

CHAPTER 22: RICK'S TESTIMONY OF HOPE, HEALING, AND FREEDOM

lies and reconnect their hearts to Him. But what if you feel so separated from God that you don't think He can even hear your prayers? What if your situation is so deep, so dark, that you feel like all ties must be gone, that He must have gone AWOL?

If this describes your situation, we are excited to offer help in the next few chapters, where we will see that even Jesus knows the loneliness of feeling forsaken by His Father in His deepest, darkest moments. As we dig deeper into the buried treasure of the gospel, we can learn to find Jesus in the midst of our troubles, even when He seems nowhere to be found.

CHAPTER 23



KEITH'S STORY OF REJECTION

The desire to connect with my father increases the pain of both what I didn't have when he was living and the loss I suffered at his death. But my pain at his absence is as much about God as it is about my father.⁵¹

All Keith ever wanted was to fit in. But for as long as he could remember, he had never belonged; never, that is, until he started using drugs.

As a Japanese-American in a navy town in post-WWII California, Keith grew up feeling self-conscious. By the age of ten, he remembers hating who he saw in the mirror.

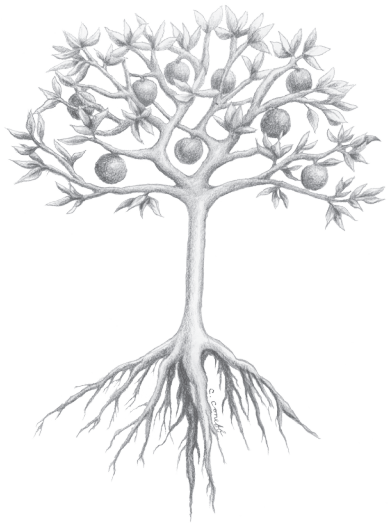
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“My family had been in concentration camps. The movies told everyone around me that I was the enemy,” he explains. “I lived with the odd desire that I would wake up and see someone in the mirror with blond hair and blue eyes. I hated my features: my almond eyes, my black hair. I grew up as a kid who couldn’t do enough and couldn’t look right.”

But Keith didn’t just just receive these messages of rejection from his community; he also received them from his dad’s neglect at home. Neglect, by the way, can be as damaging and devastating as negative or abusive attention, because it can easily send (or reinforce) the message that a person is rejected. Keith’s dad never attended “anything” his son participated in; and when he skipped Keith’s high school graduation, Keith decided his dad was dead to him. Sadly, this lack of attention from his father and others—especially after his parents’ divorce—was also what led Keith to try cigarettes, and then pot, as early as age eleven. But Keith’s drug abuse did not stop there.

SATANIC PING-PONG AND THE CYCLE OF DRUG ADDICTION

As we have seen, Satan’s deceptions usually begin in childhood, with the child’s parents or caregivers contributing the “kickoff” event, attitude, or belief that eventually leads to full-blown Satanic Ping-Pong. In this case, Satan set Keith up to be hurt by a factor even larger than his parents; he wanted Keith to take shame from his whole family line—or from his heritage. This is not unique. Even though our other stories have not included



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lies about race or heritage, they all have included lies passed down from generation to generation. And that's because our problems never start in a vacuum. Satan has been building context, planting roots, for our problems and negative fruits since the fall of mankind. And even out of those common stories, he can then spin a whole new story of destruction for each one of us.

STEP ONE—SATAN SETS KEITH UP TO BE HURT

In the case of a young Japanese boy in post-WWII California, Satan used media and a white, middle-class society to convince Keith he didn't belong—that he was a misfit, and not acceptable the way he was. To reinforce these messages from the community, Satan also caused Keith's dad to neglect and reject him, so Keith would have to seek acceptance elsewhere.

STEP TWO—SATAN SETS KEITH UP TO HURT KEITH

Now that the devil had made Keith painfully aware of his need to fit in, it was easy to get Keith to justify doing something that made him popular.

“The pain of hating who I was, and my dad's indifference, led to medicating with people-pleasing and pot. I used the one asset I had—a sharp mind—and traded it for acceptance. I allowed the kids to copy my homework in exchange for pot.”

But even when he started using every day, he didn't think he had a problem.

I can control this; it will never get beyond smoking pot, Keith heard in his head. What he didn't know was that because drugs weren't his idea in the first place, his use was already out of control, and Satan was already setting him up to move on to other drugs.

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And one day, when he tried cocaine, hitting “a trigger of euphoria that [he] had never felt before,” he was hooked.

But he still didn't think he had a problem. Intending to become a doctor, Keith enrolled in a pre-med internship track after high school, only to end up working construction. Living on his own at this time, Keith had very few expenses. But one took almost all of his money. At first, he used cocaine to work late nights. Pretty soon, this progressed from “buy coke to keep working” to “keep working to buy coke.” When Keith started calling in sick on Mondays from weekend binges, his employer noticed. Not long after that, he was fired. But by now, Keith was so addicted—and Satan had him so deceived—that he didn't even care about losing his job.

“Instead of being humiliated, it got rid of the nuisance of having to go to work. I was cashing in coin collections . . . and doing anything I could do to get more coke.”

When the money ran out, he had to quit. And without the drug, Keith saw how “possessed” he had been with it. For two years he was able to maintain abstinence, returning to construction and taking on even larger projects than before.

But because Keith's real problem wasn't drugs, but the negative beliefs in his heart, Satan knew it would only be a matter of time before he could trigger a relapse.

STEP THREE—SATAN SETS KEITH UP TO HAVE NO HOPE

“I was doing well,” Keith said, “until an old friend showed up.”

The friend was an old drug buddy from high school, inviting him to a bachelor party. But that friend wasn't the only one making suggestions to Keith.

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I've been clean for two years; I deserve to celebrate, that demonic voice whispered, just loud enough for Keith to listen. And he did.

I can handle it, Keith decided, buying an eighth ounce of coke to share with his friend at the party.

But he never made it to the party, or the wedding.

He ended up using all the coke himself, and even buying more. Suddenly, he was hooked. Again. And Satan was celebrating, because he had Keith right where he wanted him—and hopefully hooked for life.

AN ADDICT'S CHOICE: THE END . . . OR A NEW BEGINNING?

At this stage of the game, where Satan sought to trap Keith for life, cocaine was particularly effective because one of the long-term effects of the drug is “chasing the high,” or seeking the same feeling obtained during the drug's first use. Unfortunately, as the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) reports, “this high will never again be felt in the same way, and this addiction can lead to insanity and death.”⁵² In other words, cocaine was a perfect vehicle for Satan's tricks.

As Keith's drug use progressed, so did his problems. The more he used, the less reliable he became. The more he relied on cocaine, the more cocaine let him down. Soon, instead of calming his nerves, his binges began to “leap frog” into paranoia. Now, what had once been “harmless” trips turned into nightmares, as he heard noises that weren't there and imagined threats that weren't present. He heard rustling outside the windows and thought someone was trying to get inside the house to take his coke. He threw open closet doors, certain to find someone hiding.

One night the paranoia came so badly that he thought the house was going to fall on him—and amidst all the noise of his banging on cupboards

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and slamming doors, running outside and back in, his mother decided to take him to rehab.

As he sat in the same waiting room where he had once interned, and as the receptionist he had once worked with eyed him disapprovingly, all he could feel was the sting of rejection. Again. Just like in his childhood days, now he was reminded that he couldn't do anything right. And he felt like he could never be loved. Could there really be any hope for him? Was it even worth trying to get help? And was there anyone he could trust?

He couldn't see it then, but Jesus was reaching out His nail-scarred hands in an open embrace, telling Keith, "I've been there; I've faced the pain of rejection, too. And I love you, and I can heal you. But first, you need to come to the cross . . ."

How about you?

YOUR TURN: IDENTIFYING WITH REJECTION AND NEGLECT

Neglected

Rejected—Defective

Unwanted—Unloved

Discarded—Thrown Away

Something Is Wrong with Me

Not Good Enough—Inadequate

Do any of these words describe your feelings, experiences, or the messages you have received in life? Has someone close to you rejected you? Your mom, dad, spouse, best friend, or business partner? Maybe you've been snubbed by coworkers, classmates, or acquaintances. No matter the context,

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rejection hurts. Literally. As recent scientific studies have shown, the human brain responds to rejection similar to how it responds to physical pain.

In one study performed at Columbia University, individuals who had recently experienced a romantic break-up were given two different brain scans: one while looking at photos of their exes, and another while undergoing physical pain. The study not only found that both tasks triggered the same regions in the brain, but also “[affirmed] the wisdom of cultures around the world” that describe both physical pain and social rejection in similar terms.⁵³ In another study at the University of California in Los Angeles, scientists came to a similar conclusion: “The pain of rejection is no mere metaphor.” When volunteers were socially “snubbed” by a simulated game of catch, their brain’s “pain center,” the same center that registers physical pain, became especially active. These results led scientists to conclude that emotional pain is a “genuine thing;” and that the “psychological aspects of pain are . . . real.”⁵⁴

Although we may not realize it, some of our bad habits may have developed as attempts to protect ourselves from experiencing pain again, like over-planning (chapter 7), getting angry (chapter 8), denying the truth (chapter 14), withdrawing (chapter 17), looking at porn (chapter 19), or, as this chapter shows, using drugs. We’ve already seen how Christ triumphed to overcome addictions. And in the next two chapters we reveal:

- How Jesus can identify with the pain of rejection.
- How Jesus can offer comfort when you feel rejected.
- How Jesus can fill the void left by rejection.
- How Jesus can restore your truest, deepest identity as accepted sons and daughters of God.