

What others are saying about
Journeys of the Heart-Mary's Story

In this book, Tom shows us practical ways of loving our hearts, how to take our own journey, and hopefully find others with whom we can walk in it together. This is for everyone. All of us have suffered blows to our hearts that leave it limping, paralyzed or even feeling dead. Until Tom, no one had ever shown me what it actually meant to love your self. It is truly life changing.

Terri from Virginia

I wanted to keep reading to see what happened next. The journey is really, really, about the heart . . . everything else is just, well, just everything else. I can now see the dynamics of one person living from the heart and the other living from the head . . . two cars on opposite sides of the road. I look forward to the next book!

Doug from Wisconsin

It is engaging. It draws the reader into a very personal story in a way that is not offensive, yet does not skirt reality and the hard truths. It tells a story that needs to be told, a wake up call to a church that marginalizes the broken. I am glad you are not afraid to rattle some religion and challenge thinking . . .

Sandie from Ohio

I found myself crying a lot . . . After reading certain chapters I found myself asking if I listen to my own heart. Not the ending I expected.

David from Illinois

I love your book. It is awesome. In fact I did not want it to end. I would love to give the book to several people I know and I don't feel that way very often about a book. In fact, I don't read books very often any more, but this book is different. It brings the reader into contact with their own heart. How wonderful is that! The reader can go on a journey right then and there, many times over, as they read the chapters. Even though this book is about a sexual abuse victim, this book is for everyone. Can't say enough good about it.

Marlene from Virginia

I read it straight through. It kept my attention the whole time and that is hard for me to do. I was heartbroken for Mary when the parts of her heart were showing her what she had experienced as a pre-teen and as a teenager. Through her healing journey this proves the power of love: the parts of our heart being seen, heard, and accepted.

Shannon from Tennessee

This book placed me right there in the living room with Mary and the team. The gentle, relational descriptions of the healing process, even spoke to traumatized places in my own heart. I am so encouraged to see in print and hear the walking out of an approach with such transforming potential, for those of us with abuse backgrounds.

I thank God for revealing a remedy for our brokenness which is all at once, simplistic, effective, and respectful.

Matthew from North Carolina

This book takes a look at the immense power of love that can heal even the worst wounds. It spotlights a method that uses gentle guidance as a way of listening to one's heart, finding a way to heal the soul, and move on with a happier, fuller life.

MaryAnne from Illinois

Thank you so much for writing *Journeys of the Heart Mary's Story*. Although I never experienced the specific abuses Mary did, the story was no less relevant to my own heart. The idea of head knowledge versus heart knowledge is so simple, yet profound. It produced a paradigm shift in the way I approach myself and others.

The book was informative, but what amazed me while reading it was the increased awareness of my own heart's cry to be seen, heard, and affirmed. The hidden parts of my heart were happy to open up when my objective was to know, love, and honor them, versus fix them.

Tom – I could go on forever, but thank you for this book. I do not know if this is “the fixer” in me, but I want to get it in as many hands as I can. What I love about this book is that it will enable people to journey with their own heart.

John from Colorado



Journeys of the Heart

Mary's Story

Tom Gale



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This book is a work of fiction. Its contents are inspired, however, by the many courageous women whom I have been privileged to walk with over the years in their journeys of restoration and wholeness. All names and places have been changed to protect their identities.

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*This book is dedicated to all of those
who are already on the journey of the heart
and to those who will hopefully join in some day.*

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Foreword

What an adventure it has been writing this book. I sensed Papa telling me I was going to write a book, but that was two years ago. He gave me the overall theme of the book in a question form, “*What does it look like to love ourselves?*” Over the next 18 months, He had me set it aside so that He could work on my writing skills, a work which was desperately needed. He showed me how to communicate the language of the heart through words on paper with whom I walked.

It was on Jan 31 of this year when Papa sat down with me in front of my computer and said, “Let’s start writing.” The *Introduction* flowed easily and each chapter’s title was strategically laid out. For 17 days, I sat down for four to six hours and wrote. By February 17, I had the rough draft done. It had been quite effortless.

I’m still shocked and amazed at how quickly the words flowed. I literally had no idea what I was going to write from one day to the next. I sat down at my computer and told Papa, “You bring to mind the stories I am to record in this book.” Well, He did, and you now hold in your hands the final proof.

May this book give a voice to the countless number of abuse survivors and their stories. I trust it will also bring hope to all of us regarding *the journey of the heart*.

Introduction

Mary came to meet with me several years ago. Like most women I have walked with over the past 20 years, Mary's journey had a terrible beginning as a little girl, one filled with sexual abuse by her dad. How sad for Mary. I wish her story wasn't so common in our culture.

Mary is in her mid 30's, married since she was 18 to her childhood sweetheart, Dan, who is a successful business executive. She is the mother of two daughters, Crystal, age 15, and Anna, age 13.

Mary's heart has been shattered because of her childhood trauma. Often she hears her heart crying out, "What's wrong with me? Will anyone love me? Why did Daddy do these things to me? Am I bad? Why didn't I tell someone? Why didn't I stop him? Where was God in those many dark, lonely nights, in my bedroom as a child and teenager? Does He even love me?" She's not the only one with brokenness in her heart.

Even though on the outside Mary smiles a lot, on the inside she isn't smiling. She feels ugly, dirty, used and somehow responsible for the abuse. She hasn't told anyone in her family about what happened to her as a girl. Her dad is still alive and is a well-respected pastor of a local church in their community. She doesn't think anyone would believe her anyway. Her husband doesn't know about her abuse either.

Mary tells me how she hates herself. She hates the way God created her. She hates everything about her body, even though if you asked anybody around her, they would say she's a very attractive woman.

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Mary's having a hard time now as an adult keeping it together emotionally. It's like the lid has come off and the painful past is oozing out everywhere. She's having flashbacks of the abuse, often during the day, and night terrors as she sleeps. She frequently awakens in the middle of the night, screaming and shaking all over, yelling out, "Stop! Stop it! You're hurting me!" Dan doesn't know what to do. He feels helpless.

Her smile in public is strained and certain friends can see it. When they ask if she's ok, she smiles and shrugs them off with some simple excuse like "I'm tired" or "It's been a long week."

Mary is tired, very tired, especially emotionally. To have her heart ripped apart by abuse, with a counterfeit love, betrayal, such confusion . . . She has never really known who she is as a person or who God created her to be as His daughter. She has become whatever people have expected of her. She wears many hats, not only at home, but at school, church gatherings, and her husband's social functions. Many would call Mary a great servant of others, so selfless, yet she feels like a slave, invisible and worthless.

Mary tells me she'd rather be dead than to go on living anymore. She can't hold life together.

Is there hope for Mary? Yes! There is also hope for Dan and there is hope for this family. There is hope for each and every one of us to live a life where our heart is knitted back together, made whole once again, filled with love from ourselves, love from others, and love from God. Until we can truly love ourselves, we won't be able to love others well.

In this book, we will follow *Mary's Story*, the

journey of her heart, to see what loving her heart looks like.

Maybe you have a Mary in your life. Maybe your story is like Mary's. I hope not. You don't have to have an abusive background to relate to what will unfold in this book. Each of our hearts will resonate with Mary's as we journey together. We really are not that much different from one another.

Are you willing to quiet yourself, look inside your own heart, and listen to whatever it may want to communicate to you as you read this book?

I hope so.

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The Phone Call

It was a Wednesday morning around 9 am when my phone rang at home. I answered, “Hello.” At first there was silence. I thought, “Great, another computer generated sales call.” You know the type of call I’m talking about, where there’s this long pause and then someone finally answers, “Is this so and so?”

I was just ready to hang up when I heard a really soft voice say, “Hello.”

“Yes, this is Tom. Who am I speaking with?” Again another pause and then I hear, “Is this Tom?”

“Yes, this is Tom. And who is this?”

“My name is Mary. I got your number from a friend, Shannon Henderson.”

“Oh yes, Shannon. She is such a sweet, young lady. How do you know each other?”

“Shannon and I went to college together, and she thought you might be able to help me,” Mary continued in her very soft tone.

I am used to getting these types of calls. God only knows why, but for the past 20 years He has had me walking alongside women who have come out of severe abuse backgrounds, mainly sexual abuse.

I am not a counselor or therapist. I have no college degree in Psychology, or in anything for that matter. Vocationally, I’ve been working for large printing companies servicing bookbinding machinery

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for the past 16 years. You might be asking the question, "Then how did you get involved with women coming out of trauma backgrounds?"

Good question. I've often wondered that myself. Well, I didn't sign up for it, nor did I seek them out in any way. Papa, that's who I like to refer to God as, just started bringing these women across my path. As I would meet with them, they would start sharing their stories with me. Low and behold, there was a common theme in those stories, sexual abuse. I was pretty ignorant on the subject but I figured there isn't any pain or struggle in this life that Papa can't help us with. So, typically after one of these ladies would share something of their story with me, I'd start asking Papa a lot of questions.

I asked the common "why" type questions to Papa. "How could You allow these things to happen to Your children? Why did You have her born into such an evil family? Her dad is the pastor of the local church; that is so wrong." And the list goes on and on.

These ladies' lives were shattered by the abuse they had experienced, often over a period of many years. For a lot of them, their trauma was so severe that their minds had kept the truth hidden from them often until they were in their mid-30's or older.

Probably, the hardest thing I had to face was the stark reality that it didn't matter what type of home they were raised in. Abuse has no socio-economic boundaries. It has no boundaries if a family is religious or non-religious. Race and sexual orientation were insignificant. Moms and dads, grandparents, aunts, uncles, siblings, cousins, family friends, neighbors, coworkers, teachers,

pastors, community leaders . . . it just didn't matter when it came to who did the abuse. Rarely was it a total stranger.

I told Papa I would walk with these women as He would lead me. I had great freedom with my job since I was my own boss and controlled the schedule. I'd do a machine project for a few days or a few weeks and then when I was back at my home, I would meet with a woman for a few hours or a few days to listen to her story. I also traveled all over the country meeting some women too. Oh, did I tell you? I didn't meet with these women alone. I always had another woman teaming up with me. Over the years, there were several who would join me as their schedules allowed. I learned early on that, for all of us, we need healthy male and female relationships in our lives. Especially for women who have been violated by a man, to have a safe man in their life again was a huge step of healing in their journey. I was often privileged to become that first safe man for them.

Many times a woman would bring a close friend or a spouse to sit in with us. Again, Papa had His reasons, but over the next 20 years, the vast majority of women I walked alongside were from out-of-state and either I would be in their city or they would come to my town. We often met for several days at a time, and boy did Papa bring a lot of wholeness to these ladies' shattered hearts. He sure loves us!

Enough about me, though; back to Mary's story. After answering her call and finding our common connection was Shannon, I asked, "What can I do for you, Mary?"

"I'm not sure how to say this, but I am falling apart emotionally, and there just isn't any reason I

should be feeling the things I am feeling. I can be out in the garden watering the plants and I just start crying. I can be watching a TV show and find myself feeling so angry like I want to just kill the person on the screen. I often then take my anger out on my family and have to go back and apologize later.”

“So when did you notice your emotions start to escalate outwardly?” I asked gently.

“I’m not sure. I don’t see myself as that emotional a person compared to most other women I know. In high school and college I was pretty shutdown emotionally, especially towards guys. I didn’t date at all in high school except for my husband, who I met my senior year. I don’t like talking about this. I’m starting to feel some things coming up. I need to go. Bye,” as she abruptly hung up on me.

I could tell by what Mary shared with me that her heart was trying to tell me something. Mary’s adult mind, though, was uncomfortable being vulnerable with me. That’s not uncommon, since we had yet to meet face to face. I knew when Mary was ready she would probably call again.

Almost two months went by before I received that next contact from Mary. This time, I was unavailable to take her call because I was out-of-town on a job fixing a machine. She left a voicemail which said, “Tom, this is Mary. I called you two months ago, and we talked briefly about me but I got very uncomfortable and basically hung up on you. I’m sorry. I hope you will listen to the rest of this message. Life has continued to disintegrate for me. The emotions are leaking out more and more, and I hate it. I’ve been to my therapist, and he increased all my meds to higher dosages, but nothing seems to

be helping. I've been in touch with Shannon some, and she encouraged me to talk with you again. She said that you have been walking with her and her many struggles for the past two years. I feel a little safer talking to you knowing that."

Mary's voicemail continued, "I asked Shannon if you had an email address. She said yes and gave it to me. I am sending you an email that expresses what I am currently feeling and thinking. It's from my diary. I think it will be easier to share these things in an email than on the phone. After reading it, if you don't think I'm some wackjob, please let me know when we might talk again. Thank you."

That night after dinner, as I got back to my hotel, I flipped open my laptop to find Mary's email. Here is what she wrote about herself from her journal entry last month,

I am Dead Inside

She's lying in bed tonight watching the stars. The clouds of the storm before hide most of them. She is unable to sleep this night, wondering about the past and maybe a little about the present and future. She heard it said plenty of times before that a person's past, shapes his/her future. Maybe it's true. Maybe it isn't. Maybe a person doesn't always notice. Or maybe it makes a person die.

She certainly knows about the heaven or hell concept, and mostly believes it. She mostly believes in God, sometimes in Satan too. Tonight she feels completely lost and desolate and in the fourth category . . . dead. She tries to capture the exact date and time of her death. She tries to remember what dying felt like. She tries to remember what happened. So many years of her life are just missing - lost in translation. Here and

there a face comes to mind. Here and there a word comes to mind. It is always just ghost images of a past forgotten, or maybe of a past that never was.

She once read of a little mermaid who dreamed of becoming a real woman. A sea witch granted her request, but with the understanding she should find true love within three days. She never did. As a result of failing at finding love, she had to hand over her soul to the sea witch and was sentenced to an underwater eternity without her soul. Thinking about this story would have brought tears to her eyes if she could cry. However, falling in the category of deceased-without-knowing, she can't cry.

She thinks about the church service she went to the previous day. How do you serve God all your life and feel you don't know Him at all? She read the entire Book of Genesis and some of Exodus today, and still feels estranged from God, hopelessly estranged. Light years removed from His heart. Maybe she died and went to hell? Maybe not. It would explain a few things though.

She saw someone from her past. She walked out. She wouldn't have talked about the past. She wouldn't have reminisced. She wouldn't have pretended to remember. There is nothing to remember. Something killed her heart, soul, body, mind and spirit and she is painfully ashamed of the fact that what happened in the past is split into components of space, into chambers of blackness, of nothingness, of death and non-existence.

There is an invisible line she can not cross. An invisible line keeping her at arms length, if not more from even her Creator Himself. Every black hole of her past, every buried trace of remembrance, every twisted thought of anger against an unknown foe - it all leads back to the

candles, the coldness, the evil. She has no idea why she feels this way, but she feels that she died. She will always feel dead, bruised without falling, broken without force and deeply disturbed without reason.

She feels lost as she tries to count the stars tonight, trying to hear the sounds of being alive, to smell the fresh air outside, but she whispers again into the nothingness around her, "Goodnight cold, cruel world." Will anything ever matter again?

I sat back in my chair with a flood of emotions welling up inside me as I read this. Mary had just expressed what so many abuse survivors do so well, their heart's cry.

It never ceases to amaze me how abuse survivors' words on paper can so clearly articulate the many mixed and often contradictory emotions swirling around within them at any given time. Mary's note was just that. She thought they were only expressions of feeling "dead." Yet, did you see how alive she really is from reading her note? I saw someone with such raw emotion, such expression, even though pain was blinking like a neon sign behind her every word. Life is full of pain and joy. Mary just isn't feeling much joy yet.

People often ask me how I can handle hearing such stories of abuse, such deep pain, such brokenness. I tell them it's only because I get to see such transformation in these women's lives. Don't hear me wrong. It's not a cakewalk alongside these women, but Papa gives me everything I need. I often cry right along with them as their tears well up and spill down their cheeks. I often find myself grabbing for a tissue as I pass the box around to everyone else present in the room. I often at times just sit next to

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them, holding their hand or putting my arm around them as we sit together in silence.

Mary's email to me is the cry of a broken girl, a broken woman, who doesn't know what to do about her brokenness. She has taken the first step. She's asking for help. She can't do this on her own anymore.

As I sat looking at my laptop with her email on the screen in front of me, I told Papa, "Thanks for bringing Mary into my life."

I hit the reply button and sent Mary a quick note back,

Dear Mary, Thanks for being so honest, so transparent, and so vulnerable with me in your email. Your words were the cry of a shattered heart, words I have heard many times from so many others. I would love the opportunity to meet with you as soon as our schedules permit. I will be back in town next Saturday. Give me a call later that day at the number below and we can set up a time to meet. There is hope, Mary. Life can get better. I know you may doubt that currently because of what you're feeling, but I have seen many women's lives transformed right before me over time.

See you next week! Kind regards, Tom

I finished up my work project over the next several days, packed my bags, and headed home Saturday. Just like clockwork, Mary called that evening.

"Tom, this is Mary. I promise I will try not cutting our call short like last time. I was just overwhelmed.

Everything I'm feeling is still so new to me and I hate it."

"I understand, Mary. You are hurting. Much is happening right now in your life, and there are a lot of confused and fearful feelings you're wrestling with. I'm used to these challenges. There is great grace extended from my heart to yours. What does your schedule look like for next week?" I asked her.

"The kids are in school each day, so anytime after 8 am and before 3:30 pm will work. Tuesday, I help tutor in my daughter's class, but any other day will work fine."

Mary's voice was lightening up with me. She seemed a little more upbeat about meeting, but I knew that could change in an instant.

"How about next Friday at 9 am? Could you meet at my home?"

"Is it just you that I would be meeting with?" Mary asked hesitantly.

"No, I always have another lady present with me. Do you have a friend you could invite or would you like me to bring someone to be here with us?"

"No one knows what I am really going through. I haven't told anyone anything, not even my husband. Shannon knows I'm struggling, but she's 250 miles away. Could you get someone to meet with us, Tom?"

"Sure, Mary. I'll call Sandy. I'm sure she would love to join with us. Let's plan on her."

"How long do we meet for?" Mary asked somewhat nervously.

"Typically, I block out two to three hours, but there are no hard and fast rules. When we get together, we'll see how things progress and you will always have the choice to say, 'That's enough for

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today.' Even if after 15 minutes you want to leave, that's okay."

"Oh, I would never do that to you and Sandy. That would be mean. I've been in therapy for several years and had 45-minute time slots. What are we going to do for two to three hours?" she asked somewhat fearfully.

"That's a fair question, Mary. You will come to find out our approach isn't like most talk therapy. I'm not going to ask you 25+ questions about your childhood. We won't need you to actually tell us much of anything about the past, only what you're comfortable sharing.

"Talk therapy is about trying to figure out what's wrong, list the symptoms, come up with a diagnosis, label the person, and then come up with a treatment plan. That's what I call living from your head. We have surrendered to knowledge and understanding as the solution to every problem. If we just study something long and hard enough, we'll come up with an answer, usually a formula for modifying certain behaviors. Okay, maybe I'm exaggerating a little, but I don't want you to become dependent on me.

"We are all about restoring a healthy relationship with yourself. That is living from your heart. Our only goal is to come alongside you as a friend on the journey and love you. We do that by listening to what your heart is saying to you and to us. We will share with you our hearts' replies. You've already shared enough for me to know your heart is shattered and screaming out to be heard. Your emotions are the signpost, the language of your heart trying to communicate to you.

"We will help you listen to your heart and,

hopefully, you will desire to reach out and love your own heart. It's all about loving yourself, Mary. The love that you, as the adult, are willing to show all the hurting parts of your heart will bring the wholeness and healing you seek."

"Okay, I'm not sure if I understand what you are saying, but I'm willing to give it a shot. Shannon says you have been such a help to her and her family."

Mary seemed somewhat upbeat again. We'll see if she makes it until next Friday.