WOUNDS · THE INTRODUCTION

Wounds

How hurt, heartache, and tragedy become the keys to unlocking greatness. The introduction, in full.

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INTRODUCTION

IN APRIL 2019, I EXPERIENCED WHAT WAS DIAGNOSED AS MY FIRST anxiety attack. Sure, I'd felt anxious before. I'd had dark and lowly days. But something about that day was different. The weeks leading up to that moment weren't the best. I'd lost out on a pretty significant business opportunity that would have paid me very well over the course of the year, and I was walking through a very difficult situ ation with a friend regarding his marriage. Those two challenges were capped off by my most significant stressor: my business. I owned a consulting and coaching practice, and was helping a client redevelop their sales process while also coaching four of their salespeople to exceed revenue goals. This particular client was my largest, with a monthly five-figure contract. And I was on the verge of losing them. When I woke up that day, knowing I would receive a call from my client later in the morning, I went dark. Doubt set in about my true calling, my capabilities, and even my self-worth. I tried to fight through it. I imagined retired Navy SEAL and ultramarathon runner David Goggins telling me to stop being such a little bitch, but it didn't work. It was difficult to drive the three miles to my office, but I had work to do, clients to help. I got through one coaching call…barely. But as I got closer to talking to my client, to losing that contract, my thoughts spiraled. How will my family pay our bills? How quickly will we be right back to 2013, when we lost everything? What will I tell my family? What might other people think? I cannot stomach another failure like this.

I sat in the corner of my office and curled into a ball. My body was shutting down. Physically, I felt the energy was being sucked out of me. Mentally, I had a hard time engaging the logic of what was happening. And spiritually, I cried out to God in what felt like faint whispers. I had one last option in the moment. I called my wife and begged her to pray for me. I told her what was happening and how I was feeling. She prayed on the phone with me, and she continued to pray for me throughout the day. By God's grace, I made it through that day. My wife's prayers, along with God's Spirit, brought comfort to my soul. It also helped that when I got the call from my client later that day, it was only to discuss reconfiguring the execution of our work, not to adjust the fees or cancel the contract. In the days and weeks to follow, through lots of prayer and dis cussion with others close to me, I analyzed what happened to me that day. Was my anxiety attack simply the culmination of too much bad news in a short period of time, or was there something deeper? Because circumstances can trigger events like the one I expe rienced, I realized my anxiety attack was the result of a wound… well, many wounds actually. You see, my stress over the potential loss of the client wasn't the worst thing that had ever happened to me, far from it. The potential loss was simply the emotional

hit that opened up a host of old wounds. The wounds I speak of are not outward, physical cuts, scrapes, or bruises to the body. They are long-held emotional injuries that, when left untreated, fester and worsen over time. Every human being on this earth has been wounded. You picked up this book because you understand that. Wounds deep down inside of you have been bandaged over in hopes that they would just heal on their own. But bandages do nothing for deep wounds created the moment a parent walked out of your life or when a loved one was tragically killed without notice. The self-inflicted wounds from drug and alcohol addiction don't go away just because you wish

they would. And the wounds that come from familiar people and places, like church, seem particularly difficult to forget no matter how hard we try. One might think we would be expertly equipped to deal with wounds, considering the brokenness of this world and the constant afflictions we face. From the time I was young, like many boys, I in curred visible wounds, like deep cuts and broken bones from playing sports and crashing my dirt bike. I was often told to get up, shake it off, tape 'em up, and keep going. This is the norm, especially for boys, isn't it? So, it's no wonder that when the wounds are mental and emotional, as we grow up, we attempt to use the same prescription. I was conditioned to believe I could just dust off the hurt from my parents' divorce, bury the loss when my business nearly failed shortly after its launch, and bulldoze through the death and destruction I witnessed during the Las Vegas mass shooting. "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me" becomes the war cry for most Christians who attempt to try harder and push through trauma. But that doesn't work in the same way as resetting a broken bone. Worse, most emotional wounds are more severe than a broken bone. They are more like a compound fracture of the femur that has blown right through the thigh. And our answer to that mess is to clothe our inner turmoil in a T-shirt with Philippians 4:13 written on it. But we keep bleeding right through that shirt, continuing to writhe in pain. Many look to anything that might take the pain away, turning to self-preservation or self-medication. Some might read another book on grittiness, watch a motivational talk about mindset, or drink until the pain numbs. None of those tactics works in the long term. The wound is left untreated, and every attempt to make the wound disap pear becomes a potential contributor to one's absolute destruction. In my case, as I got older, my wounds got bigger. And the bigger my wounds got, the harder it was to shake them off. I couldn't make them go away. Past wounds came back to haunt me, leading to more

wounds, which were often self-inflicted. My wounds smoldered as I became more stressed, anxious, frustrated, and angry, and I didn't know what to do about it. By the

time I was twenty-eight years old, I felt lost. Though everyone saw a successful man building a life for himself and his family, I was a broken, hollow shell of a human being. Thankfully, that brokenness led me to discover a relationship with God. That relationship did not immediately heal my wounds. In fact, I'd incur some of my deepest wounds after becoming a Christian. Instead, my relationship with God helped to reveal my wounds and give me a process to heal from them. Though I had been a Christian for thirteen years, my anxiety attack in 2019 was the result of defaulting back to self-medication and self-preservation. Before knowing Christ, I used social norms like alcohol, drugs, gambling, and male bravado to mask all of my pain. Leading up to my anxiety attack, I had turned to working harder, ignoring the fact that I couldn't outwork or outrun what was hurting inside. Every one of those tactics only worsened the situations, the wounds, and my overall well-being. After my anxiety attack, reflecting back on my first encounter with Jesus reminded me that I bore my wounds for a reason, two reasons actually. The first was to coax me back into the arms of Jesus, who was always there to comfort and strengthen me. God was reminding me over and over again that I couldn't flourish on my own, I needed Him. The second reason was so God could fur ther open my mind, to show me I could go beyond simply owning my wounds. I learned to address them, grow from them, relate to others through them, and, ultimately, leverage them to discover and hone God's calling on my life so I could achieve the greatness for which He created me. This process became what I call the Wound-Analysis Framework, a series of three steps designed to help me deal with my spiritual and emotional wounds:

1. Acknowledge the hurt. The first step is to identify painful experiences that wounded me. 2. Realize the effect. Next, I accept the emotional impact those experiences have had on me. 3. Unlock the greatness. Finally, I dig into those emotions to mine for lessons I can glean to strengthen myself spiritually, emotionally, mentally, and physically. As I share in this book some of my life's darkest moments, I demonstrate the Wound-Analysis Framework as the tool God gave me to unlock greatness from inside each and every wound I bore. In a decades-long journey to get where I am, I have learned so much and grown immensely. As a performance coach, I have worked with hundreds of ex ecutives and entrepreneurs. This has allowed me to study human behavior, psychology, and how an individual's wounds often hold them back from the success they dream of. As a pastor, I've walked through life with numerous individuals, couples, and families, observing how they experienced and dealt with wounds, as well as establishing how I could best support them during those seasons and ultimately point them to Jesus. As a man who had to grow up too quickly, was often influenced to make

poor choices, and tried every way he could think of to create a great life on his own, I left a trail of wounds that hurt those I loved and cared about the most, myself included. My hope is that by reading this book, you will feel led to take the following actions: First, permit yourself to tap into and share your wounds. Being vulnerable about the events that have hurt you the deepest is not a weakness but rather a strength. Leaning into that strength makes you even stronger.

Second, break out of the prison in which you are living. Emotional prison for most people looks like this: You're bound by shame tied to the ways you have hurt yourself or how others have hurt you. To feel good about yourself, you constantly seek validation from others. You struggle to maintain a good balance of physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health. You want to make God a priority, but you just can't seem to do that consistently. Third, discover your purpose. The process of self-discovery was incredibly fruitful for me, but it wasn't voluntary and often came on the other side of great physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual pain. My hope is that as you acknowledge the hurt, realize its effect, and unlock your greatness, you will enable yourself to live the life for which God created you. It's time to unlock the greatness that's already inside of you!

This is the introduction to *Wounds: How Hurt, Heartache, and Tragedy Become the Keys to Unlocking Greatness* (2023). The whole book is on Amazon in hardcover, paperback, ebook and audiobook: amazon.com. More at ryanjamesmiller.com.