24 NKJV). "*Like a man...who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock*" (Luke 6:48 NKJV). This is what I have written this book to help you do—to dig deep and build the foundation of your life on the sturdy bedrock of your most authentic self.

A Series of Unfortunate Events?

What is your true north—the plumb line of your soul? I want to help you navigate your own heart’s compass and accurately read the signs posted along the way so you don’t find yourself running in place with no ground underneath you—or as Paul wrote, “*uncertainly (without definite aim)...like one beating the air*” (1 Cor. 9:26 AMP). I want to help you “*Run to win!*” in life (1 Cor. 9:24 NLT).

Some of the most prevalent and misunderstood things that keep people from running with purpose and certainty are the toxic thoughts and lethal strongholds within their souls—memories of painful experiences, destructive habits, emotional attachments, misplaced desires, limiting beliefs, and narrow objectives undermine purpose, meaning, and lasting fulfillment. Unaddressed, these things will cause you to go through life feeling weighed down. Unidentified, such things will continuously burden your soul, and sometimes take the wind right out of your sails so you find yourself floating a drift with no shoreline in sight. Now more than ever, at this time in history, God’s people must “*lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us*” (Heb. 12:1 NKJV).

The weights that tie you down not only make you vulnerable to sin, but also cause you to acquire maladaptive sets of behaviors that keep you stagnated and going around in circles. These patterns derail you from fulfilling your dreams and cause you to abort your purpose so eventually you leave this earth never fully realizing your potential. Not only that, but when you are unable to break free, you keep those around you bound up as well. You become part of the problem rather than the solution. You join the ranks of blind leading the blind. Jesus asked His disciples, “*Can the blind lead the blind? Will they not both fall into the ditch?*” (Luke 6:39 NKJV). You

The 40 DAY Soul Fast

become the hurting who hurts and the disappointed who disappoints.

There are apartments in the soul which have a glorious outlook; from whose windows you can see across the river of death, and into the shining city beyond; but how often are these neglected for the lower ones, which have earthward-looking windows. —Henry Ward Beecher

There seems to be little awareness of what over time has formed the framework for the paradigms that dictate how people walk out their lives spiritually, culturally, morally, socially, and institutionally. You must be brave enough to ask yourself, “Why do I do the things that I do?” “Why do I keep attracting the people I really do not want and repelling the people I do?” “How can I break negative cycles?” “How can I grow spiritually and do something great for God within my lifetime?” The Bible says when you ask a question, you will get an answer. (See James 1:5.)

In my years of observing people, it has become glaringly apparent that most folks are generally oblivious to how their decisions and thought patterns affect those with whom they interact on a daily basis, and vice versa—let alone how everyday words and decisions affect their own destiny. This is heart-wrenching to me. Time and again I’ve heard the cry of people who have been deeply hurt or negatively affected by the words or actions of another. If you listen carefully, you can hear the desperate pleas of people crying out for help from emotionally desolate places—it may be a silent cry not demonstrated by tears, but by a seething undercurrent of rage, anger, bitterness, withdrawal, isolation, jealousy, hatred, manipulation, or random emotional outbursts, all masked by a peculiarly unsettling silence. It is not so much about what they are eating naturally speaking, but what is eating away

A Series of Unfortunate Events?

at them spiritually and emotionally. All actions or reactions not born of love are simply a cry from deep within—a cry for healing and freedom—a desperate plea to be freed from the weights and bondages that bind a soul to continual defeat, failure, and despair.

Sadly, many of us are so self-absorbed we have become deaf and desensitized to the cries of others who long for the same freedom and relief that we do. Perhaps we, being imprisoned in our minds, are unable to help anyone else simply because we lack the ability to help ourselves. Like ravenous wolves, we furiously pursue the objects of our own immediate needs and desires, descending upon the bleeding hearts, bruised spirits, and scarred souls of others to satisfy our own needs unaware or unconcerned that there is a silent sufferer in our midst. This is nothing new. We can see in Scripture that when the Israelites had no judge—no moral or ethical accountability, no mentor, standard-bearer, spiritual deliverer, or visionary leader—they did what was right in their own eyes. They became self-promoting, self-justifying, and self-indulgent in an effort to artificially appease their aching souls that had become separated from God. In their wake was left a desolate carnage of souls, spiritually and emotionally massacred. The sinking ship of society's morals—and morale—takes all passengers down with it.

Have you ever had a sinking feeling in your soul? Have you ever felt as if you were drowning in loneliness, anxiety, uncertainty, hurt, fear—afraid to trust again, afraid to love again, emotionally bankrupt, or like something had a spiritual lien on your soul? Have you ever felt the overwhelming waves of depression crashing against your mind, or, when you take one step forward you end up having to take two steps backward? If the answer is “yes” to any of these questions,

The 40 DAY Soul Fast

then I believe the next 40 days could be the best 40 days of your life.

Where you are now is a direct result of every decision you have made in the past. In other words, the life you are living today—the state of your relationships, the joy and peace you are experiencing, or the sorrow and pain—finds its root in decisions you have made up until this present moment. Your life is simply a representation of the sum total of your choices—choices that either enslave or save your soul. Think about that for a moment. Ultimately, you are only one decision away from changing everything. One decision can change the trajectory of your life.

My highest calling and greatest reward in life is launching you into a new level of victorious and joyous living by establishing you in the knowledge of the truth of God's Kingdom—knowledge that will set you free regardless of the unfortunate events, decisions, or relationships you've been bound by in the past. Jesus promised His disciples, "*You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free*" (John 8:32 NIV). The truth will set the *real* you—the divinely created you that has been held captive—free from the limitations of your unsaved, enslaved soul! Let's get started unlocking the real you!

The power for authentic leadership, Havel tells us, is found not in external arrangements but in the human heart. Authentic leaders in every setting—from families to nation-states—aim at liberating the heart, their own and others', so that its powers can liberate the world. —Parker Palmer

Embrace this kingdom life and don't doubt God, you'll not only do minor feats like I did...but also triumph over huge obstacles (Matthew 21:21).