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FOREWORD BY ROBERT STEARNS

GOD CAN YOU LOVE ME?



even when
i can't
love you?



CHRYSYAL HANSEN

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GOD, CAN YOU
LOVE ME?

even when
i can't
love you?

CHRYSTAL HANSEN

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THIS BOOK IS LOVINGLY DEDICATED TO:

My mom and dad, Walt and Dolores Grieb.

I am forever grateful for your extraordinary care and love for me throughout my life. Thanks, Daddy, for your amazing heart of love, nurture, and tenderness. I can never repay you and I will always be grateful. You showed the love of Christ through your fathering. And thanks Mom, you are the one who faithfully modeled and taught me utter dependency on the heavenly Father. Your example kept me tethered to Christ through my journey. Your loving prayers still ring in my heart today.

And to:

My beloved and supportive husband, Ken.

Though we would have chosen another path for our lives, God saw fit to walk us down this one. Honey, I couldn't have made it through this journey without you. For you have lived a life of character, integrity, and faithfulness being completely committed to the destiny of our lives. I love you more than ever.

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FOREWORD

IN 1996, I WENT FOR THE FIRST TIME to minister at the church of my friend, Ken Hansen, who I had known since we were both in youth group together in Buffalo, New York. After the services, we went back to his home, where I would be staying for the weekend. I distinctly remember that evening, meeting Chrystal for the first time, when she was in the midst of the darkest days of her life—which you will read about in this book. She was withdrawn, noncommunicative, and I remember just sensing that she was in incredible despair.

To see Chrystal today, strong, confident, centered in Christ, and fully embracing her life and calling in God, is to see a miracle.

I have been a personal witness of the truth of which you are about to read in this amazing book. I have seen firsthand not only the miracle that God has worked in Chrystal's life, but the effect of powerful

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principles that she learned through this remarkable journey that she now shares with so many in the Body of Christ.

There is much that is available to us through the life and love of Christ, but so often, we do not access the fullness of the healing and restoration made available to us. Too often, our healing remains “potential,” rather than something we walk in. In this book, Chrystal shares from the authority of her own testimony not only what God did for her, but proven, balanced, scriptural strategies of how God’s Word can make a powerful difference for you.

On a regular basis, our ministry invites Chrystal and her ministry team to come and teach the principles in this book to our staff. We have all personally benefited from the anointing that rests on Chrystal’s life to “heal the brokenhearted, and proclaim liberty to the captives.”

Chrystal’s message is powerful because it immediately brings a sense of purpose and hope to the hearer, but it also requires those who desire transformation and healing to walk out the reality of what it means to come into maturity in Christ. This is not an “instant fix” manual, but rather, a genuine pathway to transformation that can begin today, with tools that can be walked out for the journey of life.

The book you hold in your hand is the testimony of a life that has been dramatically and powerfully transformed, and it shares the keys that can bring that same change into your life, or the life of someone you love.

In His Grace,
Dr. Robert Stearns
Executive Director, Eagles Wings
New York

INTRODUCTION

AN AMAZING ADVENTURE
WITH GOD

IN THE SUMMER OF 1996, my husband, Ken, and I saw our world come crashing down around us as I was overtaken by severe depression and an inability to cope with the pressures of life and ministry. Together, we sought professional help from a psychiatrist and a psychologist, and I was eventually diagnosed with bipolar disorder. Though treated with numerous antidepressant medications, I continued to experience rapid high and low emotional cycles, along with alarming psychotic episodes. Ken and I continually sought God's healing for the unexplained pain lodged in my heart.

“To live again” became the cry of my heart. As I battled with mental illness, God surprised me and gave me so much more than my life back. He miraculously restored my mind and brought healing to my

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wounded and broken heart. I pray that sharing my journey back from severe mental illness will offer a message of hope for the hurting and the desperate. And to the many friends and family members who walk alongside of those suffering, be assured and filled with hope that God still performs miracles today.

Have you ever felt frustrated or overwhelmed? Have you ever lost the will to go on? Reading about my journey will inspire and encourage you to move forward, one day at a time. God has given me a passion to help others experience the miraculous transforming power of Christ.

Over the past decade, I have been focused on developing teachings and curriculums for small groups, helping individuals journey through their inner struggles of brokenness and shattered dreams into a thriving relationship with Christ. It is a process and a lifelong journey in God, but when you sense His healing hand and restorative power in your heart, you will find that the journey is an amazing adventure with God.

Only You

*There's a fog all around
There's a dew on the ground
There's a coldness in the air
Filled with anguish and despair*

*I have nowhere to run
I have nowhere to hide
I have no one left to see
my desperation inside*

*I need the Light of the world
I need the dawn of a new day*

An Amazing Adventure With God

*I need the opening of a door
I need the path of a new way*

*It's all in You
It's all up to You*

*Take me on a journey to find myself
To find who I was meant to be
To find who You designed me to be*

*Take me on a journey;
To the core of my being
To the depths of my soul
To the innermost places of my heart*

*Only You know what will be found and discovered
Only You know what will be overturned and made new
Only You know, Only You*

*Only You can open the recesses of my soul
Only You can navigate the path
Only You can excavate the soil of my heart
Only You can, Only You*

*Take me on a journey
Take me to find You
Take me on a journey
To find Only You.*

—Chrystal Hansen, 2005

CHAPTER I

TO LIVE AGAIN

“DADDY, COME HOME QUICK,” the young voice pleaded on the other end of the phone. “Mommy is sick!”

My husband, Ken, rushed home to find me curled up in the fetal position, sobbing hysterically in the middle of the kitchen floor. Our children were encircled around me, almost as if to protect their mommy until daddy could get there and take over. Our seven-year-old son was praying for me; our five-year-old daughter was stroking my hair and telling me everything was going to be alright; while our two-year-old looked on with eyes the size of saucers. Unable to gain control of my flood of emotions, all I could do was cry out, “I just want to live again!”

The full mental breakdown that I experienced in the summer of 1996 could be compared to when your computer locks up and although

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you keep typing in the data, the computer won't read it. You wonder what has gone wrong and why the information you're entering isn't being processed the way it's supposed to be. No matter what you do, you can't figure out where the connection broke or how to fix the problem. Then a frustrating message begins flashing across the screen: "Error... cannot compute."

I had always tried to be very in control, able to accomplish whatever goals I set out to achieve. When the dam broke that day in the middle of my kitchen floor, I could no longer figure out what I needed to do to get through the day. Things went from bad to worse as I began to experience severe anxiety attacks. Overwhelming waves of panic and fear literally froze me in that moment in time. Those powerful emotions would paralyze me. After the emotions played themselves out, my rational mind would return, just enough to get me through the anxiety attack.

For a period of time, up to 2½ hours, I would be trapped in a vicious circle of unrestrained panic until the cycle played itself out. I didn't know what might trigger an attack or how to shut it off once it started. If I was at church and I started hyperventilating and crying, friends or staff would take me to a back room where my emotions could play themselves out. I remember feeling like a spectator, watching as one part of me tried to focus on what was happening, while the other half of my brain fought against the wave of panic. The other part of me seemed to realize I had absolutely no control over what was happening and just gave up as the tidal wave of emotions totally engulfed me.

I never knew when one of these attacks would happen. I lived in fear of embarrassing my husband in public or of not being able to take care of my three small children. What if this happened when I was driving the car or in the grocery store? These waves of panic started to come more and more frequently, and I began to slip farther and farther away from any kind of normality.

To Live Again

Brain Shutdown

Like many people, I had a daily routine. As my condition worsened, I found I was unable to perform even the simplest everyday tasks. My mind gradually shut down and I no longer knew what I should do first. Without being able to initiate certain sequences, routine tasks, like brushing my teeth, became impossible to complete. I would pick up my toothbrush and stand at the sink for an hour, trying to figure out what to do next. Although I had done that task thousands of times before, I could not process my thoughts into actions.

On one occasion, when I wanted to fix lunch for my kids, I pulled out a box of macaroni and reached for the pan. I looked back and forth between the two items I held in my hands. I knew I'd made it before, but I couldn't pull from my memory banks the actual steps I needed to take in order to accomplish it. I could not remember what to do first. Should I put water in the pan or dump the contents of the box in first? Struggling to do this simple task triggered an anxiety attack. This task was not new to me. Why couldn't I access the information needed to do this simple task?

When it got so bad that I could not remember how to dress myself, I knew I was in big trouble. I was already on medication and working through some of the issues that had surfaced in previous counseling sessions. I could no longer access the information I needed to function in life. I could see events happening all around me but could not clear the fog in my brain enough to participate.

(I have been told by friends and family that during that period I spent a lot of time staring off into space.)

I would awaken in the morning, sit on the edge of the bed, look at myself in the mirror, and wonder what I was supposed to do next.

GOD CAN YOU LOVE ME

No logical progression of thoughts would come. My husband would be there to get the kids off to school. He helped me get dressed, fixed my breakfast, and told me to lie on the couch until he came home at lunch time. Friends showed up during the day to check on me, knowing I couldn't care for myself.

“Detachments of reality” began. People would be talking to me, I could see their lips moving, but I could not understand what they were saying. This triggered more anxiety attacks. I became even more afraid to talk to people. Living any kind of normal life seemed to be slipping farther and farther out of my reach, with no apparent way to stop this journey to nowhere.

I have since learned that this condition is what professionals refer to as Depersonalization Disorder. It is characterized by a feeling of detachment from, or being an outside observer of, one's mental processes or body. The sensation is like being in a dream. The phenomenon causes distress or impairs work, social, or personal functioning.¹

At the time all I knew was the struggle to stay alive. I was on every antidepressant drug available from Lithium to Effexor. My doctors tried every combination imaginable to find something to get me to function normally. Nothing worked for any length of time. At one point they recommended hospitalization, but my husband was afraid that if I went in, I might never come out. He did everything he could to keep me safe, while he continued to pastor our church and care for our children.

Support of the Church

It came to the point where the doctors told my husband that I had to completely drop all of my responsibilities at the church for several

To Live Again

months or be admitted to the hospital. We were told that I was in no condition to function as a pastor's wife and that it was adding stress to my already fragile mental stability. I sadly watched as everything I had worked to achieve all my life slipped out of my hands. I could no longer function normally as a wife and mother, and now my ability to serve God was slipping away as well.

My husband got up before our congregation the first Sunday that I was gone and gave them some very basic information as to why I was not there. He explained that I was struggling with what we thought was clinical depression and that, per doctor's orders, I needed three months off to rest. He asked them not to call but encouraged them to send cards and especially to pray for our family as we walked this out. We were very surprised at the support we received from every parishioner in the church. One by one they assured my husband they would pray for us. I cried when Ken shared their response, "Tell her to take as much time as she needs. We just want her to get well."

On good days, I would try to be as "normal" as possible and do things like go to the grocery store. But if I saw somebody from the church I would panic, thinking I would have to explain why I was well enough to get groceries but not able to attend church on Sunday. Instead of disapproval, they always gave me an encouraging smile and a gentle hello. One dear elderly couple from the church met me in the grocery aisle one day. As I came toward them they gave me a very simple greeting, then lovingly smiled and said, "We love you, and we want you to get well. So hurry back, but take your time." It was those kinds of comments and the love of all these dear people that actually aided in the process of wholeness for me.

In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul talks about how the support of the church strengthened him during the many trials he faced on his various missionary journeys (see 2 Cor. 8:1-7). I too came to

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realize that the support of the local body of believers has to strengthen the ministers, just as much as the ministers are to strengthen the Body. As we learned more about my illness, we let our loving congregation know what my progress was and asked for their continued prayers and support. I held onto their love and kindness when nothing else in my life made any sense.

A New Year—A New Diagnosis

From August 1996 to January 1997, my treatment was primarily focused on clinical depression. I was prescribed close to 1600 milligrams of drugs per day to get me to a minimal functioning level. I was receiving counseling and was being coached by a spiritual mentor. With all of this therapy, I honestly thought that within a few months of rest I'd be able to put it all behind me and move back into a normal lifestyle.

As we approached the end of the prescribed three-month rest period, I realized that I was in no condition to go back to work or handle normal household responsibilities. I was still experiencing a deep inner sadness, which was now joined with a sense that I was not getting any better. There seemed to be no cure in sight from the daily regimen of medication. I had been looking forward to the New Year, thinking I would be able to resume some of my everyday activities. However, as January 1997 approached, I realized that this was a much bigger problem than I had perceived.

On January 2, 1997, I received some news that pushed me over the edge. I received a phone call telling me that my grandfather had passed away. I was dumbfounded. I knew he had been ill, but my first thought was, *Lord, why now?* I was angry at God for taking my grandfather from