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INTRODUCTION

In the movie *On the Waterfront*, Marlon Brando's character shows promise as a champion boxer, but his brother dashes his boxing dreams. In one poignant scene, Brando has taken a dive for his brother, missing his chance to be victorious in a match that would have made him famous. He says to his brother, "You was my brother, Charlie, you shoulda looked out for me. You shoulda taken care of me just a little bit so I wouldn't have to take the dive. You don't understand, I coulda had class. I coulda been a contender. I coulda been somebody. Instead of a bum. Which is what I am, let's face it. It was you, Charlie."¹

This scene resonates with me because I've had this conversation with myself. "Scott, you should have looked out for yourself. You should have paid attention. You could have been a champion. You could have been a contender. You could have been somebody. You should have reached for your dreams."

I wonder how many people out there have these same feelings? They've missed their dreams, or life has turned out tragically different from what they had hoped it would be. Or perhaps they've lost a loved one, and certain dreams died with that person. As long as we live, life is about loss. In *Unmasking Male Depression*, Archibald D. Hart writes,

All of life is loss. It starts the day we are born, when we lose the safety and comfort of the womb. Never again will we be as safe as there, protected by our mother's immune system and the placenta.

As we grow older, the potential for loss increases daily. When we graduate from kindergarten, we leave behind a safe place and special friends. When we transition from adolescence to adulthood, we again lose a degree of freedom and carefreeness. When we start to earn some money, we make investments and may lose all that hard-earned money. Very much later, we begin to lose our faculties, eyesight, teeth, and hair. Finally, we lose life itself. Life is all about loss—necessary losses.²

My parents taught me to strive for things. They educated my siblings and I in the importance of following our dreams. But they didn't teach us that dreams often end, and we need to learn how to grieve them. That's the theme of Longfellow's poem, "My Lost Youth":

*There are things of which I may not speak
 There are dreams that cannot die
 There are thoughts that make the strong heart weak
 And bring a pallor into the cheek
 And a mist before the eye
 And the words of that fatal song come over me like a chill
 A boy's will is the wind's will
 And the thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts*³

Farah Moore and Sheryl Cooke, authors of the book, *From Hurt to Hope*, suggest we are only taught how to strive for success, but we are never taught how to handle loss. Striving to get things and believing we can hold onto them is an illusion. Everything we have in this life will one day be lost. Beloved pets will die. Our parents will most likely pass away before we do. We will have to retire from a job that we might love.

Moore and Cooke write, "Unresolved emotions, from disappointments, losses, and hurts, weigh me down, distract me, and hinder my progress."⁴ These unresolved emotions sabotage our ability to live fully in the present, as God intended. But if we learn to grieve effectively and

appropriately, we can arrive at new beginnings and continue our journeys with free hearts. In this book we will walk through the five stages of the grieving process—denial, anger, bargaining, depression/sadness, and then acceptance. Each stage is necessary in the healing of our grief.

There is a way through loss. You don't have to carry grief like a soldier. You might feel as though your problems are too small and insignificant to discuss, but getting them out in the open among a group of safe people can be healing. Burdens always become lighter when others help us carry them. My hope for you as you study this guide is that this will be the beginning of help, hope, and healing for your life. Even though your grief may never vanish completely, you can learn to deal with it in healthy ways.

Most of the people we've worked with over the last ten years at Restore Ministries came to us with broken hearts. Their dreams had died or had been ripped away. But the people who allow their hearts to be broken openly before God are able to move forward. Those who refuse to accept loss will never move forward. They shield broken hearts they need to expose. This sort of denial keeps its victims trapped. So be honest in examining your loss as you move through this study. How you approach this can mean the difference between a new beginning or the same defeated past. It's time to live!