

INTRODUCTION

I AM SUSANNAH. FROM the outside, people might think my life is perfect. I grew up in a loving home. I excelled in school. I married a handsome, godly man. I have four beautiful children. I am healthy. But what others do not see is that I've been plagued by insecurity, feelings of abandonment and rejection, and bouts of depression throughout my life. Even getting out of bed and making it on my own two feet past 11 a.m. can often feel like a chore.

But everything began to change when we adopted our daughter, Mia Grace. Her backstory is the opposite of mine. When she was four days old, her biological parents abandoned her, and she was raised in a government orphanage on the other side of the world. She had a revolving door of caretakers and was often left to fend for herself for the most basic human needs. When we adopted Mia Grace at seventeen months old, we watched her regularly battle depression, anxiety, and heart-pounding fear.

While my adopted daughter and I have different backgrounds, histories, and stories, the same spirit of abandonment and rejection plagued us both.

This is our story. And this is our path to healing.

While we both still have our “down” days, we have also learned how to walk a slower path to healing while trusting in a good and faithful Father. So, to you, dear reader, we hold out hope. My specific prayer is that reading and engaging with this book becomes a turning point in your story.

Every person has the hope of a turning point in their story. Mine came nine months before my husband Jason and I adopted Mia Grace. During a class for adoptive parents at our church in Houston, a couple named Steve and Mary Klein showed me how psychology, our adoption journey, and God’s Word could change my life and heal my heart.

That first night, Mary and Steve gave me both bad news and good news. The bad news: everything I suspected about myself was true—I was a wreck. I was angry, tired, and stuck seeing my life through the lens of the past. Depression was my constant companion, and no matter what I did to try to free myself from pain and connect in a secure and consistent way with those closest to me, I could not seem to find stability there. Even my relationship with God suffered. I felt doomed to pass on these ways of relating to my children and that would undoubtedly create another generation of people stuck in depression and dysfunction. The worst news of all was that I did not have enough time to change and become the healed, whole parent I needed to be for my adoptive daughter before we brought her home.

Finally, there was some good news: I could change. The road to healing would not be quick or easy, but it was available to me if I wanted to count the cost and take the journey.

While the Kleins thought they were teaching me about adoption, they were also handing me the tools I desperately needed to rebuild the foundation of my own life and the foundation of my adopted daughter's life, both of which had started to crack and crumble.

God used the process of adopting a child as a turning point in my story. It was the motivator He knew I needed to want change, but it doesn't have to be that way: God uses all kinds of threads from experiences to people to help us desire healing and move from a place of wreckage to restoration, from ruins to rebuilding. The important piece isn't necessarily the threads. The important thing is your response to them. It begins with you, like me, growing tired and weary enough of your ruins and wreckage to want change. It begins with realizing you do not have to change, but the cost of staying as you are is too great.

It's difficult to share about my own "wreckage," but I want to be open and vulnerable with you. I grew up in a Christian home. I had two loving parents who poured their heart and soul into raising my brothers and me so that we knew they fully loved and supported us in whatever God called us to do. But, because my parents struggled to treat each other with love and respect, I felt vulnerable and insecure, unsure of anyone's ability to be there for me in a lasting or committed way.

Patterns of pain in their marriage produced patterns of

pain in me. Unhealed places in them planted the seeds of unhealed places in me. These seeds grew into poisonous fruit by the time I reached adulthood. I never felt secure in any of my relationships—marriage, parenting, or friendships. Terrified of being abandoned, I was always chasing others' approval, which left me exhausted. If I felt someone withdrawing from me, even for reasons that had nothing to do with me, I would either cling to that person or chase them down with conflict. I thought it was better to pick a fight and provoke some sort of response, even an angry one, than to receive no response at all.

This was especially obvious in my marriage and with my kids. Jason and I endured a broken engagement, which set a turbulent tone for our early years. We clashed frequently during those first few years of marriage, and coming to a healthy, whole, and secure place in our relationship took a long time and a lot of hard work. As a mom, I was always afraid I was failing my kids, but I took it out on them through anger, a harsh tone, more discipline than was necessary, and an edgy impatience in their presence. Every morning, I woke up with a sense of dread and anxiety that I was not enough and could never be enough to parent my four girls. That was what wreckage looked like for me.

Your wreckage may look different. You may look more like my friend, Laura. She spent her childhood hiding under a kitchen table to find safety from her bipolar mother's angry outbursts. She learned to isolate herself and rarely rely on those she loved, even her husband, children, and friends. She realized that, if she did not handle the pain her mother had

caused, she would never be able to let down her guard or break down the walls she had built to protect herself. So, she looked to God—she cried out to Him in her pain. She saw Him come to her rescue and restore not just her soul but every relationship she had.

Or your story might look like my friend Renee's. Her wreckage stemmed from her relationship with her mother as well; a mother who had been raised by alcoholic parents and verbally and emotionally abused Renee and her brother because of that unresolved pain. In response to her mother's emotional unavailability and festering anger, Renee struggled with depression and anger as well. She held her husband and own children at a distance, unable to foster a more intimate connection with them. Her walls came down when she was able to see that her relationship with God did not have to be dictated or understood through the lens of her relationship with her mom. She was free to listen to a different narrative spoken over her life and come out from under the weight of those words and patterns of abuse. She was free to connect to a good heavenly Father who loved her and spoke healing into her soul and relationships, including the relationship with her mom.

The problem with our wreckage is that we do not often know it's wreckage. What looks like ruins to God and others is normal to us. Sometimes it takes a wrecking ball and major demolition to wake us up and help us to realize the ruins we live in are not normal. The wrecking ball in my life was the adoption process; but wrecking balls can take many different

shapes and forms. God alone knows what each of us needs to help us see that there is hope beyond our wreckage and rebuilding beyond our ruins. We just have to wake up to our own brokenness and desire something more.

Yes, wreckage and restoration looks different for every person. But walls come tumbling down when anyone reaches a point of desperation, realizing the walls are there even with the people we love most and that we cannot do anything to tear them down unless we turn to a God who is waiting for us to push past the pain and see Him present in it. We learn to see that, in the most painful events of our lives, God wasn't running away from us, He was running after us. While we cannot rewrite the narrative of our lives or rebuild our ruins ourselves, we know a God who can.

You are reading this book for a reason, and I am thankful God has brought us together. I have prayed for you more times than I can say as I labored over the words here, pleading with God that as you read the details of my story, He would use them to speak to you about your own.

Each anecdote in this book is meant to steer you toward self-reflection. References to psychology are not an attempt to act as an expert, but rather to present another tool for self-discovery in a language we can all understand. Each verse is not another passage to skim over, but a reminder of God's desire to help us remember, restore, and rebuild.

So, let's start walking this road together. Let's learn how to honestly remember and assess the ruins in our lives, plan, choose our tools, and then learn how to use them to allow the

work of restoration and rebuilding to begin. Through questions at the end of each chapter, you will be given a chance to remember, restore, and rebuild as well. I encourage you to fill in the blanks of that section to participate in this reader-interactive format. Let the journey of restoration begin.

PART I

REMEMBER

To remember a wrongdoing is to struggle against it.

—Miroslav Volf, *The End of Memory*

For the enemy has pursued my soul;
he has crushed my life to the ground;
he has made me sit in darkness like those long dead.

Therefore my spirit faints within me;
my heart within me is appalled.

I remember the days of old;
I meditate on all that you have done;

I ponder the work of your hands.

I stretch out my hands to you;
my soul thirsts for you like a parched land.

—Psalm 143:3–6

CHAPTER 1

REMEMBERING THE RUINS

I WILL NEVER FORGET the first pediatrician's appointment with Mia Grace after we brought her home from China. I sat in the waiting room with a clipboard and a survey in my hands. I had no idea how to answer some of the questions. "Describe any complications during pregnancy." Don't know. "Was there any trauma during childbirth?" No clue. "What is her family history of cancer, anxiety, migraines, depression, heart attacks, strokes, ADHD, and any other disease or malfunction known to mortal man?" Not the foggiest idea. "At seventeen months, can your child walk?" Nope. "Can she hop on one foot?" No, she can barely sit up. "Can she kick or throw a ball?" No. "Does she speak in complete sentences and or have a vocabulary of at least ten words?" My child had never heard English until three weeks ago.

Those were just the questions on the first page.

By the time the survey was complete, I had tears in the corners of my eyes and despair in every corner of my heart. The task in front of me—to know Mia Grace and help her grow—seemed downright impossible.

But when the pediatrician walked into the room, he flipped through the survey, set it aside, looked me square in the eye, and said, “I don’t want you to worry about the results of this survey. You are going to go home, plant Mia Grace in the soil of your home, and then watch what love can do.”

Those words changed my life and my perspective because that’s exactly what happened. It wasn’t perfection that changed Mia Grace. It wasn’t my flawless parenting approach; it was fraught with difficulty and mistakes. It was love. It was the love of a Father who held me and my home in the secure hands of His love and helped me to hold Mia Grace.

I realized then something I would like for you to know: if Mia Grace could grow, change, and heal in my imperfect home, then I could grow, change, and heal in my perfect heavenly Father’s home—and so can you.

To understand how this growth takes place, we have to understand a few psychology basics and how our brains are wired to work, how God has wired us to receive and give love. What we learn about this will be the starting point for change. And when we combine what we learn here with the truth from God’s Word, healing begins.

Every human is born wired to be securely attached to the people in their lives, usually to their parents first. This

relationship sets up every child for how they will attach to other people. Author and clinical psychologist Lisa Firestone explained in an article on *Psychology Today*:

Our style of attachment affects everything from our partner selection to how well our relationships progress to, sadly, how they end. That is why recognizing our attachment pattern can help us understand our strengths and vulnerabilities in a relationship. An attachment pattern is established in early childhood attachments and continues to function as a working model for relationships in adulthood.¹

Research shows that the way you attach to your primary caretaker predicts with 80% accuracy how you will attach to every other person in your life as well.² Simply put, how you attached to your parents or primary caretaker in those foundational years of life tells you how you will form attachments to others for the rest of your life—attachments to your spouse, your own children, your friends, your co-workers, your acquaintances, and most importantly, to God.

That's not just enlightening; it's downright terrifying. At least, I was terrified the first time I heard this information. It was terrifying because, I suddenly understood where my low-level anxiety came from, why intimacy and trust in relationships was so difficult for me, the amount of internal work it was going to take to heal, and the costs involved if I did not. I realized that, if I did not go back and work on the foundational issues of trust with my parents, I would stay stuck. So, how do

you know if your relationship to your parents or primary caretakers is secure or needs some work like mine did?

According to research, there are four basic ways children attach to their primary caretakers that predict how they will attach in their relationships as adults as well.

- **Secure attachment:** if children are *secure* in their attachment to their primary caretakers, as adults they will be secure, confident, and free in their behavior and relationships with others.
- **Insecure-avoidant attachment:** if children are *insecurely-avoidant* in their attachment to their primary caretakers, as adults they will be dismissive and remote or often withdraw in their relationships with others.
- **Insecure-ambivalent attachment:** if children are *insecurely-ambivalent* in their attachment to their primary caretakers, as adults they will be preoccupied and often argumentative, easily offended, anxious, or entangled in their relationships with others.
- **Insecure-disorganized attachment:** if children are *insecurely-disorganized* in their attachment to their primary caretakers, as adults they will be extremely disorganized in their relationships, unable to make or form solid relationships with others because of unresolved trauma or loss.³

Sometimes events beyond the parents' control can affect a child's attachment style. Typically, these are labeled as trauma.

And trauma can easily move a child from secure to insecure attachment. This can be a big “T” trauma, like the death or illness of someone you love; sexual, physical, or emotional abuse; a divorce; car wreck; or some sort of illness, injury, or sudden harm. Or it can be something called a little “t” trauma, a low-level of pain that is sustained and simmers over a long period of time. This can be living under the same roof as a parents’ dysfunctional marriage or enduring the slow, steady wreckage of continuous disparaging comments from someone you love and trust.

Many of us may struggle to admit we have ever been victims of trauma. After all, trauma is what happens to people who endure terrible things like war, genocide, rape, or physical abuse—not to people like us, whose suffering seems small in comparison. But suffering is suffering, and pain is pain. And it doesn’t do any good for you, me, or anyone else to push away, minimize, or rationalize pain, or to live in denial when pain continues to affect every relationship in our lives, whether we want to admit it or not.

Trauma and pain can come from enduring spankings or beatings from an enraged parent; living with inappropriate glances or comments from a father, uncle, or older brother; or from being raised with the caustic comments and behaviors from an alcoholic parent or a parent who was raised by an alcoholic and never dealt with the effects of the abuse. Trauma and pain can also come from things beyond a parent’s control like bullying, moving, or switching to a new school or church, losing a beloved pet, or even sustaining a non-life-threatening injury.

Many of us are living with broken attachment, no matter how hard we've tried to remain securely attached. Our parents may have done their best, but we all grew up and entered a pain-filled, sin-cursed world where—regardless of age, race, social status, intellect, abilities, or socio-economic status—everyone encounters some form of trauma or pain. At some point in our lives, we will have to do the work needed to move from a place of insecure to secure attachment. This work of moving from insecure to secure is vital because the effects of an insecure attachment send ripple waves through our physical, mental, spiritual, and social well-being for the rest of our lives.

Parents can love, want the very best for, and provide for their children, but if they were insecurely attached to their own parents or caretakers, they cannot securely attach to their own children unless they have not done the hard and necessary work of healing. If secure attachment is broken, you can move to a place of security if you are willing change and seek healing.

Because of time, financial, or even emotional constraints in their own lives, not all people choose to make this journey or even know it's possible to heal attachment. When I started to learn about attachment patterns and how they affected other relationships in my life, my relationship with my children and the fact that I could not attach to them like I wanted to made sense. My insecurity in relationships and inability to trust that I was really loved and secure made sense. My relationship with my God and why I was unable to receive—I mean really receive—His steadfast love and support made sense. My ability

to memorize Scripture and know it intellectually but not be able to live it out emotionally made sense.

Finally, I was able to look around at the wreckage and ruins in my life and understand where the devastation started. I was holding the keys to understanding the wreckage and knowing the path toward healing for the very first time.

The first work we must do in the movement from insecure to secure attachment is actually not an action; it's receiving a work that has already been done on our behalf. Each of us must receive the work of salvation Jesus Christ accomplished for us through His cross and resurrection. Each one of us must admit that "we were dead in our trespasses" but God "made us alive together with Christ" (Ephesians 2:5). Through His death we die to our sin, and through His resurrection we are raised to new life. Through Christ, we are adopted into the family of God, and our salvation is secure. But this is where our work begins. We must "work out [our] own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure" (Philippians 2:12–13). So, whose work is it to move to a place of secure attachment with our heavenly Father—our or God's? The answer is both. But God stands ready, willing, and waiting to do His part. The choice is ours. We can choose to stay insecurely attached—secure in our salvation but acting as orphans without a secure home or a good father—or we can do the hard work of moving out of our orphan mentality and moving toward God on a day-by-day, decision-by-decision basis.

Understand this: Healing is optional. You do not have to

do it. But if you decide to heal, the journey might be painful, and it probably will not be pretty.

A friend shared with me about her mother who had knee surgery. For weeks after, she dealt with what is often a painful recovery. There is major swelling; the knee must be iced multiple times a day for weeks. The pain is so intense the need for relief is pressing—but doctors are careful not to prescribe anything too addictive. Infection is a concern. This woman even had to sleep in a recliner because her bed was too uncomfortable. In time, she healed, although there is still a prominent scar where doctors operated. Healing your attachment might be like recovering from surgery. But healing is for your good and the good of people closest to you—even if the process is painful, uncomfortable, and disruptive. When you reach a crossroads in the journey of your life, you must choose to take a hard turn toward the path of secure attachment if you want to rebuild what has been destroyed.

The journey toward healing and secure attachment might be even more difficult if one or both of your parents is deceased or unknown or if healthy boundaries hinder you from having a close relationship with them. But hear me on this: the move from insecure toward secure attachment is not reserved just for those whose parents are still living or who are able to reconcile. Secure attachment is available for everyone who has called on Jesus's name for salvation and received Him as Lord (Romans 10:13).

Your healing is not dependent on your parents' presence, willingness, or availability to help you toward healing.

It is dependent on your heavenly Father's willingness to help you remember your past and to forgive your sin; to help you forgive your parents or others who have sinned against you; to heal your pain; and to help you securely attach to, trust, and obey Him in the present. He knows the only heart you can work on and change is your own, and He stands ready and waiting to help you in that process (Psalm 27:7–10; Isaiah 30:15–18; Jeremiah 31:18–20).

But if you are anything like me, you might not want to try because you do not like to fail. You do not like to mess up. When I started my healing journey, I felt like I was going to start the whole adoption process by failing. I knew I could not afford to not work through all the pain from my past, finish up all the adoption paperwork, homeschool my three girls, and be the securely attached person I knew I needed to be by the time we were supposed to bring Mia Grace home.

Honestly, I did fail. I was right—adoption did not bring out the best in me. It brought out the worst. For the first two years Mia Grace was home with us, I was anxious and depressed to a degree I did not even know was possible. But my failure and awareness of mine and my daughter's brokenness were what brought me to the point of being willing to do anything to remember, restore, and rebuild. If I had not plunged so far off the cliff, I would never have so intentionally sought the healing I needed. But healing did not come overnight for Mia Grace or for me. Healing came bit by bit. Morning by morning. Step by step. Day by day. Prayer by prayer. Counseling session by counseling session.

No matter *how* you were attached to your primary caretakers—securely, insecurely, dismissively, or avoidantly—something called *earned secure attachment* is available to anyone willing to do the work necessary to get there. We will spend the remainder of this book talking about what earned secure attachment is and how you can have it, too. But for now, know that your ability to securely attach is not a lost cause. This is not a behavior that can never be unlearned.

So, praise God for His redeeming gift of earned secure attachment. Praise Him that there is no wound trauma can give, no hurt Satan can inflict, and no pain sin can incur, that God cannot undo, restore, rebuild, and even redeem. We just have to trust Him enough to be willing to take the journey.

REMEMBER

Review the questions from my introduction. Do any of them apply to you? If so, briefly describe how.

RESTORE

From the brief introduction to attachment, do you have reason to believe you are insecurely attached? If so, what about your life makes you think that?

REBUILD

What are the goals you hope to accomplish throughout, or by finishing, this book?

Consider committing this verse to memory:

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

He makes me lie down in green pastures.

He leads me beside still waters.

He restores my soul.

He leads me in paths of righteousness

for his name's sake.

—Psalm 23:1–3