

from
Fortress
to
Freedom

Deborah L.W. Roszel

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This book is dedicated
to the remarkable men
who helped me to realize that
I am a remarkable woman.

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Pain on Purpose

(an Introduction)

*H*ow great indeed is the love the Father has shown toward us; how excellent are His mercies, beyond measure.

He watched over me, carefully sheltering me, leading me only as quickly as I could follow. He chose me long before I was ever to choose Him and He directed me in diverse ways toward His path, the only way to joy.

When I was a child, I thought as a child, even though I did not think as other children. I was unusual (my grandmother's word in describing my specialness), and I did not see as a child, but much more clearly and sharply than the knowledge of my few years could explain.

And my Lord, Who knew me and formed me and chose me before my mother knew of me, smiled down upon me in pure and absolute love.

Love was all I longed for. In seeing as I did, I saw the lonely, empty spaces behind the eyes of those around me and I knew that within me there was an emptiness aching to be filled. This was the need for God, of course, but I did not realize it.

I was only a child. I thought as a child. Although I saw some of the truth of the human condition, some of

the pain of separation from God, some of the ancient loss Adam suffered for his disobedience, I did not know how to respond to the vast emptiness in and around me. It seemed that the answer had something to do with being good, but I was unsure.

I longed to know. I yearned to understand. Perhaps somehow I thought that if I paid attention, if I took notes and studied, I would sooner or later unlock the secret answer that would relieve the misery of being alone.

I remember quite clearly thinking that I wanted my mother to sit still for a day, for an entire day, and answer my questions. I was five or six, and the things I knew I didn't know seemed endless to me. I was sure my mother would know and share the answers if I could just have enough of her time to ask.

She didn't understand, but that does not mean she did not care. She showed her love for her family by doing things – cooking, shopping, saving, sewing, mending, canning, freezing, cleaning – always cleaning. Always cleaning. Still.

She loved me the best way she knew. She answered my endless questions as I followed her through my world, watching her clean. She didn't need to read to me any more, since I had learned so long ago, but she helped me find good things to read. Gradually I found that the answers I sought were more readily available from books, even old, faded, dusty ones, than from my young, pretty, clean mother. I could lose myself and find myself in a library.

So impersonal books replaced the warmth of connection, of relationship, of personhood. I could learn, and that became my consuming passion.

Still my Eternal Friend watched over me. Still He wanted to fill me with joy, but His heart was saddened as He watched me stepping away from it. He could see a dire

future for me, as I had closed my heart against the pain of watching my father leave for a year on an overseas military assignment; as I had tried to be the adult companion I thought my mother must have needed while we waited for my father's return; and as I denied yet another part of myself, turning to study rather than to relationship to quench my thirst for understanding.

At six years old, my future was no longer bright.

We live in a fallen world, but it is fallen by our own choice. Christ came and lived as if the world did not have to be a sinful place; at any point He could have chosen sin, for He was tempted in all ways as we are. But He did not sin. We, however, apart from Christ, do not easily choose to keep from sinning. And with each sin we lose a bit of the clarity of vision, a bit of the hope for reward, a bit of the confidence to stand where we know it is right to stand.

The pattern of my choices, even made in the innocence of childhood, was becoming a path toward darkness and away from Light. My vision was growing cloudy, my hope was waning, my confidence weakening. And God intervened.

He did something that He had not done until that point in my life. He allowed me to be hurt.

As His chosen, we know that everything that comes to us in life is first sifted through His hands of love. Everything. God allowed me to be hurt so that I would see that I was worthy, worth loving, worth saving. I had begun, even at this tender age, to believe I was not. My father had left me: I knew in my mind that he was not to be gone forever, but one year in a life of six years is a very long time, and in my heart I felt abandoned. My mother did not want me: I knew that was not true, but she was too busy to spend time with me, and no matter how clean I stayed, how correctly I behaved, I could not be a part of her.

God looked on this beautiful family and saw the unavoidable hurt that we caused one another. He saw that I would be lost if I did not fight. So He gave me a reason to fight: an experience that changed me forever.

The fear and pain and anger that came as a result of my sexual abuse were like an ocean of cold water into which I was suddenly thrown, but against which I struggled and fought just as a drowning person would have. I went into survival mode, just as God knew I would, and all my instincts of self-preservation, instincts God had given me when He made me, took over to run my shattered life.

But my life was not shattered. The impressions that I was damaged, and that the world was dangerous, and that people were untrustworthy, were all things that I needed to know. I needed this knowledge to be able to protect myself as I navigated the troubled waters of adolescence and the even more turbulent seas of young adulthood. I also needed the fear and the certainty of my inability to save myself, in order to begin to acknowledge my need for Christ. My very competence in coping, my security in knowledge, would have kept me from seeking, and certainly from accepting, salvation and ultimate healing.

God's ways are not man's ways and they do not always hold up to our version of scrutiny. As surely as I know that God loves me, though, I know that nothing happens to me apart from His love and nothing ever has. He alone stands outside of time and is able to see all the possible consequences of our actions, to anticipate the endings of the stories we write by our decisions. He alone is qualified and capable of intervening to provide opportunities for us to correct our course, to give tools for us to cope with unforeseen challenges, to offer support and strength through whatever means He, and only He, knows to be best.

Even pain, then, has a purpose. “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28). And I know that my pain worked together with my nature and my life for good to me, because I did and I do love God, and I am undeniably called according to His purpose.

Thank you, Lord.

This book is about God’s touch, God’s light, God’s love, and it is also about pain and healing. I have lived most of my life struggling with depression, self-condemnation, criticism, sarcasm, anger, hopelessness, shame, guilt, and fear. All of this resulted from a single incident of sexual abuse when I was six years old, which I processed all alone and ultimately repressed for roughly thirty years. I thank God for engaged, believing parents who gave me a strong and safe place to grow up, to learn about God’s love, to set high standards and work to achieve them.

In January of 2011 God used a single remark from a friend to start a chain reaction that completely changed my world, setting me free from bondage that had grown to feel so much a part of me that I’d forgotten I was in chains. I had known for many years that I was living life inside a fortress that I had built to protect myself from hurt. During the weeks that followed God chose to take me out of that dim, gray, cloistered existence and place me where He had intended for me to be all along: in a Garden of His design, lush and vibrant and alive. He showed me the true source of my hurts and granted me healing.

The healing I received touched every area of my life and allowed me to start becoming, at age forty-eight, the person I’d always dreamed I could be but stopped trying to be before I was twenty years old. The writing here chronicles that explosion of light and life and love, not in a scientific or

historical way, but in the way of the spirit, with images and analogies and symbols.

As He showed me things, I had an irrepressible need to write what He showed me. I've never been a morning person, but for weeks I woke up at His urging every morning to listen and to write. This book represents roughly the first three months of that work.

Almost as soon as I began writing these notes, which began as letters to a dear friend, I knew that I was also writing to share more broadly, because the healing was not for me alone, but for many of God's beloved children who are suffering just as I was. My fervent prayer since then is that His words, spoken to and through me, will touch and heal many, and that more and more people will join us here, dancing in His Garden.

The Truth Has Made Me Free

I am surprised, again and again, by the many ways that knowing the truth sets me free.

I know the truth, now, that the Voice I hear or sense in my heart or mind cannot be easily explained within the limitations of my American English, twenty-first-century human vocabulary. I am so far from the place Adam held as God's friend; I have lost not only proximity and fellowship but even the language to describe them.

I know the truth that it doesn't matter whether I have words to describe this. If He wishes me to share part of our experience, He will use my finite abilities to convey His infinite message, working a miracle also in the hearing of those who need to hear, just as He did at Pentecost. This frees me from the burdensome pressure of communicating to others the joy I have found, the healing and strength I have received. That pressure worked against my speaking, because instead of empowering me, it choked me, closing off the flow of my words, spoken or written. I still have the desire to share, but there is no guilt or condemnation or fear of damnation associated with my reasons to share or not to share. The sharing happens every morning as I awake joyfully to His call to listen and to write; it happens every day when He takes me to my place of need and gives

me the words of blessing to help me and other members of His much-loved family. I am free to speak or to refrain from speaking, in obedience to His leading, because I know the truth: He speaks to me.

Applying truth to myself in accepting my emotions has been freeing in a different way. Previously, I have attempted to run my life based on truth *as I understood it rationally*. Emotions, as the saying goes, make up the caboose on the train, and the caboose cannot take the lead. The engine of my decision-making must be my head, which must be filled with truth. This analogy is acceptable, but I took it too seriously – a common error of my nature. Since the caboose was not supposed to lead, but only to follow after the fact, I deemed it to be inferior and unnecessary; I strove continually to behave without emotion, with perfect and serene reason in all my dealings with mankind and myself. Not surprisingly, by cutting off such a big chunk of the person God made me to be, I found it difficult to achieve the perfect success I desired. I am nothing if not committed, however, and I absolutely believed my position was good and godly, so I continued to hold on to these ideals even as the challenges of life mounted. I kept climbing over the piles of almost-successes, and quite a few real successes, and kept hoping to improve my percentages. Competitive even with myself, I would not quit.

A side effect of determining that emotions were unnecessary was this: When I could not deny an emotional response to something, I had to analyze it before acting on it. Satan loves analysis. Every feeling I experienced became so surrounded with “should” and “should not” and “what if” and “why” that I could not even honestly say how I felt about anything. Still, since I was sure I was right in ruling by reason, I persisted in the analysis and grew further and further from my own self in the process. In addition, each feeling became surrounded by fears of failure, of offense,

of loss, of shame, of guilt, of condemnation – every feeling became a huge and ugly and fearful thing. Even simple pleasures became trials for me.

I know the truth, now, that emotions are a gift from God; I finally believe that to my core and am able to accept it as truth not only for others but also for myself. The surprise is that when I simply state, “I like this,” it becomes just that, a simple statement of what I like. This sounds so obvious, reading it here, but it was the opposite of what I expected after such a long history of complicating my emotional life. I expected to say what I liked and then to have to defend it or explain it or excuse it in some way. In my adaptation of the train analogy, my emotions were so unimportant that they didn’t deserve a mention, so it followed that mentioning them would require justification. Finally, finally, after years of my friends asking, my husband asking, my children asking, “What would you like?” I can answer and let that be the end of it. I am free because I know the truth – He has made me as a feeling person, not only a thinking person, and He loves and accepts all of me in both ways. I have been justified in Christ, and I can like things and say so.

How simple. How free.

About the Author

Deborah Roszel has been accused of thinking too much, but it hasn't stopped her from studying and taking notes on a wide variety of subjects. She's an avid reader of novels, textbooks, Bibles, essays, treatises, legal documents, and cereal boxes. She earned a B.A. in Psychology from Furman University; after marriage, she and her husband, Rich, developed their very own experimental group of five children.



Deborah has learned from Southern Baptist, Presbyterian (PCA and USA), Episcopal, Anglican, and non-denominational Christian teachers. She has shared her love of learning with her children and many of their friends, teaching and tutoring in most every subject area as a homeschooler, classroom teacher, and private tutor.

With a broad theological and educational background, Deborah is still able to approach matters of faith as a seeker, aware that all interpretations of the supernatural are necessarily limited: we all have it wrong some of the time, She hopes that, some of the time, she might have it right.