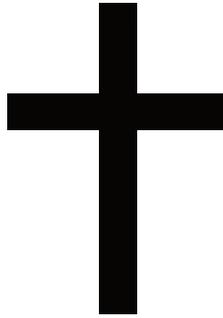


“I Can Recover”

Three Principles to Save Your Own Life



JOHNNY M. CALDWELL JR.

With David Dillard-Wright

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In Celebration of
My wife Celestine L. Caldwell, who epitomizes Proverbs 18:22:
“Who so ever finds a wife,
finds a good thing and obtain favor with the Lord...”
My children Tracy, Elysie, Johnny III and Jason:
Continue your walk with God and He shall direct your path.
My siblings Faye, Stanley, Gregory, Dumont, Angie and Tyrone:
Remember our parents did the best they could.

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PREFACE

Beginning the Journey to Recovery

A church is a hospital for sinners, not a museum for saints.

-Abigail Van Buren

We could learn a lot from crayons; some are sharp, some are pretty, some are dull, while others bright, some have weird names, but they all have learned to live together in the same box.

-Robert Fulghum

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Whether saved or still seeking, everyone will have a wilderness experience of one kind or another, a time of great spiritual, emotional or even physical struggle. We all lose friends and relatives, we all get sick and face death, and we all make poor decisions. For some, addiction to drugs or alcohol has made life no longer worth living. For others, bad money management has led to bills piling higher and higher and debt collectors calling at every hour of the day and night. For some, spousal or child abuse has made every day anxiety and fear riddled. And still, maybe it is infidelity and usury that has left you with a low self-esteem and image. So some experiences may be more extreme than others, but all of them are human experiences, and that's the level where Jesus reaches people.

People often say that in order to recover you must first hit rock bottom. I would tend to agree with that statement, but with some discussion about the "rock" part of the equation. Jesus said to his disciple, Peter, "on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not overcome it." (Matthew 16:18, NIV). By saying that to Peter, Jesus actually praised Peter's faith, for it is this unswerving belief in divine power and grace that actually renders the Church unassailable. Way down in the darkness of the traumatic moments of life, in the midst of the worst difficulties, lies an invisible force, the wellspring of faith that can actually defeat the very forces of evil in the world. Those of you reading this book are seeking to recover yourself or are helping someone to recover. A financial strain may have led you to these pages: you may have a huge burden of debt and bills. You or someone you love may have a problem with drug or alcohol abuse and are desperately trying to find the way to sobriety. Or it could be your community has been fragmented, whether the small community of the family, the larger community of the church or the even larger communities of nations and the world. Our communities can be fragmented by

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many things: harsh and judgmental attitudes, slander and backbiting, grief and loss, enmity and division. In all of these situations, faith provides a place to stand, a starting point for the road ahead. Recovery requires hard work, no doubt, but it must begin with the firm conviction that change will happen, that God helps His children. The future can be different from the past.

To move away from the rock image for awhile, let's think about spiders. Have you ever taken a walk after a rain, only to find your face and hair covered with spider silk? You try in vain to remove it from your hair and skin, but it's pretty hard to do. Spider silk is so fine and light, so subtle, and yet scientists say that the substance is many times stronger than steel. If you could make a strand of it as thick as your pinky finger, it would be strong enough to tow a battleship. Faith is like that; it seems so small and insignificant, but it is powerful enough to lift you out of the greatest difficulties. And think of the spider. Someone disturbs its web, ruining all of its spun lines, but it immediately begins working again, rebuilding over and over. It knows that its web is its livelihood. We must learn to be like a spider, to rebuild after the major and minor catastrophes, to start over again and again. Recovery is not a one-time process; it is the task of a lifetime. Just as Jesus told us to take up our crosses daily (Luke 9:23), we must all make the continual effort to recover from the many hells of the past. Those of us who have been through the wilderness know the debilitating effects of fear and anger. We have lived through hell and come back again, and we emerge stronger than before. We know that nothing can prevail against faith, that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ (Romans 8:35). So, like the spider, we defy gravity by hanging upside down from that slender strand of faith, knowing that it will support us.

Now spiders often work alone, but they come into the world with parents, just like other creatures. They also rely

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on what they have been given to build their webs: a door-frame, a leaf, a twig or almost anything can become the support for an excellent web. A strong web must have many points of support to withstand the wind and the rain. The design of a spider's web allows it to stay in place even if one of the lines breaks. And I want us to keep that web image in mind as we speak and think about recovery. Recovery works in community: we all need support systems in order to make the journey out of darkness and into the light of day. In the dark it can be hard to see, so we all need someone else to help us get our footing, to find the way out. Different strands in the web of supports are outlined throughout *I Can Recover* (you will find a list of resources in the back of this book to help you get started), but it all must start with positive relationships (not the negative ones that caused the problem in the first place). In the Bible, the Church, and many other organizations, you will find the examples you need to make the change that you want.

When the spider begins to build its web, it must first make a leap of faith. It drags a line behind itself and lets the wind carry it, riding the smallest currents of air. It doesn't know where it might land, but it leaps nonetheless. You have made a leap of faith by reading this book, by opening yourself to its message. Please understand that when you make a step toward God, He will in turn make steps toward you. You may have failed in the past, you may have made some steps backward, "but with God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26). This means that we can all begin again, that the strands of the past have been broken and we can move forward in full confidence, placing ourselves in the care and protection of our loving Savior. We can build a new and life-giving web, one of nurturing, care and support, a web that will not fail. We all have a small voice inside, call it conscience or faith or the Holy Spirit, that lets us know whom we can trust, that intuitively points the way to a new future.

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This book will provide some new tools for web-building, and I'm not talking about the World Wide Web! This book speaks to each and every one of us because God's grace knows no bounds. We are all knitted together by a subtle web and we need each other. Regardless of how the wilderness experience arose, the gospels, which mean "good news," communicate the powerful truth that our circumstances can be overcome and that God can and will see us through.

LUKE 15

¹ Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him to hear Him. ² And the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, "This Man receives sinners and eats with them." ³ So He spoke this parable to them, saying:

⁴ "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? ⁵ And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. ⁶ And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!' ⁷ I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance.

⁸ "Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? ⁹ And when she has found it, she calls her friends and neighbors together, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece which I lost!' ¹⁰ Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

¹¹ Then He said: "A certain man had two sons. ¹² And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me.' So he divided to them his livelihood. ¹³ And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living. ¹⁴ But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want. ¹⁵ Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. ¹⁶ And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him anything.

¹⁷ "But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with

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hunger! ¹⁸ I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, ¹⁹ and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.”’

²⁰ “And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. ²¹ And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.’

²² “But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet. ²³ And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry; ²⁴ for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ And they began to be merry.

²⁵ “Now his older son was in the field. And as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶ So he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. ²⁷ And he said to him, ‘Your brother has come, and because he has received him safe and sound, your father has killed the fatted calf.’

²⁸ “But he was angry and would not go in. Therefore his father came out and pleaded with him. ²⁹ So he answered and said to his father, ‘Lo, these many years I have been serving you; I never transgressed your commandment at any time; and yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might make merry with my friends. ³⁰ But as soon as this son of yours came, who has devoured your livelihood with harlots, you killed the fatted calf for him.’

³¹ “And he said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours. ³² It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found.’”

PART ONE: GETTING THE KASH

The best years of your life are the ones in which you decide your problems are your own. You do not blame them on your mother, the ecology, or the president. You realize that you control your own destiny.

-Albert Ellis

We can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we had when we created them.

-Albert Einstein

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I was at a financial conference years ago and the speaker used an acronym that made so much sense to me that I’ve used it ever since: KASH. Each letter pertains to a facet of life that we all need in order to make lasting positive change. Here’s the basic breakdown:

“K” = Knowledge. You must know where you are and how you have gotten there in order to move forward. A map doesn’t do you any good unless you can locate your present position.

“A” = Attitude. The key ingredient to any recovery is a sincere belief that you can change. This positive attitude will get you over the first hurdles – and a good attitude is contagious.

“S” = Skills. We all need to learn the skills needed in order to move forward. These skills may be practical or emotional.

“H” = Habits. Bad habits often result in poor decisions. By cultivating good habits, we are making small steps toward better and more satisfactory life experiences.

We will return to this idea of KASH at the end of each part because I find it to be a helpful acronym when thinking about how to approach life. It’s such a simple yet all-encompassing idea. KASH applies to everything, including this book.

I Can Recover is all about giving you a foundation for finding knowledge, maintaining a positive attitude, learning new skills and forming better habits so that you can live the life that you want. To that end, each part in this book contains knowledge in the form of Scripture and real life testimonies, including my own in the next chapter. Then you will find that, although my own story is not one of sunshine and candy, I believe that it is possible to have a positive outlook on life. This book is written from that standpoint. But attitude and knowledge will only get you so far, and so many of us are from Missouri, the “show me” state. We all want

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to be shown not just told. So, I aim to give you practice at building new skills with the exercises found in each part; you will see that you can be a different person if you just apply yourself, even a little. And *I Can Recover* offers reflections to activate your mind and encourage new habits.

All the KASH you need to start on your way is right here and it's the kind of currency that the more you spend it the wealthier you will become.