

STUDY GUIDE
GROUPS / INDIVIDUALS

SIX SESSIONS

In the Middle *of* the Mess

STRENGTH FOR THIS
BEAUTIFUL, BROKEN LIFE



Sheila Walsh

Bestselling author with more than 5 million books sold

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of the Mess

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Sheila Walsh

With Ashley Wiersma

 ZONDERVAN®



In the Middle of the Mess Study Guide

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Author is represented by the literary agency of Alive Communications, Inc., 7680 Goddard Street, Suite 200, Colorado Springs, CO 80920, www.alivecommunications.com.

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ISBN 978-0-310-08943-8

First Printing September 2017 / Printed in the United States of America

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Session One



Brokenness Is the Beginning

Grace and Radical Acceptance

You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.

JOHN 8:32 ESV

Session Overview

It's there to greet you first thing in the morning, through an unkind word from your spouse or child. It's there again as you merge onto the highway, via the other guy's blaring horn, causing your unwanted swerve. It shows up in your friend's phone call . . . there's an edge there—you can hear it. Things aren't as they should be. News stories shouted at you all day long only confirm what you suspected to be true: *things are not okay in this world*. Life is broken—deeply broken—shattered into a million pieces. The question isn't so much, "Is there brokenness in this world?" for that response would be *yes*. The question is, "What will we do with this brokenness in the world . . . and also, in *me*?"

In this opening session, we'll journey through the Word of God to take a look at both the expected and unexpected nature of this brokenness that so marks our existence. What did God promise would be true of our earthly lives? How did those whose lives are detailed in Scripture move through seasons of trial with wisdom and grace? And, if we believe God truly can bring beauty from ashes, as the prophet Isaiah so boldly declared (see Isaiah 61:3), then how are we to find our way from here to there, from the bleakness and desperation that marks brokenness's beginning to the longed-for victory that we are promised?

Come. Sit with God. Soak in His Word. Let His ages-old perspective and promises sink deep into your sea-tossed soul. There is a marvelous end game to this brokenness that we're just *sure* will do us in. Brokenness is a necessary beginning. This is where our discussion begins.

Opening Thoughts

Take one to two minutes to open your time together with prayer. Then, have each group member answer the following question before watching the video segment:

How have you seen “brokenness” show up in your life? Describe for your group a recent encounter or exchange from which you walked away thinking, *Things here aren’t as they are meant to be.*

Video: Brokenness Is the Beginning (20 MINUTES)

Play the video for Session 1. Use the following prompts to record your thoughts as you watch.

VIDEO NOTES

Secrets don’t keep us safe

God’s rock-solid promise

Six truths

Where true transformation comes from

The great distance between our head and our heart

Imprisoned to be set free

Two benefits to coming to the end of oneself

The usefulness of “radical acceptance”

Everyone who calls on God is saved by God

The one-word prayer “Jesus”

Letter from a devoted daughter

Group Discussion

Spend the balance of your group time answering as many of the following questions as you have time and energy for, being sure to give equal opportunity for each member to share.

1. Briefly review your video notes. Given your present circumstances, what word, phrase, sentiment, or concept feels most relevant to you? Why?

2. Sheila noted the six sessions of this study. Which of the following holds the most promise for you? Which one makes you feel anxious the first time you read it?
 - *Brokenness is the beginning* . . . the truth of our situation, as bleak as that truth may be, can set us free.
 - *Brokenness is hard* . . . even on the darkest night, we never walk the path of grief alone.
 - *Brokenness is loud* . . . even in our noisy world, we can learn to live in the stillness and quietness of God's presence.
 - *Brokenness is to be shared* . . . there is strength to be found in confessing our sins to one another.
 - *Brokenness is the path to healing* . . . when we fix our eyes on God, we live a life of thanksgiving.
 - *Brokenness is temporary* . . . what you are facing right now will pass.

3. In what way can you relate to Sheila's experience of raw emotions resurfacing long after you thought those feelings were dealt with and buried? Why is jagged-edge brokenness so terribly hard to "get over"? Do you believe it's possible to *truly move past* deep pain?
4. What thoughts came to mind when you heard Sheila reference this session's spiritual-discipline focus of *radical acceptance*? What does that practice involve? What would you gain from the practice of radically accepting your present circumstances and pain?
5. Sheila said one of her biggest motivations for putting together the content for this study was to remind people that "even in our brokenness, we can tell the truth . . . we don't have to hide anymore." What do you suppose keeps us from telling our truth? What keeps us hiding from the reality of our lives?
6. What attitudes, actions, or habits might the group practice in order to encourage your honest participation in this six-session experience? What do they need to understand about you in this process?

Closing Prayer

Taking as much time as your group needs, have each member who feels comfortable complete the following prayer prompt as a way to close your discussion:

*God, please let this present brokenness I'm
dealing with be the beginning of . . .*

Between-Sessions Personal Study

Session One



Reflect on the content you've discussed this week by engaging in any or all of the following between-sessions personal studies. The time you invest will be well spent, so let God use it to draw you closer to Him. At your next meeting, share with your group any key points or insights that stood out to you as you spent this time with the Lord.

PART ONE:

The Existence of Brokenness Is Expected

Where does it come from, that immediate regret you feel when you respond too harshly to a loved one or that sorrow over someone being harsh with *you*? Why is it there, that sense of insecurity when it seems everyone else has their lives together, that frustration that things haven't panned out like you thought they would? What do you call that anxiety over not having enough money to cover your obligations, or that fear that your kids aren't turning out right, or the resignation to the fact that three glasses of wine has become part of your nightly routine? The answer to these and a thousand more questions is found in a single word: *brokenness*. Brokenness is a declaration that all is not as it should be in the world, the realization that we indeed have fallen . . . and are having trouble getting back up.

REVISIT YOUR EXPERIENCE

Take a few moments to revisit this week's teaching as it relates to your personal experience.

When you think of the word *brokenness*, what thoughts or images come to mind? What experiences or assumptions influence these associations for you?

As you survey the landscape of your life today, where do you spot brokenness in any of its forms?

What emotions bubble up to the surface of your mind and heart as you focus your attention on these aspects of brokenness you face?

If you were to focus on *one particular aspect of brokenness* for the purposes of this study, what would it be? Select one from the options that follow on the next page, or write in a one-to two-word phrase that describes the brokenness you feel. (You can go back and apply the practices introduced in this guide to additional aspects of brokenness you'd like repaired, but to aid your focus this first time through, consider choosing just one.)

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Abuse | <input type="checkbox"/> Loneliness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Addiction | <input type="checkbox"/> Marital strife/discord |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Anxiety/anxious thoughts | <input type="checkbox"/> Overwhelmed with life |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chronic pain | <input type="checkbox"/> Pain from physical accident |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Debilitating fear | <input type="checkbox"/> Parenting challenges |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Depression | <input type="checkbox"/> Post-traumatic stress |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Distance from loved ones | <input type="checkbox"/> Prodigal child |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Escapist thoughts | <input type="checkbox"/> Sorrow |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family member's pain | <input type="checkbox"/> Spiritual doubts |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Financial debt | <input type="checkbox"/> Substance misuse |
| <input type="checkbox"/> God seems silent | <input type="checkbox"/> Suffering |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Grief over loss | <input type="checkbox"/> Suicidal thoughts |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Grief over world affairs | <input type="checkbox"/> Tragedy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Illness | <input type="checkbox"/> Trauma |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Impact-hungry | <input type="checkbox"/> Uncertainty regarding future |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Job dissatisfaction | <input type="checkbox"/> Unwanted health diagnosis |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Job loss | <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of material resources | |

With this singular aspect of brokenness in mind, use the following prompts to describe the effect it is having on the various parts of your life:

Relational

Emotional

Physical

Psychological

Vocational

Financial

Marital

Spiritual

Other

Does anything shock you about the level of impact your brokenness is having on you? Which aspects have you just “come to expect” as being part of your life here on earth? Note your thoughts in the space below.

*This is one of the sad conditions of life, that experience
is not transmissible. No man will learn from the
suffering of another; he must suffer himself.*

—JAMES H. AUGHEY

RECEIVE GOD'S TRUTH

Read each of the following Scripture passages and reflect on the related questions.

Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin,
and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned—to be sure, sin was
in the world before the law was given, but sin is not charged against anyone's
account where there is no law.

(ROMANS 5:12–13)

Who do you understand the “one man” to be (see also Genesis 3)? How did sin first
enter our world?

What accompanied sin as it came into the picture here on earth?

Who is affected by the “death” that has arrived?

Given that you and everyone around you are alive today, what type of “death” is ushered in through sin?

How does spiritual death lead to a sense that “things are broken” here on earth?

We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way;
and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

(ISAIAH 53:6)

Who is tempted to go his or her own way, according to this verse?

Why is going one’s own way considered going “astray”?

What is the connection between humankind’s tendency to go its own way and the fact that brokenness exists in the world?

“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.

(REVELATION 21:4)

What can you deduce about our present reality, given this picture of glory that John paints in Revelation?

What type of “death” is John speaking of here?

What confidence do you gain from John’s vision of the future for those who are in Christ?

It's okay not to be okay.

—SHEILA WALSH

REORIENT YOUR HABITS AND HEART

As a means for bringing the first theme to life—that of brokenness being an expected part of our experience here on earth—select one or more of the following to practice sometime today:

- Sit with the concept from Isaiah 53:6 about the link between going your own way and the existence of brokenness. What brokenness have you known in your past that could have been averted had you submitted your will and ways to God?
- Write out the word *brokenness* on a sheet of paper. Create an acrostic based on your present challenges, forming a new word with each letter, such as “bleak days” for *b*, “repetition of previous mistakes” for *r*, and so forth. Read your acrostic aloud to yourself as a means of acknowledging the pain you’ve endured.
- Consider how brokenness sounds. What type of music, sound from nature, tone of voice, or other sound characterizes pain, in your view? Spend a few moments silently “playing” that sound in your mind. What emotions does the sound elicit from you?
- What are a few things you expect to transpire in a given week? A regular meeting at work, perhaps, or a child’s school routine? The Tuesday-night neighborhood potluck, weekend worship at church, or book club on Thursday night? Jot down these events that occur each and every week. Now imagine what it would be like to actually slot “face challenges, obstacles, and pain” on your calendar. What would it be like to accept as usual, normal, and expected the brokenness that Scripture says we will undoubtedly endure?
- Go outside and find a few blades of grass, a small pile of leaves, or a stray feather. Toss one of these natural elements into the air and watch it float away in the wind. Thank God that someday, according to Revelation 21, every bit of brokenness we experience will fade, as though carried off by the wind. Imagine the future scene that John painted: no more death, no more crying, no more pain. What do you most look forward to about living in that new reality?

PART TWO:

The Experience of Brokenness Is Unexpected

Even if we embrace the idea that *general* brokenness is to be considered an expected part of life—something that is just part of existing in a fallen world—the *particular brokenness* we face still always seems to catch us off-guard. As Sheila mentioned during this week’s teaching, the death of her mother brought to the surface all of the brokenness and pain she experienced when her dad died more than five decades before.

REVISIT YOUR EXPERIENCE

In general terms, how have you responded to the various troubling situations you’ve faced? On the grid below, note a handful of the biggest trials you’ve endured and your reaction to each.

Trial I Faced	How I Responded

Take another look at the grid above. Which of the situations you noted was most surprising to you? Why?

In what ways did this particular challenge go against how you thought your life would turn out?

Why is it easier to accept the general *idea* of brokenness than to accept the specific ways in which it shows up in our lives?

RECEIVE GOD'S TRUTH

Read each of the following Scripture passages and reflect on the related questions.

Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.

(1 PETER 4:12)

Why is Peter's "encouragement" so difficult to follow about receiving trials without feeling surprised?

Peter acknowledges that our tendency when trials come our way is to act as though "something strange" were happening to us. Based on the information you wrote on page 24, do you tend to receive struggles as what's normal or as something strange?

If a close friend asked for your advice on how to stop pushing against a current trial as though it were “something strange,” what would you say?

What assumptions or attitudes most often get in your *own* way when it comes to living out the advice you would offer your friend?

So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me.

(2 CORINTHIANS 12:7–8 ESV)

What types of challenges do you think this “thorn” of Paul’s might have represented?

Why did God ask Paul to face such an arduous challenge?

Do you think that any of the challenges you’ve faced have been “given to you by God” for a specific purpose? Why or why not?

What does the fact Paul begged God to take away the thorn reveal about Paul's level of expectation regarding that thorn?

How does your own resistance to the struggles you encounter reveal your expectations of life? If you had to name these expectations, what words would you use? Expectations of comfort, perhaps? Or of good health? Of financial resourcefulness? Of life-giving relationships? Of grateful children? Of peace?

REORIENT YOUR HABITS AND HEART

To help activate the theme of receiving instead of resisting struggles that come your way, select one or more of the following to practice sometime today:

- Carve out two or three minutes when you can sit still in a quiet spot, alone. With your life's most significant struggle in mind, shift your posture so that your arms are outstretched and your hands are upturned to heaven. Imagine yourself physically "receiving" the struggle into your hands, sensing the weight of it, the gravity of it, the force. Consider how it feels to draw it near instead of pushing it away—what emotions rise to the surface for you? What images does the burden bring forth? Sit with this present reality for a few moments. Ask Christ to be with you in the middle of the mess before leaving your seat and reentering your day.
- Spend some time journaling about your present pain. What expectations of your life does this challenge violate? What aspects of it feel totally unjust? In what ways does it feel like a "thorn" in your flesh?
- Read the full text of 1 Peter 4, noting the evidences of brokenness you find there as well as the stated purpose for the existence of pain. What encouragement can you take from Peter's words regarding the universal nature of pain?

PART THREE:

We Can Look to Jesus in Our Brokenness

For the Christ follower, the answer to all difficult and heartbreaking questions lies in the person of Jesus—His flawless nature, His boundless wisdom, and the faithful example He set. So, in each session, you will find an invitation to look to and learn from Him.

Recall that it wasn't until Sheila had exhausted every other option she could find and turned intentionally toward Jesus—"not just parts of me," she wrote, but "all of me, fully and faithfully"—that she could begin to find relief from the incredible pain she bore. This is the "beginning" we spoke of at the start of this session, the beginning that brokenness imparts. It's the beginning of a journey toward deeper intimacy with Jesus, an intimacy that we can know no other way.

What Jesus will show in this segment is that in order to knit ourselves to the heart of the Father, we must accept the pain the Father allows. "Radical acceptance," as behavioral therapists have called it, is the act of acknowledging not what we *wish* to be but rather what *actually is*.

REVISIT YOUR EXPERIENCE

What do you imagine "radical acceptance" would involve as it relates to your present round of suffering or challenges? Check the following response that best fits your definition:

- ☐ Letting the one who offended me off the hook
- ☐ Raising the white flag of surrender
- ☐ Pretending that nothing is wrong and moving on
- ☐ Changing my self-talk to something a little more positive
- ☐ Acknowledging the pain that I feel is present, it is real, and it really hurts

As it turns out, practicing "radical acceptance" has nothing to do with sticking your head in the sand, acting like nothing is the matter, giving up altogether, or simply altering what you say to yourself. Radical acceptance, as Sheila clarified in

the video, is simply *seeing your suffering and calling it what it is*, so you consider how you'd like it to change.

*Radical acceptance doesn't mean that we approve of
our brokenness. It simply means that we see it.
We quit stuffing it all the way down.*

—SHEILA WALSH

What alternatives to radical acceptance have you practiced along the way—attempts to *not see* and *not name* the pain you feel? Denial, perhaps? Numbing yourself with substances or distractions? Blaming the one who hurt you? Refusing to put words to your pain? Note your thoughts in the space below before moving on.

How helpful have those alternatives been to you in allowing you to heal from the pain you feel? Explain.

What fears, insecurities, or lack of knowledge have kept you from pursuing radical acceptance of your particular brokenness as a path toward wholeness, holiness, and grace?

What do you fear being asked to relinquish should you choose to follow this “radical acceptance” course of action? Control? Pride? Independence from God? Something else?

RECEIVE GOD’S TRUTH

The most powerful example of a person radically accepting suffering and pain occurred in the moments before the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. You likely know this turn of events by heart. The Feast of the Unleavened Bread (the Passover) was nearing, and those in power plotted to take Jesus’s life. One of Jesus’s closest followers, Judas Iscariot, agreed to tell the leaders where Jesus was located in exchange for a few coins (a betrayal that had to cut deep). Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper, demonstrating the physical, bodily brokenness that was about to occur. And then we come to this scene, as recorded by Luke. Read the passage below and answer the questions that follow.

Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him. On reaching the place, he said to them, “Pray that you will not fall into temptation.” He withdrew about a stone’s throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.” An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.

When he rose from prayer and went back to the disciples, he found them asleep, exhausted from sorrow. “Why are you sleeping?” he asked them. “Get up and pray so that you will not fall into temptation.”

(LUKE 22:39–46)

Imagine that you were Jesus at the end of that very long day. How would you most likely have responded, given the heavy burden you were made to bear?

What emotions do you expect Jesus was experiencing as He prayed, “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done”?

How does such a prayer reflect the idea of “radical acceptance”?

What type of strength do you suppose the angel who appeared afforded Jesus just after He had uttered those words? Why would that type of strength have been necessary to Him?

How do you think Jesus felt upon realizing that His prayer team had all fallen asleep, even as He battled spiritual forces and sweat drops of blood?

How was Jesus able to rise and continue along the fearsome journey that awaited Him, given the gut-wrenching experience He’d just had?

Do you believe similar strength and power awaits anyone who accepts the cup of suffering as Jesus did? Why or why not?

REORIENT YOUR HABITS AND HEART

When Sheila arrived at the end of herself and her schemes for “getting through” her pain, she finally turned toward Jesus, words of radical acceptance on her lips. In her book *In the Middle of the Mess*, she writes:

Christian had fallen fast asleep. Barry could tell I wasn’t doing well and suggested I take a bath and relax. I couldn’t. I told him I was fine and just needed a little alone time. As the night wore on, the house grew cold and still, and it felt as if evil had crawled through cracks in the wall. The evil seeped across the floorboards and down to my toes. It crept up my shins, up my torso, up my neck. It stuck to me.

The weapon that night was a large knife. I saw it lying on the draining board in the kitchen, and the voices were deafening.

Just pick it up. It won’t hurt. It will be over soon. You don’t have to live like this anymore.

I walked into the living room and lay face down on the carpet. All I could say over and over was one name: “Jesus! Jesus! Jesus!”

The hours passed—one o’clock, two o’clock. At three in the morning something inside me shifted. I remembered whose I was. I stood up and shouted out, “No!” I picked up a verse I’ve known since I was a child and wielded it like a weapon, “For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Romans 10:13 HCSB).

I called that verse aloud and believed it. I called on His name and believed Him. I had been saved from hell and into eternity as an eleven-year-old girl, when I accepted Jesus as my Savior. But that night, I needed saving in the present, and I knew it. It wasn’t that I needed to become a Christian again; instead, I needed the power of the living Word of God to save me from the present tormentors.

And that night, as I called on the name of the Lord, I found Him pushing back the darkness, the evil—all of those suicidal thoughts.

I felt Him saving me.

This is the truth I would discover that night: Christ came to save us in this present moment. The gift of salvation is God's active, present gift to us, no matter where we are.

This was the truth of Sheila's situation, a truth she hadn't been able to tell back when she hosted a show aimed at inviting *others* to tell their own. This was the suffering she'd struggled to accept, rising to the top of her consciousness and spilling right out. This was *radical acceptance* in its purest, rawest state, refusing to stuff the pain down further and instead letting it just. come. out. "You will know the truth," this session's epigraph boldly states, quoting the apostle John, "and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32).

I discovered in my darkest moments that sometimes the most powerful prayer of all is just a single word: "Jesus!"

—SHEILA WALSH

In what ways can you relate to Sheila's experience of coming to the end of herself and all of her efforts? Have you known yet what that feels like?

Who or what do you think protected Sheila from self-harm and outright destruction during those hours that passed by so slowly, before she finally called on the Lord?

What do you imagine happened both in heaven and on earth as soon as Sheila uttered that one-word prayer: “Jesus! Jesus! Jesus!”

What similarities and differences do you note between the account of Jesus Christ praying on the Mount of Olives and Sheila praying from the floor of her living room? Write down a few thoughts below.

Similarities

Differences

How would you have responded to that level of despair, had you faced Sheila’s situation that night?

What emotions crop up in you as you consider engaging in the same process of radical acceptance that Sheila’s story demonstrates?

In this session’s video, Sheila confirmed that radical acceptance is not a one-time affair but a spiritual discipline to be practiced with the same fervency and frequency as other spiritual disciplines, such as contemplation, solitude, or prayer. As with any spiritual discipline, the *power is in the practice*, not in hyper-focusing on particular

outcomes. We “pray without ceasing,” for example, not so much because we feel like prayer all day, every day, at life’s every twist and turn, but because we are practicing a life of constant communication with our heavenly Father. We are in training for righteousness’s sake. Similarly, we must keep coming back to this practice of radical acceptance if we ever hope to heal. We must keep saying over and over, “I see you, suffering, I do. I *knew* you were there somewhere.”

What follows in the final portion of this study is a series of “steps,” if you will, to aid you in your practice of radical acceptance. But as with any spiritual practice, you should feel free to go wherever the Spirit leads. Don’t get hung up on ticking off to-do boxes or turning the bullet points you find here into a stale and ritualized routine. Instead, simply use what follows as a guide, and then ask God to graciously lead.



PRACTICING THE DISCIPLINE OF RADICAL ACCEPTANCE

It is quite difficult in our results-oriented culture to sit with something difficult instead of skipping right to solution-seeking (even if that solution happens to be proclaiming, “Suffering? Me? No. Trust me—really—I’m *fine*.”). But to know the usefulness of suffering—the character it forms in us, the glory it delivers to God, the empathy it affords us for others, and so forth—we must *first acknowledge that it exists*. And so: radical acceptance. It is with this practice that we say:

“I see you, suffering.”

“I feel you, pain.”

“Yes, this is actually happening to me.”

“I didn’t want this, but it is here.”

And yet those words aren’t said only to the air around us; no, they also are said to God. In the next session, we will explore the magnificent healing that begins to unfold, the moment we entrust our pain to God. But before that can happen, a certain transfer must occur, an exchange that begins by calling on one specific name.

“Father!” Jesus cried out.

“Jesus!” Sheila said that night.

Yes, transformation begins by calling on the Name above all other names.

1. *Call on the Name of Jesus*

Are you fed up with your own solutions and ready for real healing to occur? Simply call on the name of Jesus. Even if that is the extent of your prayer, say the name. Call His name. Beckon Him now.

“Jesus . . . Jesus . . . Jesus . . .”

Upon calling on the name of His Father, Jesus then reminded God of His pain. “I’m still carrying around this cup of suffering,” He essentially said. “It’s heavy. It’s weighty. It’s hard.”

Without even knowing she was doing so, Sheila echoed this approach in that moment with Christ as she acknowledged the darkness, evil, and suicidal thoughts that had been plaguing her. Here, we find a level of honesty that can be agonizing to let play out.

2. *Acknowledge the Pain*

Are you tired of hiding and pretending, weary of acting as though nothing is wrong? It’s time to exhale all falsehood and there, before God, *acknowledge the presence of pain*.

“I’m hurting . . .”

“I’ve failed again . . .”

“I can’t arrest this addiction, Lord . . .”

“I’m desperate . . .”

“Life is hopeless . . .”

“I’ll take any escape from this pain . . .”

Finally, after pouring out His pain and accepting the burden He was called to bear, Jesus made an incredible choice. He chose to stop fixating on the presence of pain and focus on His Father and the divine purpose for His life—a mission only He could fulfill. *This* was the power that carried Him from the garden to the agony of the cross.

For Sheila, this shift in focus felt like salvation—salvation that is available not only when we walk a church aisle or pray a beautiful prayer, but also in our quiet suffering, when our need for real rescue has shown itself once again.

The extreme greatness of Christianity lies in the fact that it does not seek a supernatural remedy for suffering, but a supernatural use for it.

—SIMONE WEIL

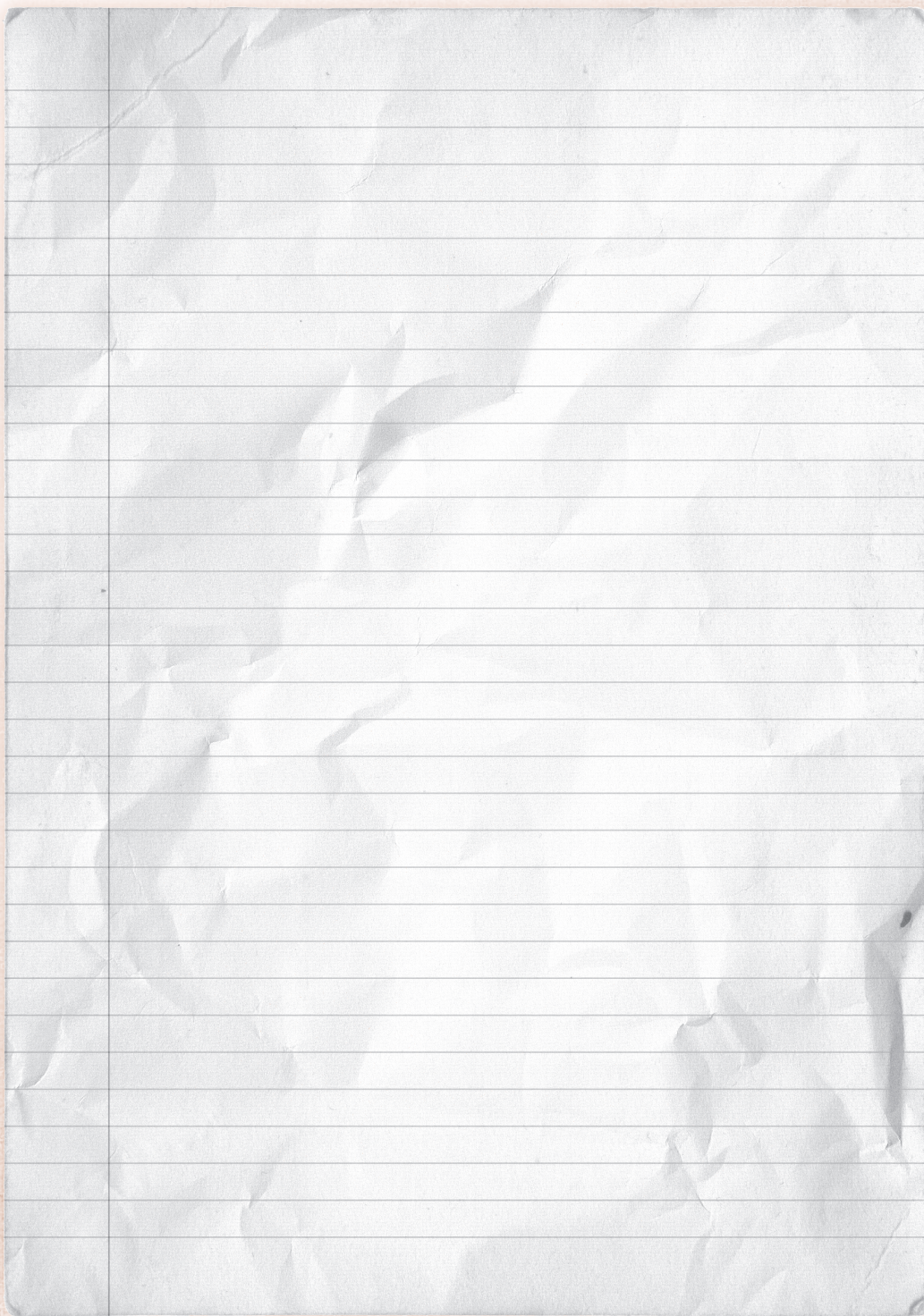
3. Turn to the Father

Are you in need of real rescue today? Turn your attention from the presence of the pain you've been carrying to the presence of your Father instead. He is near and He is listening. He holds all healing in His hands.

As you conclude your time in this session, spend a few moments logging your thoughts regarding “radically accepting” this suffering of yours. What parts of your present reality is it time for you to accept? What in your life needs “saving” and in what ways will Jesus accomplish that task? What subtle shifts in attitude or posture do you detect, as you practice focusing less on the presence of pain and more on the presence of God? What “strength” does God long to impart to you now, as you take this vital first step?

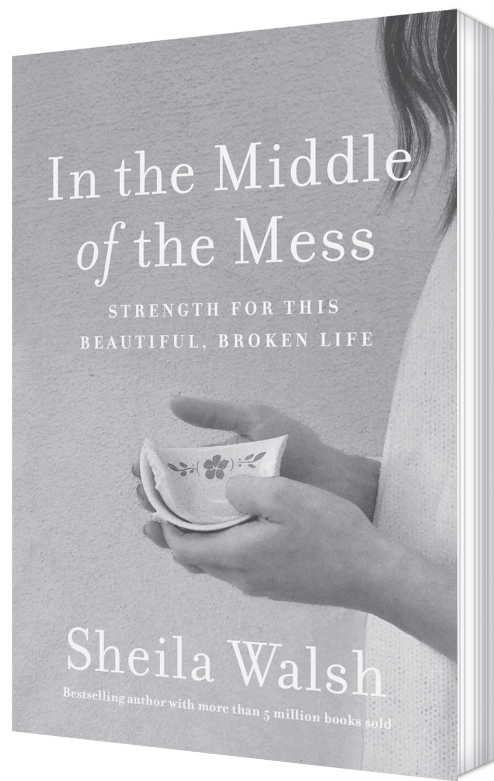
On the lined page that follows, consider adopting the response that Sheila herself did, which was to write a letter to her dad. Only, in this case, craft it to your *heavenly* Father. Tell Him all that is on your heart.

Before the next meeting, read chapters 3 and 4 of *In the Middle of the Mess*.



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