

unraveling



by Alice Matagora
Leader Development
Train - Develop - Care

The Great Unraveling of 2016. A year of incredible pain, grief, loss, anger, and confusion. The year I was completely undone, only to be transformed into a truer image of myself in Christ.

For the couple of years leading up to The Great Unraveling, I was stuck. You wouldn't have guessed it. Immaculate image, financially well off, thriving secularly, well respected as a marriage and family therapist—heck, even I couldn't have guessed it!

Yet deep underneath this polished armor, I carried rage and bitterness toward The Navigators, as well as the aching chasm of infertility. For years, I had pleaded with God to be "seen" by The Navigators. I had cried out for a child, or at least some answers. Faced with silence and shut doors, I gave up on God, thinking He had given up on me. I started living for myself, apart from the grace and goodness of God.

Near the end of 2015, the Lord led my husband and me to the mountains of Arizona to receive counseling for my anger. I came in fully armed to fight for the truth that The Navigators were stupid. Within an hour, the counselor had cut through the thick armor that hid my pain to reveal the scared little girl who was afraid she was bad. My eyes were opened to the mess the little girl had made in trying to run from her pain.

The Great Unraveling. The year God allowed me to come to the end of myself, only to begin again with Him.

That year was a painful season of deconstructing all that I had built my identity around and all of who I had believed God to be. God, who did You create me to be? Who do You say I am? Who are You really? And can I trust You to be good and to be for my good? In my exposed vulnerability, God proved both strong to protect me from harm and tender to allure me into the wilderness of His love. Not only that, but God began restoring my husband to his truest identity in Christ. Our marriage began to heal.

I now see those years of silence as an invitation from the Lord to turn inward with Him—to look for any offensive way in me, to reveal the idols in my life, and to lead me into trust that Christ alone is sufficient. That the work God wanted to do *in* me, through healing childhood wounds and speaking truth to core lies, would prepare me for the work He would do *through* me, both as a laborer for His Kingdom and as a mother. It has only been since coming out of The Great Unraveling that I've come to realize it's not so scary after all to walk in the wilderness without our armor and apart from our comforts, distractions, and securities, and to dismantle everything we've believed about God, the world, and ourselves.

Not when our good, faithful, and true Father walks alongside us, leading us in the way everlasting. ◀

crisis (continued from p. 3)

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Real-Life Stories and Practical Tools to Advance The Navigators Calling

worship at the wall



by Lyndi Lee Markus
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Numb. Dry. Stuck. Lifeless. Unsteady. Analytical. Untrusting. Betrayed. Ashamed. Defiant. Fearful. Hypocritical. Empty. Defeated. Terrified to tell anyone I was struggling... because what if they knew? I almost backed out of church and quit leading worship.

I know I'm not the first.

Leaders like Hagberg and Scazzero refer to this crucial and very authentic space on our spiritual journey as "the Wall." Scazzero says, "For most of us the Wall appears through a crisis that turns our world upside down.... We don't know where God is, what he is doing, where he is going, how he is getting us there, or when this will be over." (EHS, 101) Some call it the Dark Night of the Soul, and sometimes it's dark indeed.

The Wailing Wall in Jerusalem is the only remnant of the retaining wall that surrounded the Temple Mount, where the Temple was completely destroyed by the Romans in A.D. 70. To this day, Jews and many others go there to ask their deep questions. When they lament, they return to their foundation.

Lament is worship, too—deep questions come from personal loss or cultural injustice; time lost in relationship, in ministry, or to pandemic; our crumbling views of who we always thought we were and how we thought the world worked. Where on earth is God, in a very, very literal sense (Psalms 10:1)?

At the Wall, we're invited to lament, wail, and fix our eyes on a holy place, directing our attention toward our Cornerstone. We can worship God with our doubts, holding them and trying to trust. That's worship, too.

Our internal chaos at the Wall can eventually numb us into a dissatisfied cocoon, where we retreat in spiritual and emotional exhaustion. A time of rest can be good. But staying in that cocoon means consigning ourselves to a half-life—a zombie existence of internal dissonance and reduced capacity.

We need to scour the Wall for every gift it offers. Questions can deepen our faith. Doubts underscore our desperate need for assurance. And God can prove Himself. Take your time. But don't endeavor to stay there. Feel the invitation to know God more intimately, to see new facets of His character... and deepen.

If you're at the Wall, you're still absolutely beloved. Your questions don't scare God. He's big enough, strong enough, and good enough to meet you there, as He did with Job. As he's done with many Navigators, including me. You don't have to walk here alone.

Whatever doubts you or those you minister to may be confronting, our Creator is still with you in them, even if worship feels impossible. Even at the Wall. ◀

It's okay and important to talk to people you trust about all the questions and laments on your mind. Find a trusted friend or spiritual adviser, or contact TDC@navigators.org.

crisis of faith

by Cynthia Hagen
Founding Editor, *Upfront*
Train – Develop – Care



“Prayer doesn’t work!” Tom scowled at us. “I’ve spent two years claiming these promises in ministry, and nothing has happened!” We older team members exchanged glances. Most of us had hit this kind of Wall before, and we knew only God Himself could help Tom wrestle through it.

For me, it was Psalms 37:4. “Delight yourself in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart.” I decided either this promise wasn’t true, or I wasn’t delighting myself in Him enough. I leaned toward blaming myself, because the other would be heresy. But my heart accused us both.

Faith crises are a normal part of our journey with and toward the Lord. In this issue of *Upfront*, you’ll read about how unmet expectations and desires, hurts, painful experiences with other believers, or our interpretation and application of Scripture can cause us to “hit the Wall.”

Although we often think we’re wrestling God because He didn’t come through, we’re really wrestling against our own ideas about who He is and what He’s said He will do. Tom reacted to his crisis with anger. I felt shame and disappointment. Others may be afraid that questioning God’s promise will push them over the edge and shatter their faith.

In the course of Tom’s long (and loud) wrestling match, I saw him grow in dependence and influence. As for myself, when I learned that I needed to interpret Psalms 37:4 as a principle and not a promise, this verse became my real experience.

crisis (continued on back)

settled in our minds



by Glenn and Margo Balsis
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The birth of our second child uprooted our tidy days of life and ministry. Kristen spent her second week of life in the hospital while a medical team searched for answers to her respiratory and digestive issues.

As we followed the doctor to his cramped office, we spotted a pamphlet on cystic fibrosis extending from his back pocket. “Sit down,” he said. And then he explained this genetic mutation that affects the lungs, ending with, “The average life span is 21 years.”

In an instant, we experienced the shaking of everything we believed about God and how He orchestrates life for His people. Our curated list of Scripture verses had seemed to guarantee smooth pathways and dynamic ministry. “God said it, I believe it, that settles it” had been our mindset about His Word. Now, during those dark days, that proclamation sometimes felt more like a platitude of faith than a conviction forged from real life experience. How could we reconcile truths about God’s goodness and care with our daughter’s struggles to breathe?

In *Prayers in the Night* (IVP, 2021), author Tish Harrison Warren writes about a couple whose infant son faced a frightening surgery. Before he was wheeled into the operating room, the wife looked at her husband and said, “We have to decide right now whether or not God is good, because if we wait to determine that by the results of this surgery, we will always keep God on trial.”

Throughout Kristen’s 28 years of life on earth, God invited us over and over into deepening surrender and trust. Day by day, year after year, we pressed on through medical issues, hospitalizations, and disruptions to our plans. Along unfamiliar paths, we experienced being led by the God who promises to smooth out rough places (Isaiah 42:16). Through all the uncertainty, we found ourselves retreating to God and familiar Scriptures, becoming more convinced these were not idle words for us—they were our life. We clung to the bedrock truth of Psalm 112:7-8 (NLT 1978): “He does not fear bad news, nor live in dread of what may happen. For he is settled in his mind that Jehovah will take care of him. That is why he is not afraid but can calmly face his foes.”

We couldn’t control outcomes then, and we still can’t. Each time we “hit the wall,” another invitation from God emerges for us to draw nearer. We face another opportunity to “settle in our minds” that God is still good, and He will care for us. ◀

My idea of God is not a divine idea. It has to be shattered time after time. He shatters it Himself.

—C.S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed* (1961)

What We Wonder AT THE Wall

How could a loving God allow such injustice?

Have I ever really heard from God?

Is everything I’ve ever believed a lie?

Why can’t I pray?

Why is there no life in my faith community?

What’s missing?

Am I a hypocrite?

Should I quit ministry?

Do I even believe in Jesus ... let alone love Him?

Am I even a Christian anymore?

If there is a God, why or how would He want to use me?

building blocks

Sometimes the last thing we need in a moment of questioning is another topic to research or another string of simperingly faithful sentences implying Scripture has all the answers, even though we may still believe that to be true.

And that’s okay. Reading another book won’t magically fix the dissonance you may be holding.

But sometimes it does help to know we’re not alone, and to hear others’ voices and perspectives. If that’s something you need for yourself or to walk with others through their Dark Nights, you might dig a little deeper in some of these places.

Shattered Dreams

(Larry Crabb, 2001)

The Critical Journey

(Hagberg and Guelich, 1989)

Companions for Your Spiritual Journey

(Mark Harris, 1999)

Prayers in the Night

(Tish Harrison Warren, 2021)

Life of the Beloved

(Henri Nouwen, 1992)

A Grief Observed

(C.S. Lewis, 1961)

Abba’s Child

(Brennan Manning, 1994)

Faith & Doubt

(John Ortberg, 2008)

Emotionally Healthy Spirituality

(Peter Scazzero, 2006)

A Grace Disguised: How the Soul Grows through Loss

(Jerry Sittser, 1996)