

WHAT READERS ARE SAYING ABOUT *IT'S NOT SUPPOSED TO BE THIS WAY*

“There are few people brave enough to share their truth authentically and candidly. My longtime friend Lysa TerKeurst is one of those people. In *It's Not Supposed to Be This Way*, she gives us permission to acknowledge our own pain and disappointment by courageously exposing her own. Then she points us squarely to the sovereignty and faithfulness of God. This is a powerful book not only because each chapter oozes compassion and grace but because I've personally witnessed the tears, the pain, and the prayers that produced it. And therein lies its strength. It will be impossible to read this and not be tremendously encouraged.”

—Priscilla Shirer, Bible teacher and author

“My dear friend Lysa TerKeurst knows firsthand what it's like to have her faith tested to the breaking point and somehow draw closer to the Lord. I'm so grateful for her willingness to share her journey with us in *It's Not Supposed to Be This Way*. With a Job-like faith, Lysa vulnerably reveals the raw pain of enduring the unimaginable and seeking God in the midst of her struggles. This book is an instant classic on the relationship between suffering and knowing God. Not to be missed!”

—Chris Hodges, Senior Pastor, Church of the Highlands;
author of *Fresh Air* and *The Daniel Dilemma*

“In *It's Not Supposed to Be This Way*, Lysa confronts the often brutal differences between the life we have and the life we expected to have with stunning vulnerability. She helps us recognize that the deep well of hurt, frustration, and discouragement cannot compare to the depth of the well of hope, joy, and restoration that God has for us. If you feel debilitated by the shackles of disappointment, then let this book point you to God's plan for a whole new way to be human. You won't get your old life back—it's much better than that.”

—Levi Lusko, Pastor, Fresh Life Church; bestselling author
of *Swipe Right* and *Through the Eyes of a Lion*

“Lysa encourages us that our disappointments, failures, and the unexpected can actually serve in helping us grow closer to Jesus. I would recommend anyone and everyone to pick up a copy of *It’s Not Supposed to Be This Way!*”

—Chad Veach, Lead Pastor, ZOE Church LA

“This book is for every believer who has ever asked the question, ‘Why, Lord?’”

—Elizabeth E.

“Lysa shares her journey through the hardest season of her life with pure honesty and a holy perspective that’s relatable, tear-provoking, and life-changing.”

—Ashley S.

“If you have suffered disappointment, or are currently walking through disappointment, this book is for you. It’s relatable and rich with helpful Scripture. It’s as if the story was my own.”

—Tammy M.

“I have not read a more raw and honest book that ultimately points to God’s sovereignty in the midst of life’s hard. Lysa not only teaches us how to be better equipped for the fires and battles of this life, but her life illustrates how to wrestle well in the most difficult seasons. Her beautiful example of standing firm on the goodness of God—even when our flesh desperately wants to doubt and question—has been a life-changing gift to me!”

—Katie G.

“Lysa takes her own life circumstances and the Word of God and combines them into an easy-to-read and very practically applicable book! I would highly recommend this to anyone who is disappointed and struggling!”

—Erin S.

“Sometimes disappointments and hurts are so deep that a person is left feeling hopeless in the fallout of their circumstances. This book takes you on a journey of healing from that hopelessness.”

—Rachel R.

IT'S NOT
SUPPOSED
TO BE
THIS WAY

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What Happens When Women Say Yes to God

CHILDREN'S

It Will Be Okay

Win or Lose, I Love You!

**IT'S NOT
SUPPOSED
TO BE
THIS WAY**

Finding Unexpected Strength When
Disappointments Leave You Shattered

LYSA TERKEURST



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To my executive team at Proverbs 31 Ministries, Meredith Brock, Lisa Allen, Barb Spencer, Glynnis Whitwer, and Danya Jordan . . . you have walked beside me every step of this journey. Words will never be able to express how grateful I am for your unconditional love, tremendous support, and fervent prayers. I love you.

And to you who hold this book right now—the hurting heart, the disappointed soul, the devastated dreamer—I know your pain. I really do. But I also know that God sees. God hears. And God loves you deeply. My prayer is that the heaviness will be lifted off of your soul as you embrace the truths through the pages of this book.



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INTRODUCTION

There is a favorite story I like to tell myself. It's the one about how my life should turn out. Though it's riddled with missing everyday details, it's full of a general sense of okayness. No, actually more than okayness. It's the story where my toes can dig deeply into the sands of a glorious land called *normal*. A land I didn't design but one where I'm allowed to nod in agreement before any changes occur. And I can veto all circumstances that don't look right, feel right, or smell right. My lungs inhale fresh gusts of predictability and the wind is always a gentle breeze. Never unstable or stormy and certainly not brutal or destructive.

This place is neither glamorous nor glitzy. It's casual and comfortable with a boho chic eclectic style and a pace all my own. Things don't wear out and I don't get worn down. People are kind. They do what they say they are going to do and are only grumpy enough to keep things interesting. Goodness dots the landscape like trees in bloom. Peace hovers like the best poofy clouds. And the soundtrack is simple and sweet, crescendoing with lingering laughter over all the inside jokes that a big family with so many big personalities effortlessly produces.

I like this place.

I don't want to just vacation here. I want to live here.

And I suspect you have a version of this kind of story you like to tell yourself as well.

We don't just want to read the end of our story and feel good about it. We want to take the pen and write it ourselves. We feel very certain how things should turn out. But we live in the uncertainty of neither being able to predict nor control the outcome.

Humans are very attached to outcomes. We say we trust God but behind the scenes we work our fingers to the bone and our emotions into a tangled fray trying to control our outcomes. We praise God when our normal looks like what we thought it would. We question God when it doesn't. And walk away from Him when we have a sinking suspicion that God is the one who set fire to the hope that was holding us together.

Even the most grounded people can feel hijacked by the winds of unpredictable change. We feel weighed down by grief while at the same time unable to get our bearings as the weightless ashes of all we thought would be fly away.

I've never seen ashes able to control where the winds of change take them.

At least these tissue-thin pieces of debris don't expect to be able to control where they go and how they land.

I've yet to meet a human who can remain so unattached to outcomes.

We motivate ourselves to get through the bad of today by playing a mental movie of the good that will surely come tomorrow. And if not tomorrow, soon. Very soon.

And this good that comes will be such a glorious outcome that we will exhale all the anxiety and finally say, "Whew, I can honestly say it was worth it." Cue the redemption song and a small ticker tape parade.

The good outcome will look like we dreamed. It will come as

fast as we hoped it would. And it will make all the wrongs right, right, right. Those who walked faithfully with us during this hard season will feel their investment of time with us and casseroles made for us was a good one. They fulfilled yet another kingdom assignment. Check the list. And now let's all be happy.

Those who shunned you or judged you or, worst of all, somehow used your season of pain against you will see how wrong they were. They will apologize. And they will promise they learned their lesson to never ever treat anyone like that again.

This is the acceptable outcome.

This is how the formula should calculate: hard time plus healing time plus staying faithful to God should equal the exact good outcome we were counting on.

But if you are a human who has been doing the adult thing for more than twenty-four hours, you've probably come to the same stunning revelation as I have. We cannot control our outcomes. We cannot formulate how the promises of God will actually take shape. And we will never be able to demand any of the healing from all the hurt to hurry up.

I ride this struggle bus. But I'm never comfortable with the fact that I can't grab the wheel and drive it back to Normal.

I make such big assumptions of what a good God should do and then find myself epically disappointed when the winds change, the struggle bus takes a sharp turn left, and nothing at all feels right.

This isn't how I pictured my life right now.

And this probably isn't exactly how you thought things would look in your life right now either.

I'm not telling you anything new. I'm just giving voice to thoughts you've already had but maybe didn't know how to verbalize.

But, here's the hope.

Though we can't predict or control or demand the outcome of our circumstances, we can know with great certainty we will be okay. Better than okay. Better than normal. We will be victorious because Jesus is victorious (1 Corinthians 15:57). And victorious people were never meant to settle for normal.

Through these pages I'm going to help you find a soft place to land in the story God Himself is perfectly orchestrating with our good in mind. Some will live their whole lives missing the chance to see all the good God has placed around them just for them. Partly because the hard stuff has demanded so much of their attention. And the seeming permanence of some of the heartbreak has stolen their affection for life.

But what if the victory is only in part how things turn out? What if a bigger part of being victorious is how well we live today? This hour. This minute.

You are about to have a completely different experience with this thing called life. Together we will find a way to tie our hope not to the specific outcomes we thought were the only way back to normal, but rather to the very heart of God. The Author of the story your heart could never conceive but begs to live with every thumping beat. There is more to all of this than you know.

And I can't wait to watch it unfold in your life and mine.

GOING *to the* WELL

To help us on this journey as we empty ourselves of the misconceptions we have of the way life should be, I've written a section called "Going to the Well" at the end of each chapter. It's a recap of all we are learning, so we don't forget the good stuff along the way. When we empty ourselves of our misplaced hopes and limited perspectives, we have to fill ourselves up with something. So we will learn to identify our empty spaces, our thirst, and fill that void with the living water of God's truth. His Word is tailor-made to transform the hurting human heart.

Each "Going to the Well" will include statements to cling to, scriptures to soak in, questions to think on, and a prayer.

GOING *to the* WELL

Though we can't predict or control or demand the outcome of our circumstances, we can know with great certainty we will be okay.

REMEMBER (STATEMENTS TO CLING TO):

- We live in the uncertainty of neither being able to predict nor control the outcome.
- Even the most grounded people can feel hijacked by the winds of unpredictable change.
- We will be victorious because Jesus is victorious. And victorious people were never meant to settle for normal.
- What if the victory is only in part how things turn out? What if a bigger part of being victorious is how well we live today?

RECEIVE (SCRIPTURES TO SOAK IN):

But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 15:57)

REFLECT (QUESTIONS TO THINK ON):

- What plans or thoughts have you had about how your life should turn out?
- How do you handle not being able to control the outcome?
- In what ways do you feel you're attached to the outcome more than trusting God in the process?

Father,

I admit that so often I have held tightly to my own plans and to the outcomes that I think should come to pass. But I know the story You're writing for me is so much better than any story I could ever write for myself. Help me to cling to this truth when my circumstances are uncertain and unpredictable. I declare my trust in You above it all.

In Jesus' name, amen.

BETWEEN
GARDEN

EN TWO NS

Chapter 1

BETWEEN TWO GARDENS



My hands were shaking as I dialed a number I'd called hundreds, if not thousands, of times before. It was 5:34 a.m. I knew the minute my friend picked up the call, the horror of what I'd just discovered would be real. I didn't want it to be real. And maybe if I kept it to myself, I could deny the hurt that was threatening to swallow me whole.

But pretending away reality never makes things better. It just causes you to implode on the inside while smiling on the outside. That's no way to live.

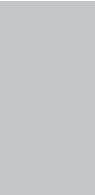
Sometimes to get your life back, you have to face the death of what you thought your life would look like.

I was staring that kind of death in the face when I heard my friend whisper a sleepy but slightly panicked, "Hello? Lysa? Are you okay?"

I most definitely was not.

And I wouldn't feel okay for a very long time. The feelings of safety and security in my marriage that I'd treasured for more than two decades were suddenly ripped away, leaving my heart raw and my soul trembling.

Even now, more than two years after the fact, I still struggle with the distance between what I thought would be and what is. I



Sometimes to get your life back, you have to face the death of what you thought your life would look like.

have days so far from okay I want to send a text message to that missing good feeling and demand its return.

But this isn't something isolated to the white brick house that sits at the end of

my driveway. This thought gets tangled around you too. It comes in like a whisper through the smaller disappointments. A bad haircut. An overflowing dishwasher. A burned dinner. A child who

won't listen today. A scale that keeps going up and a bank account that keeps going down.

Then the whisper graduates into a louder voice with the friend who goes silent for a while. The job you didn't get. The harsh words spoken to you by someone you're desperate to hear some encouragement from. That underlying sense that your marriage has grown cold while your conversations are constantly heated. The lonely feeling you didn't think you'd have at this stage of life.

Then the disappointment roars with earth-shattering thunder with a call from the doctor and a diagnosis that flips life upside down. The discovered affair. The hidden addictions. The child you don't even know anymore. The fire. The bankruptcy. The breakup. The death so unexpected you keep calling their number just hoping this is all a bad dream and surely they'll answer this time.

I don't know when these disappointments, big and small, are coming my way. They just show up. An unexpected guest that I don't know what to do with.

This guest of disappointment exhausts me.

But I don't have to tell you that.

It frustrates and exhausts you too.

Life isn't turning out the way we thought it would.

Disappointment. Whether you've used that word or not, it's there. And I want to wrap a little vocabulary around the feelings that are affecting us more than we realize or dare to verbalize.

It's that feeling things should be better than they are. People should be better than they are. Circumstances should be better than they are. Finances should be better than they are. Relationships should be better than they are.

And you know what? You're right. Everything should be better than it is. It's no wonder that I'm exhausted and that you are too.

Stay with me here, and let me unpack something that Satan has viciously fought to keep us from knowing.

The disappointment that is exhausting and frustrating you? It holds the potential for so much good. But we'll only see it as good if we trust the heart of the Giver.

You see, disappointment can be a gift from God that feels nothing like a gift at all. It's unexpectedly sharp, and the Giver can seem almost cruel as we watch someone unwrap it. Their fingers will bleed. They will feel tricked and so very tempted to stop trusting that anything good can be found within. They will most certainly question the One who allowed it to come their way.

I've done all those things. I certainly threw out many deep, sob-filled questions about how God could allow this when I called my friend at 5:34 a.m.

But disappointment isn't proof that God is withholding good things from us. Sometimes it's His way of leading us Home. But to see this and properly understand what's really going on, we must take a step back and view it in the context of God's epic love story. The one in which He rescues and reconciles humanity to Himself.

So, let's lay down our questions about why these things are happening for just a bit. We'll pick them back up after we are better equipped with truths through which we can process them. And let's open up God's answers, God's ways, God's Word. I promise you won't find flimsy bumper sticker quotes that never help and often hurt. Together we are going to find a real help and a true hope and a God who will hold us safe through it all. Let's start at the very beginning.

Genesis tells us that the human heart was created in the perfection of the garden of Eden.

Can you imagine what the world looked like when God first

Disappointment

isn't proof that God

is withholding good

things from us.

Sometimes it's His way

of leading us Home.

created it? When He said it was all good. Very good. And it was all perfect.

Perfection's symphony filled the atmosphere. Everything ebbed and flowed in complete harmony. It sang with the richest tones. And danced with ridiculous precision. There was nothing that didn't look right or feel right. It was beautiful and peaceful and fulfilling. There was perfect peace in relationships. Adam and Eve were so beautifully connected to each other, and they lived in the perfect presence of God. It was paradise with unique intimacy where God would interact in direct relationship with Adam and Eve. There was perfect provision and perfect fulfillment of their purpose. There was no sadness or confusion or injustice. There was no disease or divorce or depression or death. There were no misaligned motives, no manipulations, no malicious intentions.

It was everything you could ever dream up and then so much more than that.

So the human heart was created in the context of the perfection of the garden of Eden. But we don't live there now.

This is why our instincts keep firing off the lie that perfection is possible. We have pictures of perfection etched into the very DNA of our souls.

We chase it. We angle our cameras trying to catch it. We take twenty shots in hopes of finding it. And then even our good photos have to be color corrected, filtered, and cropped.

We do our very best to make others think this posted picture is the real deal. But we all know the truth. We all see the charade. We all know the emperor is naked. But there we are, clapping on the sidelines, following along, playing the game. Trying to believe that maybe, just maybe, if we get close to something that looks like perfection it will help us snag a little of its shine for ourselves.

But we know even the shiniest of things is headed in the direction of becoming dull. New will always eventually become old. Followers unfollow. People who lift us up will let us down. The most tightly knit aspects of life snag, unravel, and disintegrate before our very eyes.

And so we are epically disappointed.

But we aren't talking about it.

We don't even feel permission to do so or we just don't know how to process our disappointments. Especially not in Bible study or Sunday church. Because everyone says, "Be grateful and positive, and let your faith boss your feelings around."

And I do believe we need to be grateful and positive and let our faith boss our feelings around. But I also think there's a dangerous aspect to staying quiet and pretending we don't get exhausted by our disappointments.

In the quiet, unexpressed, unwrestled-through disappointments, Satan is handcrafting his most damning weapons against us and those we love. It's his subtle seduction to get us alone with our thoughts so he can slip in whispers that will develop our disappointments into destructive choices.

If the enemy can isolate us,

If the enemy can isolate us, he
can influence us.

he can influence us.

And his favorite entry point of all is through our disappointments. The enemy comes in as a whisper, lingers like a gentle breeze, and builds like a storm you don't even see coming. But eventually his insatiable appetite to destroy will unleash the tornado of destruction he planned all along. He doesn't whisper to our disappointed places to coddle us. He wants to crush us.

And counselors everywhere are telling brokenhearted people sitting on tear-soaked couches that one of the reasons their

relationships failed is because of conversations they needed to have but never did.

If we don't open up a way to process our disappointments, we'll be tempted to let Satan rewrite God's love story as a negative narrative, leaving us more than slightly suspicious of our Creator. Why would He create our hearts in the perfection of the garden of Eden knowing that, because of our eventual sin, we wouldn't live there?

I mean, once Adam and Eve sinned, couldn't God strip the awareness and craving for perfection out of their hearts before He banished them from the garden? Yes, He certainly could have done that. But to strip out the cause of our disappointment would also rob us of the glorious hope of where we are headed.

Remember, this is a love story. And we will never appreciate or even desire the hope of our True Love if lesser loves don't disappoint. The piercing angst of disappointment in everything on this side of eternity creates a discontent with this world and pushes us to long for God Himself—and for the place where we will finally walk in the garden with Him again. Where we will finally have peace and security and eyes that no longer leak tears . . . and hearts that are no longer broken.

The Bible begins with the book of Genesis, set in the first garden of Eden. But never forget, it ends with Eden restored in the last chapters of Revelation, the last book.

“Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” (Revelation 21:3–5)



Notice all the feeling words used to describe the world we currently inhabit: *mourning*, *crying*, and *pain*. Utter disappointment often taps the place of deep tears. As we talked about earlier, everything on this side of eternity is in a state of decay. This is simply the natural result of sin entering the equation. Bright days become dark nights. The laughter of living will be eclipsed by the tears of dying. The excitement of this moment is torn away by the disappointment of the next moment. This constant threat to our deep feelings ushers in depression, anxiety, callousness, and, quite honestly, a skepticism about the goodness of God.

Unless.

We see that all those harsh realities aren't the end, but rather a temporary middle space. Not the place where we are meant to wallow and dwell. Rather the place through which we will have to learn to wrestle well. I need this wrestling. I have honest feelings where I want to throw my hands up in utter frustration and yell about the unfairness of it all. To deny my feelings any voice is to rob me of being human. But to let my feelings be the only voice will rob my soul of healing perspectives with which God wants to comfort me and carry me forward. My feelings and my faith will almost certainly come into conflict with each other. My feelings see rotten situations as absolutely unnecessary hurt that stinks. My soul sees it as fertilizer for a better future. Both these perspectives are real. And they yank me in different directions with never-ending wrestling. To wrestle well means acknowledging my feelings but moving forward, letting my faith lead the way.

God knows before we eternally dwell we will have to learn how to wrestle well. Do you see the encouragement God is giving us in the passage from Revelation 21 to help us do this when our feelings beg us to doubt our faith? He will stop the continuum of decay and death and utter disappointment. He will make everything new!

In this restored garden of Eden the curse will be lifted and perfection will greet us like a long-lost friend. There will be no gap between our expectations and experiences. They will be one and the same. We won't be hurt. We won't live hurt. We won't be disappointed, and we won't live disappointed. Not in people. Not in ourselves. Not in God. Our feelings and faith will nod in agreement. We will return to a purity of emotion where we can experience the best of our hearts working in tandem with the absolutes of truth.

We won't need to wrestle well between our feelings and our faith in the new Eden, because there will be no competing narrative about God's nature. There will be no corruption of God's nurture. There will be no contrary notions about why God allows things to happen. And there will be no gnawing fear that things might not turn out okay.

We won't need to wrestle well, because we will *be* well. Whole. Complete. Assured. Secure. Certain. Victorious. And brought full circle in our understanding of truth.

But, as I said at the very beginning of our discussion here, we don't live in the perfection of Eden or the yet-to-come Eden restored. Therefore, today we must understand our need to wrestle well in this space between two gardens. And we must learn to live and love in the imperfect rhythms of our clunky humanity, trying to stay on beat within a symphony of divinity.

We will get the words to the song wrong sometimes.

We will go off-key and offbeat.

We will go sharp, and we will fall flat.

But if God's symphony continues to play loud and strong as the ultimate soundtrack of our lives, we will sense how to get back

on track. We will feel how to get back in rhythm. We will hear how to get back in tune.

It's just like when I sing along in my car with a well-produced song. With that soundtrack blaring along with me, I sound amazing. But it's not because I'm suddenly a master musician. It's because the master musician is louder than me, guiding me, holding me in key and on beat. I wrestle well with the song, because I'm not left on my own to hold it all together.

But heaven help us if I turn the radio down and pick up a microphone to sing it all by myself.

I won't wrestle well. I will wrangle what was beautiful music into an unrecognizable tangle of unpleasant sounds. I will add to the chaotic noise of this world, but I'll miss the glorious soundtrack meant to remind me of the epic love story I'm destined to live with the Great Lover of my soul.

So, that's the point of this book. Plain and simple. I want to learn to wrestle well in this life between two gardens. And I want to open the gift of disappointment and release the atmosphere of hope contained within. I'm so thankful we get to do this together.

GOING *to the* WELL

The human heart was created in the context of the perfection of the garden of Eden. But we don't live there now.

REMEMBER:

- Sometimes to get your life back, you have to face the death of what you thought your life would look like.
- Disappointment is that feeling things should be better than they are.
- Disappointment isn't proof that God is withholding good things from us. Sometimes it's His way of leading us Home.
- If the enemy can isolate us, he can influence us.
- We will never appreciate or even desire the hope of our True Love if lesser loves don't disappoint.
- God knows before we eternally dwell we will have to learn how to wrestle well.
- In the new Eden we won't need to wrestle well, because we will *be* well.

RECEIVE:

“Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” (Revelation 21:3–5)

REFLECT:

- What disappointments are you currently facing?
- Are there any long-standing untruths you’ve been believing about your disappointments?
- As you look back and consider the past, what gifts have come out of your disappointments?
- In what ways can you learn to wrestle well in the midst of your right-now life?
- How does this teaching on the garden of Eden help you have a better understanding of what you’re going through?

Father,

Living in the messy middle between two gardens is so trying at times. Teach me to wrestle well between my faith and my feelings when life disappoints in ways I never imagined. My disappointments don’t feel like a gift at all, but I’m going to trust You—the Giver of good gifts. Release an atmosphere of hope in my right-now life, I pray.

In Jesus’ name, amen.

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Chapter 2

D U S T



I grabbed my chest while tears slipped down my cheeks in an unending stream. The pain in my heart wasn't physical. But the stabbing emotional hurt was so intense I could hardly breathe. My hands were shaking. My eyes were wide with fear. My mouth felt paralyzed.

My life had gone from feeling full and whole to being obliterated beyond recognition.

I'd been hurt plenty of times in my life. But nothing like this.

After twenty-five years of marriage partnership, I had no choice but to tell my husband, "I love you. And I can forgive you. But I cannot share you."

Never had I felt more shattered and alone. And then, adding more salt to the wound, people started talking. I'd kept this hell I was walking through private, telling only a few friends and counselors. They were tender and helped me in ways I'll never be able to repay. There are some really good people on this earth. But others weren't so understanding or compassionate. And now realities and rumors were crushing me. I was experiencing the death of my "normal life." But people don't have funerals for "normal." I was dealing with extreme grief from losing the person I loved the very most in this world. But instead of visiting a gravesite and mourning a death, I was visiting the rumor mill and being devastated by all the theories and opinions. My pillow was soaked with tears of which only I knew the real source. Not only was I dealing with deep personal pain, but I was experiencing firsthand the way broken people sometimes contribute to the brokenness of others.

We live in a broken world where broken things happen. So it's not surprising that things get broken in our lives as well. But what about those times when things aren't just broken but shattered beyond repair? Shattered to the point of dust. At least when things are broken there's some hope you can glue the pieces back together.

But what if there aren't even pieces to pick up in front of you? You can't glue dust.

It's hard to hold dust. What was once something so very precious is now reduced to nothing but weightless powder even the slightest wind could carry away. We feel desperately hopeless. Dust begs us to believe the promises of God no longer apply to us. That the reach of God falls just short of where we are. And that the hope of God has been snuffed out by the consuming darkness all around us.

We want God to fix it all. Edit this story so it has a different ending. Repair this heartbreaking reality.

But what if fixing, editing, and repairing isn't at all what God has in mind for us in this shattering?

What if, this time, God desires to make something completely brand-new? Right now. On this side of eternity. No matter how shattered our circumstances may seem.

Dust is the exact ingredient God loves to use.

We think the shattering in our lives could not possibly be for any good. But what if shattering is the only way to get dust back to its basic form so that something new can be made? We can see dust as a result of an unfair breaking. Or we can see dust as a crucial ingredient.

Think about a plain piece of ice. If the ice stays in a cube, it will always be just a square of ice. But if the ice melts it can be poured into a beautiful form to reshape it when frozen again. Dust is much the same; it's the basic ingredient with such great potential for new life.

Of all the things God could have used to make man, He chose to use dust. "Then the LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being" (Genesis 2:7).

Jesus used the dust of the ground to restore a man's sight. Jesus said, "'While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.' After saying this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes" (John 9:5–6). And after the man washed in the pool of Siloam, he went home seeing.

And, when mixed with water, dust becomes clay. Clay, when placed in the potter's hands, can be formed into anything the potter dreams up!

Yet You, LORD, are our Father.

We are the clay, you are the potter;
we are all the work of your hand.

(ISAIAH 64:8)

"Can I not do with you, Israel, as this potter does?" declares the LORD. "Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, Israel." (Jeremiah 18:6)

Dust doesn't have to signify the end. Dust is often what must be present for the new to begin.

Think about how much of an end it feels like when someone dies. No matter how well we take care of ourselves and those we love, no matter how good we are, no matter how mature in the faith we become, we will not escape the reality that death is certain and our lives will be reduced to dust. Genesis 3:19 tells us that from dust we came and to dust we shall return. That can certainly make us step back and wonder, *What is the point of all this?* In the end, we all die, decay, and decompose into dust. But for those who believe in Jesus Christ as the Lord of their lives, this isn't the end but the beginning of a transformation we all long to experience. Physical death is the only way to start the process of receiving our

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heavenly bodies that will never wear out, decay in any way, or ever be reduced to dust.

For we know that when this earthly tent we live in is taken down (that is, when we die and leave this earthly body), we will have a house in heaven, an eternal body made for us by God himself and not by human hands. We grow weary in our present bodies, and we long to put on our heavenly bodies like new clothing. For we will put on heavenly bodies; we will not be spirits without bodies. While we live in these earthly bodies, we groan and sigh, but it's not that we want to die and get rid of these bodies that clothe us. Rather, we want to put on our new bodies so that these dying bodies will be swallowed up by life. God himself has prepared us for this, and as a guarantee he has given us his Holy Spirit. (2 Corinthians 5:1–5 NLT)

Remember God's declaration in Revelation 21:5 about Eden restored? "*I am making everything new!*" Death is but a passage-way at God's designated time for us to finally escape this broken world full of imperfections and be welcomed to the Home we've been longing for our entire lives. We don't determine when this is, but we don't have to fear death as an end. It's another beginning.

Yes, in the restored Eden there will be no more death. No more crying. No more broken hearts or broken circumstances. No more shattered realities. No more dust. What a redeeming thought: that the shattering of our physical bodies leads us to God's renewal, where we will experience no more shattering, physical or otherwise.

When I wrote my last book, *Uninvited*, I felt I had wisdom to share on the very painful subject of rejection. God had helped me make so much progress with the painful rejections of my past that I felt certain I could help others. I pictured my reader sitting

knee-deep in rejection's grief, feeling less alone because she could sense me there with her. She could rely on the fact that my teachings weren't good-sounding theories but hard-fought-for truths. She would know I'd felt the depth of her pain, so she could trust there was hope for her healing as well.

I wrote the book.

I turned it over to the editors.

I checked that assignment off my list.

Life moved on.

And then I found out about my husband's affair. Life as I knew it stopped. It turned upside down. All the best parts were shaken loose. The more I tried to grab hold of what was falling down around me, the more I realized my utter lack of control.

As I described at the beginning of this chapter, I'd been hurt plenty of times in my life, but nothing like this.

Things crashed. Things broke beyond repair. Things went from being whole to being reduced to dust. I crawled into bed. I willed the world to stop spinning. I wanted everything to pause and stop hurting me. But nothing did.

And that's one of the most devastating realities of dust times in our lives. We need the world to stop spinning for a while. We need things to pause. We need the celebrations to cease long enough to let us work through our grief. We need people with expectations to stop e-mailing us. We need our schedules to clear.

But my calendar didn't get that memo. It didn't magically erase all the things I'd agreed to do when life felt predictable and whole.

Including this book I'd written on rejection. It was due to be released in six months. But there was one final step required: I had to read through the entire manuscript one last time.

I remember getting the final page proofs of the book in the mail. They came to my house, delivered by a truck that rumbled and rushed down my long gravel driveway. The UPS man dropped the package at my front door. He rang the doorbell. He hopped back in his truck. And then he was off to his next delivery.

To that delivery man it was just another day.

Little did he know he was delivering life back into a soul hanging on by a thread.

I opened the envelope, and there it was—my book to help the world deal with the very feelings now pulsing in my heart. *Why, God, would You let me write this book when You knew I was clueless about the devastation marching in my direction? I'm the biggest fool for picking this topic. After all, I should have known I'd be attacked in the very area I was writing about. And You could have stopped me, God. You could have stopped this whole thing.*

I felt so very empty as I spread the pages across the rumpled covers of my bed.

I had nothing to give anyone. And yet, I was about to stand before the tempest-tossed world like the Statue of Liberty promising my own version of a fresh start: “Give me your broken hearts, promises not kept by others, and your fears tangled with tears yearning to breathe free. I will be a light by which you can find God’s hope past the heartbreak of rejection.”

When I’d first written *Uninvited*, I had been excited about talking to others about healing from the rejections of my past. But how in the world could I possibly talk about rejection when I was feeling so devastated by such a fresh wound?

I stared at the typed-out words strung together page after page.

I wanted it all to go away.

The book.

The rejection.

The timing of it all.

Yes, especially the timing. It seemed like such a cruel twist of irony.

And what was so very crazy is that in the months leading up to this devastation, the one thing I kept hearing God say to me was, “Trust my timing.”

But it was the timing that seemed so very confusing. It was the timing that fed this intense awareness that no matter how well I plan things, I can’t control them. No matter how well I think I know the people in my life, I can’t control them. No matter how well I follow the rules, do what’s right, and seek to obey God with my whole heart, I can’t control my life. I can’t control God.

It’s hard to type those words.

Because I don’t want to control God.

Until I do.

When His timing seems questionable, His lack of intervention seems hurtful, and His promises seem doubtful, I get afraid. I get confused. And left alone with those feelings, I can’t help but feel disappointed that God isn’t doing what I assume a good God should do.

I want to assume that God would have seen the rejection coming my way and stopped me from writing on that topic. Or better yet, I want to assume God would have intervened and prevented this rejection from happening in the first place. I want to assume that His promise to never leave me or forsake me means that He’s operating like a supernatural shield around me, preventing horrific things from happening to me and those I love.

I want to assume that my definition of best should be God’s definition of best. And that my definition of good should be God’s definition of good.

I want to write the story of my life according to all my assumptions.

Therefore, it's impossible to escape the truth that I don't want to relinquish control to God. I want to take control from God.

And then I make the most dangerous assumption of all: I could surely do all of this better than God.

Of course, I don't ever verbalize any of that. But there it is. I picture Satan standing there, luring me in. He has *control* written on one of his hands and *disappointment* on the other. He holds out control and says, "Take control of your own life. Stop following God's rules. When you're in control you'll be able to get everything you've ever felt denied by God." And with his other hand he starts pointing to all the many disappointments of my life and questions, "Why would God keep good things from you? He's such a restrictive God. His rules really shouldn't apply to your situation. You actually know better."

Disappointment happens every time I come face-to-face with my absolute inability to control people, circumstances, and timing. If I could control all these things, I'd arrange my own version of perfection. I'd be the boss of my life and those in my life.

And I'd do exactly what Adam and Eve did. I'd have a love affair with my own desires. I'd sell my soul for a lie laced with poison.

The very things I assume would give me a better life are the exact things that would eventually kill me.

Look at the dangerous progression that happened with Eve:

In Genesis 2:16, God's first three words to Adam when telling him the rule of not eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil were, "You are free." God gave him a message of freedom with one restriction for his protection.

But when the serpent quoted this rule to Eve, he changed God's language of freedom to complete restriction with no freedom at

all. When quoting God, the serpent's first three words were, "You must not" (Genesis 3:1). And then he finished by exaggerating the rule to say Adam and Eve must not eat from *any* tree in the garden.

Eve heard the mistake and corrected the serpent, but then added her own restriction that was a complete misquote of God's rule: "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die'" (Genesis 3:2–3).

God never said anything about touching the fruit. And He certainly didn't say if they touched it they would die.

She assumed this.

Please see how dangerous this assumption was. She got alone with her own thoughts and assumptions. And it led her to doubt God. And take control to get what she wanted. What she thought was best.

And do you see how the serpent played into this? "You will not certainly die . . . For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:4–5).

In other words, "Eve, it's not a bad thing to want to be like God, is it? Why would God keep this from you?"

I don't want to assign her a thought that we can't see verified in Scripture, but her disobedience seems to point to the same struggle I have when I don't like God's plan: *surely I could do this better than God*.

Genesis 3:6 says, "When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some . . ."

Don't miss this. Before she ate it, she took it. She touched it, and she didn't die.

Then she ate it. And gave some to Adam, who was with her and who also saw that Eve didn't die when she touched it, so he ate some. And sin entered in.

Do you see how dangerous that misquote, that misunderstanding of God's instruction, was? Eve's assumption that she would die when she touched the fruit seemed to prove God wrong. And it reinforced the lie of the serpent that she could be like God. She didn't die. So, maybe she did know better. This very dangerous perception could have helped her justify the next step of eating the fruit. This is the progression of sin. And this wasn't just a personal tragedy for Eve and Adam. It ushered in a horrific reality for all of humanity.

Perfection ended.

Curses began.

Consequences were unleashed.

And they were banished from the garden.

Spiritual death was immediate.

Physical death was imminent.

From dust they came, and now to dust they would return.

But here's the good news: even when we follow in Eve's footsteps, when we try to take control and make assumptions and misunderstand God on every level, He still has a plan. A good plan. A plan to make something from dust.

And eventually we will understand that God hasn't denied us the best. He's offering us the very best by offering Himself. He is our only source of perfection on this side of eternity. And He sees a perfect plan for our dust.

We may be afraid of all the disappointment of this broken world. But God isn't afraid. He's aware. So very aware of His

ultimate plans and purposes. It isn't to keep us from getting shattered. It's to keep our souls connected, so deeply connected to Himself.

And let's be honest, if we weren't ever disappointed, we'd settle for the shallow pleasures of this world rather than addressing the spiritual desperation of our souls. We don't think about fixing things until we realize they are broken. And even then we don't call in the experts until we surrender to the realization we cannot fix things on our own. If our souls never ached with disappointments and disillusionments, we'd never fully admit and submit to our need for God. If we weren't ever shattered we'd never know the glorious touch of the Potter making something glorious out of dust, out of us.



It took me forever to focus enough to read the first couple of paragraphs of *Uninvited*. And then the first couple of pages turned into the first couple of chapters. Tears slid down my face and dripped onto my shirt. I pressed the loose pages into my chest.

God had given me the book last year I'd be so desperate to read this year.

That reader I'd imagined? She was me.

Maybe the timing and the subject matter of my book wasn't a cruel twist of irony.

Maybe it was just right. For me and my situation. And for everyone else who would soon encounter *Uninvited*.

And maybe the freshness of my own rejection would make the message I'd soon be delivering that much more authentic. I wouldn't be teaching only from past experiences but from an even deeper awareness of just how painful the healing process can be.

I wouldn't have written my story this way. I would have avoided anything that looks like dust. I think we all would.

Let's revisit that paragraph I wrote earlier.

When His timing seems questionable, His lack of intervention seems hurtful, and His promises seem doubtful, I get afraid. I get confused. And left alone with those feelings, I can't help but feel disappointed that God isn't doing what I assume a good God should do.

There isn't any timing that seems like the right timing to be shattered into dust.

There isn't any plan God could present where I would willingly agree to be broken into unglueable pieces.

I just wouldn't.

And what a tragedy that would be. My controlling things would prevent the dust required for God to make the new He desperately desires for me. And isn't that what all His promises hinge on? Old becoming new. Dead things coming to life. Good from evil. Darkness turning to light.

If I want His promises, I

have to trust His process.

If I want His promises, I have to

trust His process.

I have to trust that first comes the dust, and then comes the making of something even better with us. God isn't ever going to forsake you, but He will go to great lengths to remake you.

What if disappointment is really the exact appointment your soul needs to radically encounter God?

GOING *to the* WELL

Dust doesn't have to signify the end. Dust is often what must be present for the new to begin.

REMEMBER:

- We live in a broken world where broken things happen.
- Dust is the exact ingredient God loves to use.
- God speaks in a language of freedom; Satan speaks in a language of restriction.
- God is our only source of perfection on this side of eternity. And He sees a perfect plan for our dust.
- If I want His promises, I have to trust His process.
- God isn't ever going to forsake you, but He will go to great lengths to remake you.
- What if disappointment is really the exact appointment your soul needs to radically encounter God?

RECEIVE:

Yet You, LORD, are our Father.
We are the clay, you are the potter;
we are all the work of your hand.
(Isaiah 64:8)

Also read:

Genesis 2–3
Jeremiah 18:6
John 9:5–6
2 Corinthians 5:1–5
Revelation 21:5

REFLECT:

- When has your life felt shattered to the point of dust?
- How do you relate to the story of Adam and Eve's disobedience?
- Where are you hoping for a new beginning?
- In what ways are you willing to trust God's process for your life?

Father,

This world is broken and broken things happen—yes. Even still, I can't help but feel utterly shattered and disillusioned when heartbreak is a part of my story. I don't like this—I don't like dust. But dust is one of Your favorite ingredients to use when making something new, and I believe You are working right now to do this very thing in my life. I know You will never forsake me, but that You will go to great lengths to remake me. Thank You.

In Jesus' name, amen.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Amy Riley Wobser



LYSA TERKEURST is the president of Proverbs 31 Ministries and the #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *Uninvited*, *The Best Yes*, and twenty other books. But to those who know her best she's just a simple girl with a well-worn Bible who proclaims hope in the midst of good times and heart-breaking realities.

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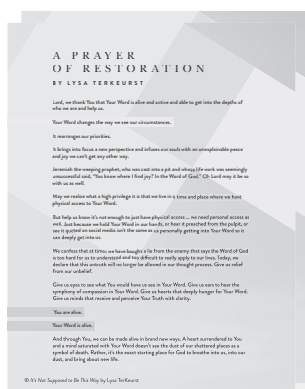
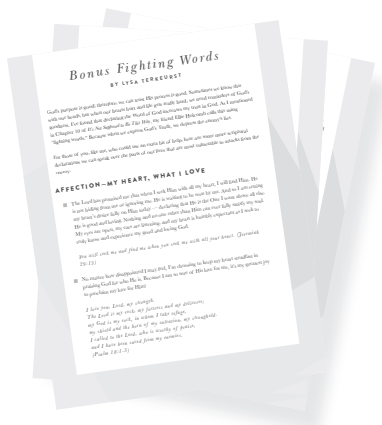
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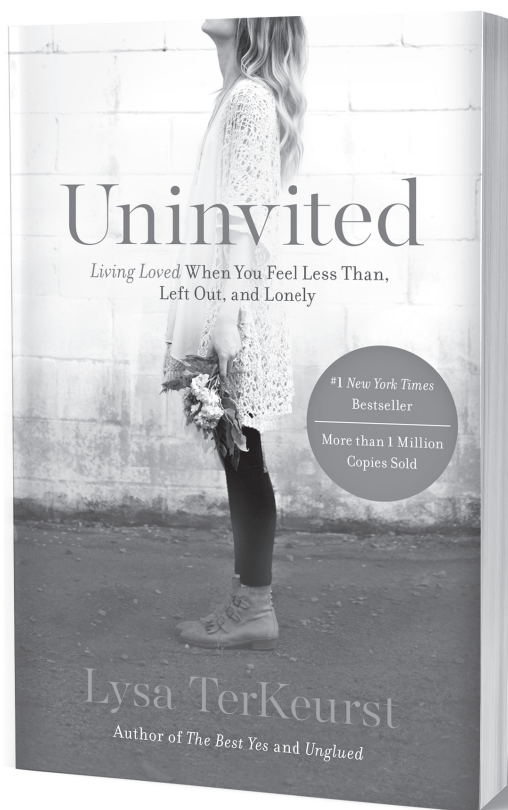
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