

The following are short, little topics that are great to bite into and chew on. They are full of things that go deeper than the usual superficial level. If you want life more abundantly and don't mind digging for it here are some gems. A great deal of this information has been gathered out of many books (and I have witnessed them from life). A good deal of it has come from two books that are referenced on the last page. This format has been helpful for those that don't have a lot of time to read a whole book or two but would like to glean some important information. In my experience, every lock has its key. Here are some keys I discovered. These highlights were very helpful to me. It is my hope that these might be helpful to you too.

TOOLS FOR GROWING INTO A HEALTHY PERSON

BE DONE WITH THE UNHAPPY, SHAME-BASED RULES FROM THE PAST. FORMULATE HEALTHY VALUES AND BEHAVIORS BASED ON LOVE FOR GOD (THEN WILL FOLLOW LOVE FOR OTHERS AND YOURSELF.) "LOSE YOUR LIFE AND YOU WILL SAVE IT..."

Being Right-This is not important except for your own wellbeing; Not for anyone else's. Being right does not make you or anyone else "better". The trap of the "right-wrong" justice scale places everyone at the mercy of measurement of value and worth depending on how right or wrong they are. You have a responsibility to stand up for what you believe and set boundaries but not by condemning someone else. This trap focuses on others instead of on Christ and our relationship to and with Him. What we do needs to be right *only* for us. Strive for love in relationships, not superiority. Share peace and truth but learn to accept that others make their own decisions based on their own motives and actions known only to God.

Setting our own course-Don't spend your life reacting to others expectations. Live unto God. Set your own goals and direction in life. Consider how responding to another's needs will affect the course of your life. Don't let other people control the course of your life by attempting to respond to their demands and expectations. Set boundaries; Listen but choose your path.

Letting go of those who don't want to grow/Reject survivor guilt-We can go forward with our life and growth even though someone we love is not yet appearing to grow. Picture a bridge. On one side of the bridge it is cold and dark. We stood there with others in the cold and darkness, doubled over in pain. Some of us developed an eating disorder to cope with the pain. Some drank; some used other drugs. Some of us lost control of our sexual behavior. Some of us obsessively focused on addicted people's pain to distract us from our own pain. Many of us did both: we developed an addictive behavior, and distracted ourselves by focusing on other addicted people. We did not know there was a bridge. We thought we were trapped on a cliff. Then, some of us searched and found. Our eyes opened, by the Grace of God, because it was time. We saw the bridge. (This bridge is Jesus. He is the only hope we have.) People had told us what was on the other side: warmth, light, and healing from our pain. We could barely glimpse or imagine

this, but we decided to start the trek across the bridge anyway. We tried to convince the people around us on the cliff that there was a bridge to a better place, but they wouldn't listen. They couldn't see it; they couldn't believe. They were not ready for the journey. We decided to go alone, because we believed, and because people on the other side were cheering us onward. The closer we got to the other side, the more we could see, and feel, that what we had been promised was real. There was light, warmth, healing, and love. The other side was a better place. But now, there is a bridge between us and those on the other side. Sometimes, we may be tempted to go back and drag them over with us, but it cannot be done. No one can be dragged or forced across this bridge. Some will come; some will stay on the other side. The choice is not ours. We can love them. We can wave to them. We can holler back and forth. We can cheer them on, as others have cheered and encouraged us. But we cannot make them come over with us. If our time has come to cross the bridge, or if we have already crossed and are standing in the light and warmth, we do not have to feel guilty. It is where we are meant to be. We do not have to go back to the dark cliff because another's time has not yet come. The best thing we can do is stay in the light, because it reassures others that there is a better place. And if others ever do decide to cross the bridge, we will be there to cheer them on.

Rejecting shame- Shame is the trademark of dysfunctional families. Guilt is our indicator that our behavior needs to be corrected or altered but shame is an overwhelming negative sense that who we are isn't okay. Shame is a no-win situation. We can change our behaviors but we can't change who we are. Shame can cause self-defeating or self-destructive behaviors. Some of us feel ashamed for just being. This allows others to control us-control how we feel about ourselves. We have learned to put this spell on ourselves and hand our control to someone else. Don't give your control to someone else. That's how we lose our trust. It is okay to make mistakes and struggle to find our path-find ourselves and God.

Be who you Are-After all God made you yourself. Sometimes, our instinctive reaction to being in a new situation is: Don't be yourself. Who else can we be? Who else would you want to be? We don't *need* to be anyone else. The greatest gift we can bring to any relationship wherever we go is being who we are. We may think others won't like us. We may be afraid that if we just relax and be ourselves, the other person will go away or shame us. We may worry about what the other person will think. But, when we relax, accept ourselves and realize we are being who we want to be (like God-to the best of our ability) we don't need to worry about what other people think. People often feel much better being around us than when we are rigid and repressed. If you are becoming the person you want to be inside then all the rest will fall into place.

Healthy limits/healthy boundaries-Once you have set your boundaries and realize that you alone choose how you act, you will realize that others have responded to your growth. People will react when we do things differently or take assertive action to control our actions and no longer play the "game". Defensive behaviors and all will be no more. Do not let those who respond to our growth convince us to return to these behavior patterns. If people are used to us behaving in a certain way, they'll attempt to convince us to stay that way to avoid changing the system. If they are used to us saying yes all the time, they may start mumbling and murmuring

when we say no. If people are used to us taking care of their responsibilities, feelings and problems they may give us some flack when we stop. (Or anger). That's normal. We can learn to live with a little flack in the name of healthy growth. Continue on your course. Deal with your issues. People may be used to trying to control us through guilt, bullying, and badgering, they may intensify their efforts when we change and refuse to be controlled. That is okay and *their* choice. Their behavior is their business. We don't have to be pulled by this back into old ways if we've decided we want and need this change. We don't have to react to flack or give it much attention. It doesn't deserve it. It will die down. This is the road to freedom. "The truth shall make you free..."

Trusting God & asking for what we need- Remember God is in control and He is on our side. He wants us to be healthy, happy and growing. He is ready to heal. He is accepting, and willing to forgive. This is not a "do-it-yourself program". God is the one who will get the job done if you will let Him.

Staying in the present moment/Letting go of Worry-Worrying about what's going to happen blocks us from functioning effectively today. Keeps us from doing our best now. Blocks us from learning and mastering today's lessons. Staying in the now, doing our best, and participating fully are all we need to do to assure ourselves that what's going to happen tomorrow will be for the best. Worrying about what's going to happen is a negative contribution to our future. God is "I AM" not "I Was" or "I Will Be." We are in control of our present moment. (*"I was regretting the past and fearing the future. Suddenly my Lord was speaking, "My Name is I Am". He paused. I waited. He continued, "When you live in the past with its mistakes and regrets it is hard. I am not there. My name is not I was. When you live in the future, with its problems and fears. It is hard. I am not there. My name is not I will be. When you live in this moment it is not hard I am here. My name is I Am." -Author Unknown)* John 8:32-"And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

Appreciating our lessons from the past-It is easy to forget and be negative about past mistakes and unhappiness. But it is much more healing to look at ourselves and our past in the light of experience, acceptance, and growth. Our past is a series of lessons that graduate us to the next step in life's lessons of living and loving. Experiencing unhappy times gives God an opportunity to help us learn a lesson of life and provide for us when in need. Do not focus on the past-God is not there. Look and learn in the present-God is "I am". Is our past lessons a mistake? We went through exactly the experiences we needed to to learn the lesson. The only mistake we can make is mistaking that for the truth.

Stopping victimization-Sometimes we are victimized, sometimes we just feel victimized. Our boundaries need to be reassessed and sometimes, a change of attitude is all that is required. Try not to force consequences or crises upon another but also do not rescue that person from logical consequences of his or her behavior. We stop partaking in the behaviors that cause us to feel victimized or be victimized. This is our choice. Compassion for the other person involved only comes after we have removed ourselves from being victims or we will fall into this cycle again.

Needing People-Find the balance between needing people too much and not needing them at all. Many of us have unmet dependency needs lingering from the past. We are at times so needy that we drive people away by needing them too much. Some go to the other extreme of pushing people away and not letting people be there for them. Either way we are living out unfinished business. We deserve better. When we change, our circumstances will change. Strive to be balanced then you can heal from the past- love and be loved.

Off the hook-Learn not to get hooked into unhealthy, self-defeating behaviors in relationships (caretaking, controlling, discounting ourselves, believing lies). Learn to identify these road blocks to growth (Codependency). More often than not, these hooks can be almost deliberate, and the results predictable. Someone may stand before us and hint or sigh about a problem, knowing or hoping that hint or sigh will hook us into taking care of him or her. That is manipulation. This is a game. You will be sucked in if you allow it to happen. Learn to ask and insist that people ask us directly for what they want and need. People usually act on their best interest and not necessarily in ours. We also need to behave in a direct and honest manner instead of expecting them to rescue us. If someone baits the hook you don't have to bite.

Clearing the Slate-holding on to negative feelings is the greatest barrier to any healthy growth- be it spiritual or mental. Self-defeating feelings and beliefs from the past can hinder your growth and your ability to trust. (God, yourself, or others.) After clearing the slate you can start new beginnings without the old baggage. You can learn to trust yourself by being trustworthy. Find the truth and then stand in your truth and light from God. Don't look to others for support and reinforcement. This builds the self-respect that God sees as a priceless gift and frees you to find *real* truth not a copy (or counterfeit) - what others approve of. As you learn you are changed. If you do not deceive yourself; you can trust yourself.

Remove unrealistic expectations they will steal your happiness-Many people expect themselves and others to be perfect. Neither expectation is valid. Search and seek Christ but don't expect to not make mistakes. If you do, you will never learn from them but be wrapped up in self or other criticism. This is self-defeating and inhibiting growth behavior. Accepting that we make mistakes doesn't give you the license to make more but gives you the room to improve and get back on track. Refocus on your goal (Christlike characteristics) and just make sure you're still on course.

Taking responsibility for ourselves ("owning our own stuff")-It is worthy to be considerate, loving, and nurturing but caretaking is neglecting ourselves to the point that we feel responsible for the choices, problems and destiny of others. This may even cause us to believe that others are responsible for our happiness and we're responsible for theirs. Caretaking hampers others from learning to take responsibility for themselves. The result of this is hurt, used and victimized feelings experienced by us and those receiving the wellmeant behavior. This would be doing the wrong things for the right reasons.

Distinguish between powerlessness and helplessness-There are some things you cannot do but you are never helpless. No matter how long or hard we try we cannot change other people, solve their problems, or control their behavior. We aren't trapped by other people if we choose not to be. We each have the God-given power, and the right to take care of ourselves in any circumstance, and with any person. The goal is balance. Balance is the middle ground between the two extremes of controlling others and allowing them to control us. Make the right choice. Find the balance between assertive action taken in my own best interest and love for others. If you get out of balance you realize it. Something is out of perspective. A healthy, balanced life takes into account all our needs: friends, work, love, family, play, private time, recovery time, and spiritual time-time with God.

Acting as if- Acting as if is a way to practice the positive. When a problem plagues us sometimes acting as if can help us get unstuck. We act as if the problem will be or already is solved, so we can go on with our life. Don't act as if your bad behavior is good. Remove the bad behavior and act as if we can do the right thing as by acting it is done. Acting as if in a positive way will help to overcome fears, doubts, and low self-esteem. It keeps you from limiting the future by today's feelings and circumstances.

Prayer-"More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of..." Change is not possible without coming from within. Each time we talk to God, we are transformed. With His help we learn how to change our behaviors and have our needs met. Prayer is our connection with God; umbilical cord of life.

Standing up for ourselves-You and God are the only ones who you can depend on 100%. You need to know what you believe and stand for it. This builds your self-respect, you are a better witness, and your faith will be strengthened.

Letting go of guilt-"There's a good trick that people in dysfunctional relationships use," said one recovering woman. "The other person does something inappropriate or wrong, then stands there until you feel guilty and end up apologizing." Much of the time, the things we feel guilty about are not our issues. Another person behaves inappropriately or in some way violates our boundaries. We challenge the behavior and the person gets angry and defensive. Then we feel guilty. Guilt can prevent us from setting the boundaries that would be in our best interests, and in other people's best interests. Guilt can stop us from taking healthy care of ourselves. Feeling good about ourselves is a choice. So is feeling guilty. When guilt is legitimate, it acts as a warning light, signaling that we're off course. Then its purpose is finished. Wallowing in guilt allows others to control us. Prevents us from setting boundaries and taking healthy action. If we are at fault just make an amend, change a behavior, ask for God's assistance (and forgiveness) and let it go.

Vulnerability-Part of growing healthfully is learning to share ourselves with other people. We learn to admit our mistakes and expose our imperfections. Not so that others can fix us, rescue us, or feel sorry for us, but so we can acknowledge them. This is the beginning to healing and changing these areas. Many of us are fearful of sharing our imperfections because that makes us

vulnerable. Some of us have tried being vulnerable in the past; and people tried to control, manipulate, or exploit us, or they made us feel ashamed. Maybe this experience has taught us we need to set a boundary. We must learn from our mistakes and learn to choose safe people with whom to share ourselves. At times we will have pain but remember God is safe and He can change these imperfections and heal our pain.

Dealing with painful feelings-Emotional pain does not have to devastate us. We do not have to act in haste; we do not have to punish others (try to hurt others-to get back at them) to get control over our feelings. Act not react! When we stop holding others responsible for our pain then we will be able to control our feelings and our perspective. Relay your feelings to God (and trustworthy friends if necessary) then allow them to heal and allow God to heal you.

Letting go of sadness-Unfinished business does not go away. It keeps repeating itself, until it gets our attention, until we feel it, deal with it and begin to heal. Denying the hurt will not reduce the pain. It is still there. Unresolved sadness from the past can be a block to joy and love. Deal with it and then let it go or it will stay there hidden until you do.

Let go of the need to Control-Sometimes we may try to control people and situations to mask our pain (codependency). When we are looking for happiness outside ourselves with Christ and begin looking to others to provide our peace and stability, remember this: Even if we could control things and people, even if we got what we wanted, we would still be ourselves. People and things don't stop our pain or heal us. It is our job and we can do it by refocusing on Christ. Trying to control causes us to lose sight of Him and become overwhelmed with others. Good things will happen when the time is right. I can stop trying to manipulate outcomes. God is in control.

people pleasers- Being around someone who is turned inside out to please another is often irritating and anxiety-producing. This behavior result may have occurred by adapting to survive but it is not healthy. Taking other people's wants and needs into consideration is an important part of our relationships; but, people-pleasing backfires. Not only do others get annoyed with us, we often get annoyed when our efforts to please do not work as we planned. The most comfortable people to be around are those who are considerate of others but are already happy within themselves.

letting go of denial-Some of us in the past have not been able to deal with things from time to time. We have engaged in denial and relied on this tool to get us through. We may have denied events or feelings from our past. We may have denied other people's problems; we may have denied our own problems, feelings, thoughts, wants, or needs. We have even denied truth; be it physical or even SPIRITUAL. (This is especially dangerous-to our relationship with God and ultimately our eternal life.) We didn't let ourselves face reality, usually because facing that particular reality would hurt. It would be a loss of something: trust, love, family, perhaps a marriage, a friendship, or a dream. And it hurts to lose something or someone. Denial is a protective device, a shock absorber for the soul. It prevents us from acknowledging reality until

we feel prepared to cope with that particular reality. People can shout and scream the truth at us, but we will not see or hear it until we are ready. We are sturdy yet fragile beings. Sometimes, we need time to get prepared, time to ready ourselves to cope. We do not let go of our need to deny by beating ourselves into acceptance; we let go of denial by allowing ourselves to grow and let God work in us. This is our choice. Can *you* trust Him to make you strong enough to cope with the truth? Any truth. The result will be eternal life. It's worth it. Peace with God and peace with yourself here and forever. If you're not trusting Him, how would your eternal life be with Him you don't trust?

letting go of anger-Anger is a warning signal. It points to problems. Sometimes, it signals problems we need to solve. Sometimes, it points to boundaries we need to set. It should not be allowed to harden into resentment or used as a battering ram to punish or abuse people. Anger will not be present if we defuse it with love and focusing on handling as Christ would. Holding anger in keeps us living in the past. Anger happens when we have become overwhelmed or lost sight of our goals and are only reacting instead of acting to our environment. This is the time to apologize and go on with our learning process-renew our commitment to God. Not dwell on our shortcomings. Talk it out with God, this is relationship instead of reaction.

Peace-Anxiety is often our first reaction to conflict, problems, or even our own fears. We think: If I really care, I'll worry; if this is really important to me, I must stay upset. We convince ourselves that outcomes will be positively affected by the amount of time we spend worrying. Our best problem-solving resource is peace. Solutions arise easily and naturally out of a peaceful state. Often, fear and anxiety block solutions; any from ourselves or from God. Anxiety helps the problem not the solution. It does not help to harbor turmoil. Peace is available if we choose it.

Trust and rest in God knowing that He is in control; this brings peace. In spite of chaos and unsolved problems around us, all is well.

Taking care of ourselves-We cannot simultaneously set a boundary and take care of another person's feelings. It's impossible; the two acts contradict. If you set a boundary and focus on following God you will give that person all they need to take care of their own feelings and you have done your part. It's good to care about other people and their feelings; it's essential to care about ourselves too. Sometimes, to take care of our wellbeing we need to make a choice. If you've decided to focus on God it will always be the right one. Take responsibility for your actions and allow others to be responsible for theirs. Caring works. Caretaking doesn't. We can learn to be caring and not be caretakers.

Timing/Putting God first/Surrendering to God-Surrendering to God will enable us to grow. All the growth must come from within and only God can make the change permanent and successful. Know God has given us a place and He has a Plan for us. Know that God has perfect timing and that with God in charge, everything I need shall be provided for today. God even knows what we want and need even when we don't. Learn to listen to Him.

Clarity and direction- Sometimes there is no way to understand what is going on in our life. We trust, wait, pray, listen to people, listen to ourselves, and the answer still does not come. During those times, we need to understand that we are right where we need to be, even though that place may feel awkward and uncomfortable. Our life is in God's hands and does have purpose and direction. This is the time that good things beyond our capacity to imagine are being prepared in and for us. We are growing and changing at levels deeper than we can imagine. This is the time to be ready for an answer. We do not have to act in haste or urgency just to relieve our discomfort, we can wait for clear direction. God will send it.

Look for the good-It's easy to look around and notice what's wrong. It takes practice to see what's right. Many of us have lived around negativity for years. We've become skilled at labeling what's wrong with other people, our life, our work, our day, our relationships, ourselves. We want to be realistic but this is often not our intent when we practice negativity. The purpose of negativity is usually annihilation. Negative thinking enlarges the problem. It sabotages and destroys.

Resist negativity-Some people are carriers of negativity. They have decided to remain in the victim role and act in ways that further their victimization. This can have a pull on us but we do not have to go. We cannot change other people. It does not help others for us to get off balance. *We do not help lead others into the Light by stepping into the darkness with them.* Thinking positive improves us and our life every day. We can ask what's right, what's good- about other people, our life, our work, our day, our relationships, ourselves. God is positive. He heals, transforms and loves.

Appreciating that God made us/gifts, not burdens-Each person is a gift from God; life. We are not a burden. Somewhere many of us have received the belief that we were a burden to the world and the people around us. This belief can block our ability to enjoy life and our relationships with others. It can even impair our relationship with God. We can even feel we are a burden to God. It is time to let this go. We are not a burden and never were. This message we may have received from our childhood is false. It is time to realize that the message sender had a burden within themselves that they needed to resolve and it had nothing to do with the worth and value of us. God bent down and gave us the gift of life. You can choose to make your gift beautiful and offer it back to God. God is longing to help you; you are not alone in your masterpiece.

Getting needs met-Realize that for every need there is a supply. God gave you a need because He planned to fulfill it. There is a place for Him that only He can fill. All the necessary supplies have already been planned and provided for in this journey of life.

Avoid self-defeating behaviors-Identify feelings and behaviors that may be interfering with our life today. Blocks that prevent us from loving God, others and ourself. Locate these self-defeating patterns, expose them, and avoid them. Begin to perform the behaviors that are positive; that lead to growth and happiness.

Negotiating conflicts- Face and solve your problems. Avoiding them may mean we may run into that problem again. Not being willing to tackle and solve problems may lead to unresolved negative feelings. These intensify the problem and waste time and energy. We need to clearly understand what we want and need, what is negotiable, and what our bottom line is. To negotiate problems, we must be willing to identify the problem, let go of blame and shame, and focus on possible creative solutions. Learn to be flexible but not too flexible. To those committed, intimate relationships-realize that your relationship means two people are learning to work together through their problems and conflicts in ways that work in both people's best interest.

detaching in love-When we are hooked into a reaction of anger, fear, guilt, or shame then we get hooked into a power play-an attempt to control or force others to do something they don't want to do. When the way we're reacting isn't helping the other person or solving the problem. When the way we're reacting is hurting us and/or others it's time to detach; when detachment appears to be the least likely, or possible, thing to do. The first step toward detachment is understanding that reacting and controlling don't help. The next step is getting peaceful. Restoring our balance. *Call on God.* The concept of letting go can be confusing to many of us but it is a key to strengthening our healthy relationships-the ones that we want to grow and flourish. Detaching benefits our difficult relationships-the ones that are teaching us to cope. It helps us. Detaching is a daily behavior. This keeps us from caretaking and struggling to maintain control in our relationships. We learn to let go of people we love, people we like, and those we don't particularly care for. We separate ourselves, and our process, from others and their process. We relinquish our tight hold and our need to control in our relationships. We take responsibility for ourselves; we allow others to do the same. We detach with the understanding that life is unfolding exactly as it needs to, for others and ourselves. Lessons in life are good, even when it hurts. We come through stronger for having been through. Ultimately, we can benefit from even the most difficult situations. Detaching with our loved ones gives each the freedom to realize we are each there because we *want* to be not because we have been manipulated into our place. "The truth shall make you free..."

giving-Learn to be a healthy giver. Learn to give without feeling you gave too much. Give with a true desire to give and with an underlying attitude of respect for ourselves and others.

Take one day at a time and let go of fear/don't panic- For a moment at times it may seem helpful to look forward and see what needs to be done. Do not panic like a swimmer in deep water. Focus on today. Do not focus on the future and the enormity of the task. Panic will stop the process of accomplishment today. Trust in God, breathe deeply, peace. We can get back on track by treading water until we regain our composure. Once we realize the peacefulness again we can begin swimming with confidence once more. As with swimming, learning can be overwhelming. Don't panic. No need to become desperate. Tread water for a bit, until your equilibrium returns then you can return to floating peacefully in your trust in God. It is a safe stream. Our course has been charted and all is well.

enjoy simple things in life-There is much to be enjoyed each day. Look. Apply yourself with dedication to learning to enjoy each day. Work as hard at learning to have fun as you did feeling unhappy or miserable. It will pay off. Each day you will find many pleasures to be enjoyed.

stop expecting perfection in others or yourself; focus on God He is perfect and He will influence you-expecting yourself to be perfect slows the process of growth; it puts us in a guilty and anxious state therefore focusing on the wrong issues. Expecting others to be perfect is equally destructive; it makes others feel ashamed and may interfere with their growth. This kind of behavior puts us in a state of moral superiority. Superior (expecting others to be perfect) vs inferior (expecting ourselves to be perfect). Both are the extreme. When we stop expecting others to be perfect we may discover that they're doing much better than we thought. When we stop expecting ourselves to be perfect, we'll discover the beauty of being ourselves and enjoy building a healthy relationship with God and others. When we allow God to change us; that's what God calls "perfecting".

communication-Learn to communicate clearly, directly, and assertively. We don't have to beat around the bush in our conversations to control the reactions of others. Guilt-producing comments only produce guilt. We don't have to fix or take care of people with our words; we can't expect others to take care of us with words either. We can settle for being kind but heard and accepted. And we can respectfully listen to what others have to say. Hinting at what we need doesn't work. Others can't read our mind, and they're likely to resent our indirectness. The best way to take responsibility for what we want is to ask for it directly. And, we can insist on directness from others. If someone is trying to control us through a conversation, we can refuse to participate. Be direct about your feelings instead of making others guess at them or having them come out in other ways. If you don't know what to say, you can say that too. We can ask for information and use words to forge a closer connection, but we don't have to take people around the block with our conversations. Strive to avoid manipulative, indirect or guilt-producing statements. These block your communication.

self esteem not self indulgence (or self-neglect)-This means we are taking responsibility for our actions. Learning self responsibility instead of feeling responsible for others. This allows you to be responsive to others. Don't go to extremes: self indulgence or self-neglect.

waiting-If the time is not right, the way not clear, the answer or decision not consistent, wait. We may want to resolve the issue by doing something-anything now, but that action may not be in our best interest. It may feel more comfortable to resolve issues but making a decision too soon may mean we may have to go back and redo it. If the time is not right, wait. Often, waiting is a God-guided action, one with as much power as a decision, and more power than an urgent, ill-timed decision. When it is time, we will know. We will have peace and consistency. Do not let panic, urgency or fear control or dictate decisions. Waiting isn't easy or fun but often necessary. God will direct.

learning new behaviors-Life is a teacher. The lessons are ones God wants us to learn because

we need to. Sometimes in the midst of learning it seems too difficult and we become frustrated, confused. In despair, we turn away, deciding that that formula will never be available to our mind. This blocks our learning and makes us unhappy. When we can take a quiet walk, we break through. Quietly the gift of understanding has reached us. It soon becomes hard to remember not knowing. This we need to not forget; this memory can help share understanding. Be grateful that you have learned and continue on. Don't ever give up in frustration or you will remain unhappy. Remember how you broke through before and try again.

Wants & needs-Learning what you want and need in life is an important lesson. These items influence our behaviors. This is part of taking responsibility for ourselves. Not expecting others to identify and meet our wants and needs. Finding that God will meet all your expectations for wants and needs. Sometimes we close down. We need to ask ourselves what we are hoping to accomplish by shutting down. Do we need some time to deal? to heal? to grow? To sort? or are we reverting to our old ways-hiding, running, and terminating relationships because we are afraid we cannot take care of ourselves in any other way? Be careful when you choose to shut down. It is unhealthy to make this an ongoing practice but occasionally it is necessary. Find out your motive. Learn to grow and use only healthy behaviors.

intimacy-We can let ourselves be close to people. By habit we may withdraw, or push the person away to create distance. We may start criticizing the other person, a behavior sure to create distance. We may start trying to control the person, a behavior that prevents intimacy. We may tell ourselves we don't want or need another person, or smother the person with our needs. Sometimes, we defeat ourselves by trying to be close to people who aren't available for intimacy-people with active addictions, or people who don't choose to be close to us. We're afraid, and we fear losing ourselves. When you keep your boundaries, learn when to detach, and take your responsibility, these behaviors that prevent intimacy will disappear and so will the fear.

property lines-If another person has an addiction, a problem, a feeling or a self-defeating behavior, that is their property, not ours. If someone is a martyr, immersed in negativity, controlling, or manipulative, that is their issue, not ours. Other people's choices are their property, not ours. What people choose to say and do is their business. Peoples lies, deceptions, tricks, manipulations, abusive behaviors, inappropriate behaviors, cheating behaviors, and tacky behaviors belong to them too. So are their beliefs and happiness or misery. Our property includes our behaviors, problems, ability to love, care, hopes, dreams and whether we allow ourselves to be controlled, manipulated, deceived, or mistreated. This is our business. If something is not ours don't take it. Learn to give it back if you do take it. Let other people have their property. Learn to take care of what's ours.

Choices-We have choices. We may feel trapped in our relationships, our jobs, our life. We may feel locked into behaviors-such as caretaking or controlling. Feeling trapped is a illusion. We can choose not to be controlled by our circumstances, our past, the expectations of others, or our unhealthy expectations.

take risks-You cannot keep yourself stymied and trapped out of fear of making a mistake or failing. Naturally, we will make mistakes and fail from time to time. That's part of being alive. There are no guarantees. If we are waiting for guaranteed courses of action, we may spend much of our life waiting. Do not shame yourself or accept shame from anyone else. Take a risk, if it doesn't work as expected, dust yourself off after a mistake, and then move on to the success.

solving problems-Problems are a part of life, so are solutions. People have problems, but we, and our self-esteem, are separate from our problems. I've yet to meet a person who didn't have problems to solve, but I've met many who felt ashamed to talk about the problems they actually had solved! We are more than our problems. Even if our problem is our own behavior, the problem is not who we are- it's what we did. Correct it, learn from it and grow. Sometimes when solving a problem it is appropriate not to give up and to try harder. Sometimes, it's more appropriate to let go, detach and stop trying so hard. If it doesn't work, it doesn't flow, maybe life is trying to tell us something. Maybe we are trying to force ourselves down the wrong path. Sometimes, a different solution is appropriate. Sometimes, a different path opens up. Often, the answer will emerge more clearly in the quietness of letting go than it will in the urgency, frustration, and desperation of pushing harder. Learn to recognize when something isn't working. Step back and take another look (and maybe wait).

commitment-If you are unwilling to make commitments in your life then there are many things and people we may lose, or lose out on. We must commit, on deep levels, to careers-to goals-to family, friends, growing. Trying something will not enable us to succeed. Committing ourselves will. Fear can prevent commitment. Even commitment to God.

trusting God-God's will-Sometimes we experience times of frustration in our life. We believe we're on track, trusting God and ourselves, yet things don't work out. We have false starts and stops. The door refuses to swing wide open. We may wonder if God has abandoned us, or doesn't care. We may not understand where we're going, or what our direction is. Then one day we see; the reason we didn't get what we wanted was because God had something much better planned for us (and it was worth waiting for). We must trust God.

competition between martyrs-"My pain is greater than yours!" What an easy trap that can be for us. We are out to show others how victimized we have been, how much we hurt, how unfair life is, and what a tremendous martyr we are. We don't need to prove our pain and suffering to anyone. This borders on negativity. This is the focus of our conversation and behavior. Change your focus to growing in God. Your pain will begin to resolve and disappear.

surviving slumps-sometimes we may again find ourselves looking frantically for other people to make us feel better, the whole time knowing our happiness and well-being does not lay with others. We may begin taking things personally that are not our issues, and reacting in ways we've learned all too well do not work. This is a slump and won't last forever. Practice one good behavior in one small area, and begin to climb uphill. Soon, the slump will disappear. We can never judge where we will be tomorrow by where we are today.

accepting change-Like plants that have roots that grow and need transplanting; so our lives get uprooted and turned upside down. Sometimes, I've endured the change willingly, sometimes reluctantly, but usually my reaction has been a combination. Won't this be hard on me I ask. Wouldn't it be better if things remained the same? That's when I remember the plants and how transplanting gives them room to grow. That is how they grow into strong plants. This is how they survive.

keep at it-Keep at your healthy behaviors even when they haven't taken yet and you feel a little awkward. We need to work at healthy behaviors with diligence, effort and repeated practice. Even after years, we may find ourselves, in times of stress reverting to old ways of thinking feeling, and behaving. Don't give up. One day the healthy behaviors will come natural and you will be off to learn something new and better. One day as we apply these behaviors to all aspects of our lives-work, home, friends- it will come together. It will become harmonious. The music will come together in our life if we keep practicing the parts (achieving harmony).

Self- protective Blocks that interfere between us, God, and others -When we become willing to let go of our defects of character-issues, behaviors, old feelings, unresolved grief, beliefs that are blocking us from the joy that is ours. When we ask God to take them from us; then we do not try and force change. We don't have to. For once we don't have to "do it ourselves." All we have to do is strive for an attitude of willingness and humility. All we have to do is ask God for what we want and need, and then trust God to do for us that which we cannot do and do not have the ability to do for ourselves. This is how we become changed.

Revenge-One of the blocks that hinders our growth. Stop playing the game. Unhook. Learn your lesson. Thank the other person for having taught you something valuable. And be finished with it. Put it behind, with the lesson intact. Acceptance helps. So does forgiveness. Walk your own path with forgiveness and boundaries.

Apology- Sometimes we need to apologize; however, a sense of shame can cause us to apologize for everything we do, for every word we say, for being alive and being who we are. We don't have to apologize for these things. Learn to detach from things not our responsibility. We learn to take our apologies seriously and not hand them out when they're not valid. When we feel good about ourselves, we know when it's time to say we're sorry and when it's not.

Peace with the past-Holding on to the past, either through guilt, longing, denial, or resentment is a waste of valuable energy-energy that can be used to transform today and tomorrow. We cannot control the past. But we can transform it by allowing ourselves to heal from it and looking to the present and the future. Do not let your past control you by controlling your feelings.

self-disclosure-Many of us have hidden under a protective shell, a casing that prevents others from seeing or hurting us. We do not want to be that vulnerable. We do not want to expose our thoughts, feelings, fears, weaknesses, and sometimes our strengths, to others. We do not want

others to see who we really are. We may be afraid they might judge us, go away, or not like us. We may be uncertain that who we are is who we want to be. Sometimes, out of fear, we may withhold, thinking that will help the relationship or will help others like us more. That is an illusion. Withholding who we are does not help us, the other person, or the relationship.

Withholding is a behavior that backfires. For true intimacy and closeness to exist, for us to be content with ourselves and be content in a relationship, we need to disclose who we are. Learn who to trust. Learning to let go of our need to control others- their opinions, their feelings about us, or the course of the relationship- is the key. Strive to be like God and then opinions will not matter. You will then be the best you can be. Learn to let go of the need to be who people want you to be and instead- be what God wants you to be.

being honest with ourselves-When we've learned to stand on our own two feet and accept who we are we will be ready to accept others. Learn to laugh at yourself and then you can laugh with others. Don't ever betray yourself with untruth. This will cause you not to trust yourself. Self-defeating behaviors and feelings will then begin to control you and you will again be unhappy. Truth releases the bonds of unhappiness and misery. "You were made an original, don't die a copy".

relaying your foundation-In the same way a builder must tear down and dig out the old to make way for the new, God is cleaning out the foundation in your life. What is old and decayed must be removed. What is insufficient or too weak to support the new structure must be removed, replaced, or reinforced. No builder who cares about his or her work would put a new surface over an insufficient support system. The foundation would give way. If the finished product is to be what is desired, the work must be done from the bottom up thoroughly. As in a house, it may appear to be wasted time and effort, because we cannot see the final product yet. But it is so important that the foundation be laid properly if the finishing touches is to be all that we want it to be. Trust God and surrender to Him. He can lay a foundation and apply the finishing touches. He will create a masterpiece of your life. Although impatient at times, realize that someday you shall enjoy the good that has been planned and you shall see the purpose. It shall all come together and make sense. Each day you understand a little more. Someday we will stand in awe at the beauty of God's finished products.

Our end result: our goals-growing healthfully with God, Christlike character present and overcoming your old traits, achieving harmony with God and sharing it with others.

*Excerpts from "The Language of Letting Go" by Melody Beattie
& "Unrealistic Expectations" by Barbra Minar.