

FREE
at
LAST

LARRY HUCH



WHITAKER
HOUSE

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FREE AT LAST: Removing the Past from Your Future
expanded edition

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ISBN-13: 978-0-88368-428-3 • ISBN-10: 0-88368-428-4
Printed in the United States of America
© 2000, 2003, 2004, 2010 by Larry Huch

Whitaker House
1030 Hunt Valley Circle
New Kensington, PA 15068
www.whitakerhouse.com

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Huch, Larry.
Free at last : removing the past from your future / Larry Huch.— Rev. ed. with study guide.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references.
ISBN 0-88368-428-4 (trade pbk. w/ cd insert : alk. paper) 1. Family—Religious life. 2. Blessing and cursing. I. Title.
BV4526.3.H83 2004
248.8'6—dc22
2004013630

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Dedication



To Tiz,
my wife, my friend, my inspiration,
my dream-come-true,
who knew me before
I knew this.



Chapter One

Getting a New Life

I DON'T KNOW if it was the way the cab driver responded, or didn't respond, or just our imaginations, but all of a sudden, something seemed wrong—real wrong.

Just a couple of minutes after we had gotten in the cab, another car had pulled up next to us as we went down the road. They started yelling at our driver, "Stop that cab! Let those gringos out! We will kill them!" They used a few other descriptive words as well. Then they drove on. I was finally realizing what a bad idea this outing had been. We needed to get back up the mountain to my ranch as quickly as possible. We would be safe there.

I was sitting in the backseat of the cab, right behind the driver. Jim was next to me, and Laura was in the front because her Spanish was better than ours. We were somewhere outside the city of Medellín, Colombia. It was almost dark, and those roads grew even more dangerous at night. Still, we thought we would be all right as long as we kept to the main roads where there were more people. But the driver made a turn instead of staying on the main route like we had told him, and he suddenly pulled onto a side road leading back up into the hills. We got very nervous and started to question him, "Why did you turn off? Where are you going?"

"It's okay, it's okay," he kept saying. "This is a shortcut, a quicker way."

I'd been living in Colombia nearly a year, and in all that time, no cab had ever taken us this way. By this time it was pitch black outside, and there were no houses, no lights, and no one else

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around. Could they be thinking we were drug agents to be gotten rid of, or did they know we had a lot of money to buy cocaine? Maybe they were going to kill us, take the money, and just keep the cocaine. I began to realize that, any way you cut it, they would get what they wanted, and we would be dead.

We kept shouting at the driver, "Turn around! Take us back!"

But he wouldn't do it. "Just up ahead," he kept saying as we drove further and further up into the hills.

Then out of nowhere two cars pulled out, not at the same time, but one in front of us and one behind. I've never been so scared in my life. Everyone was screaming and yelling at the same time, some in English and some in Spanish, which just added to the confusion and the intensity of the fear. Jim and I didn't understand everything being said and the driver didn't speak English. But, while the words may have been lost, the meaning was coming across quite clear. We knew that we were being set up to be killed and robbed and that our driver was in on it. "It's just up ahead," he cried. "It's just up ahead."

In that part of Colombia, people disappeared all the time, never to be found again. Just the week before we'd heard on the radio that two tourists had their hotel room door broken down. The man was robbed and then killed, and the woman was raped. This was a dangerous place.

Panic had hit us all, and I felt we needed to kill the cab driver and take over the cab or we were dead. I took my belt off and screamed, "Tell him if he doesn't pass that car I'm going to kill him!" Laura was yelling at me in English, "Not yet, Larry, don't do it!" and at the driver in Spanish at the same time, "Pass him! Pass him!"

Jim was shouting at both of us, "We've got to do something! We've got to get out of here!"

The two cars were on us bumper-to-bumper. I figured it was now or never. I gripped the belt in my two fists and got ready to put it over the driver's head and around his neck. I yelled at Jim, "I'll pull him to the back, you jump in front and grab the wheel. Don't stop for anything!"

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Just at that moment we came over the hill and saw the lights of the village. The other two cars turned quickly off the road and disappeared into the night. The taxi driver had been telling the truth. We had never been in any danger, and I'd been ready to kill him for nothing!

As he let us out at our ranch, I was split between panic, anger, and relief; I hardly knew what to think. When I had awakened that morning, I never thought that by nighttime I would be thinking about killing someone. That was bad enough, but what really upset me was that it didn't really seem to bother me that I had been ready to kill someone so suddenly. I realized then and there that my anger—and my life—were totally out of control.

We meet and hear from people nationwide who are desperate for answers and are about to give up on themselves, their friends, or their family because of some bondage in their lives. Some people get shocked into reality when the hopes and dreams they had for their lives or for their children's lives have been shattered. Others fear they are losing their grip on a lifelong battle against their own private demons of drug dependence, gambling, lying, cheating, anger, violence, sexual abuse, divorce, or sickness.

I often speak to men and women with great ambitions, talents, and promise for success who just can't seem to get ahead. Their lives consist of repeated failures in business as a result of a spirit of poverty or failure. Depression seems to be at an all-time high in men and women from every walk of life. Many have finally accomplished their life's dreams but are plagued with a shadow of darkness or hollow emptiness. I've ministered to professional entertainers and athletes who have achieved great fame and fortune yet have lost it all.

Situations like these beg an explanation. We yearn to make sense of such destructive events—especially when they are happening to us or to someone we love. There has been a lot of talk in the news about medical researchers trying to determine

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why certain sinful traits are passed from one generation to the next. Researchers recognize that there is a definite pattern, but they can't pinpoint the reasons. Is it genetic? Is it environmental? These all play a part, no doubt, but I believe there is a spiritual reason that is the main determining factor. Some reports have called it "family baggage." It is a family curse.

To understand the awesome delivering power of God in my life, you must first see what I was delivered from. I was an extremely angry and violent person, but my life has been transformed by the supernatural power of Jesus Christ. And here's good news for you: What He has done for me, He will do for you! "*God is no respecter of persons*" (Acts 10:34 KJV).

I think it's obvious that the violent anger I experienced that day in Colombia didn't just pop into my life overnight. Anger, drugs, divorce—the numerous battles we face are spiritual. These are spiritual strongholds that get into our lives and into our families. Unless we know how to find them and get rid of them, they will stay with us, grow, and be passed to our children and our children's children.

I can remember the very day the spirit of anger began to grab my life. A terrible thing happened to me that left me feeling unwanted and alone. I was very young, and I remember going into my room to cry. Lying there on my bed, I suddenly stopped crying, wiped away my tears, stood up, and with clenched fists and gritted teeth, made a promise to myself. *Nobody will ever make me cry again.* With that declaration, I opened a door to the spirit of anger, rejection, and violence. And from that point on, it seemed like I was always angry and looking to even a score with someone. If anyone looked at me wrong or said something I didn't like, I would take it personally and anything might happen. I would fight at the drop of a hat, with words, fists, bats—or whatever I could find to use as a weapon. Most of my targets were strangers, so it was impersonal and didn't seem to matter, but I didn't care whom I hurt. This behavior released a Bible principle into my life:

Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. (Galatians 6:7)

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One night I was sitting at a hamburger place in South St. Louis with some of my friends, and some guys came by in a car and began to yell at us. We immediately jumped into our car to chase them. Just another street fight, nothing new. But what I didn't know was that this was a setup.

As we chased these guys down the street, they suddenly pulled into a parking lot and got out, waiting for us. Six of them and four of us. Not bad odds, I thought. This is going to be fun. But all of a sudden the fun turned serious. From behind the wall came a couple dozen other guys who'd been waiting for us. Then I suddenly found out that they weren't actually waiting for us; they were waiting for me. The three guys I was with took off, and none of the others moved to follow them. I was the one they were after.

They beat me with bats, boots, and fists. The next thing I remember is coming back to consciousness in the backseat of a car going down an alley. Without stopping, the car door flung open, and I was tossed out onto the pavement. As I slowly got up, the only thing I could think of was revenge.

You would think I would have begun to seek a change at that point. My life was becoming a continual hell. But I was growing more and more uncontrollable as I progressed through my teenage years and into my early twenties, and many times I scared myself as well as those who were close to me. I was in constant trouble with my school, the law, and anyone else I thought might threaten me. It seemed that I had enemies everywhere, but in truth I had only one: the spirit I was allowing to control my life.

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.
(Ephesians 6:12)

I didn't want to be controlled by this spirit of anger and violence, but I didn't know what to do. Truthfully, I didn't even know what was happening to me.

After returning from Colombia, I remember going back to see a girl I had dated in college. We had split up because of my anger

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and drug abuse. I wanted to see if we could get back together. I assured her that I had changed, turned over a new leaf, and was a different person. “Larry,” she said, “I’ve heard that before. I know you mean it. I know you want to change, but you never will—not until you find Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. Anger is in your family and now it’s in you. Only Jesus can change you. It will take a miracle.”

While I had been in Colombia, my old girlfriend had become born-again. She was the first “Jesus Freak” I’d ever met. Even though I didn’t want any of this religious stuff, there were two things I knew she was right about. One was that I couldn’t change on my own. I’d tried too many times before and knew it was impossible without help. The second was that I had become everything I had hated all my years growing up. But isn’t it that way in all of our lives? We become the things we hated as children, the things that scared us, the things that pushed us away. “Like father, like son; he’s just like his dad” or “She’s just like her mom.” That’s what the world says, but the Word of God says that the iniquities of the fathers (parents) are visited *“upon the children and the children’s children to the third and the fourth generation”* (Exodus 34:7).

My girlfriend from college was right. No matter how hard I tried to change, that old nature kept rising up and taking over. I was desperate to live differently, but I couldn’t do it on my own.

I started using drugs when I was a senior in high school. The Vietnam War was being fought, and the rebellious hippie movement was spreading around the nation. A few of my friends began smoking marijuana. Eventually, I gave it a try.

The following year, I went off to college at Southeast Missouri State on a football scholarship. While I was there, drugs became more and more available. I started doing acid, LSD, psilocybin—whatever came along. Not only did I find drug use enjoyable; I found out there is a lot of money to be made by selling drugs.

Money Must Be the Answer

It seemed lack of money had caused my mom and dad to live under constant stress and hardship. I promised myself that I was not going to live the rest of my life that way, no matter what it took.

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My plan had been to go to college and then into sports to make money, but I discovered it was easier to make money selling drugs.

I began selling LSD and marijuana, and a door opened for me to go to Colombia. I lived in Medellín, worked with the drug cartel there, and smuggled dope back into the United States. At that time, I was the only American in the history of that country to live in that area.

I didn't know who God was, if He cared about me, or if He even existed, but I found myself saying, "God, there must be something else."

I had a ranch high on top of the Andes Mountains. I was surrounded by chauffeurs, bodyguards, and the servants who cooked our meals and manicured the lawn with machetes every day. I walked around with fifty or sixty thousand dollars in my pocket all the time. I had all the good and all the bad that money could buy.

While I was dealing dope, I had kilos of cocaine available to me in my house every single day, and I began using it. I started snorting it, and soon I was mainlining it. I was using eight to ten thousand dollars worth of cocaine a day.

I didn't know who God was, if He existed, or if He even cared about me if He did exist, but I eventually found myself saying, "God, there must be something else." During this time, I was listening to gurus and reading all kinds of bizarre books. As strange as it sounds, I really thought maybe I could get so high that I would find God.

Right before I went to Colombia, I played college football and lifted weights competitively. I weighed about 215 pounds and was bench-pressing close to 500 pounds. I had finished sixth in the nation in a weight-lifting competition. Then I moved to Colombia. In about eight months I went from 215 pounds to 145 pounds because of my drug use.

Having It All and Losing It All

Laura and Jim, the friends in the cab with me the night I almost killed the driver, were living with me in Colombia. We

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did drugs from early in the morning until we passed out at night. We went for days without eating, just doing drugs. I kept getting weaker and weaker, and I kept doing more and more drugs. Laura started noticing my weight loss and she would fuss about me all the time saying, "Larry, you are going to kill yourself." She would try to make us eat. She brought us food, but we would just nibble on it and then take more drugs.

One time, Jim and Laura were gone for the day. No one else was around. I had been doing dope and drinking all day long and had just finished a deal. I was feeling good. I said, "Man, I'm really going to get high." Not realizing how stoned I already was, I doubled the amount of cocaine I usually used. I put it in the syringe and stuck it in my arm. I didn't realize I had put the needle right through my vein, so I took that amount and doubled it again.

When a person mainlines drugs, the drug is injected into the vein and that vein carries it directly to the heart. I had been hitting up ten to twelve times a day, so all my veins were in bad shape. I tried over and over again to get the drugs into my veins. Finally, on that one last try, after doubling the dose several times, I took the needle, stuck it into my vein, and I hit. I fell to the ground, began to vomit, and my body began to convulse. There was no one there to help me, and no one could hear me. I can't tell you how I knew, but I knew I was dying.

In every one of us, there is an "emergency button" in our spirits that calls out, "God, help me! You're the only one who can give me the miracle I need."

Have you ever noticed what people do when they get really desperate? You can call yourself an atheist, agnostic, or whatever you want, but the moment you get into trouble and nothing can help you except a miracle, you cry, "God, help me!" In every one of us, there is an "emergency button" in our spirits that calls out, "God, help me! You're the only one who can give me the miracle I need!"

I didn't believe in heaven or in hell, but I cried out, "God, don't let me die." I had made it out of the city, into college, and

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down to Colombia. I had everything I could want with one exception: I didn't have whatever it was that was going to make me happy. "God," I pleaded, "don't let me die until I find out what happiness is."

By a miracle of God I started coming to. I recovered, and God was put on the back burner again.

Sometime later, I went to Mexico City to meet some "mule" runners carrying a shipment of cocaine from Colombia. While I was out of Colombia, bandits broke into my house in the mountains. Our servants had tipped off the bandits that I was gone and had driven them up the mountain to the house. Armed with guns and machetes, the intruders got into the house and attacked Jim and Laura. The two somehow managed to get out alive, took all the money, and skipped the country.

In just a few months, I went from having everything I could possibly want to having absolutely nothing. While I was sitting in my motel room in Mexico City, I admitted to myself that, despite my denials, I was a drug addict. Laura had told me over and over that I was an addict, but I had denied it and thought I could quit at any time. Now I realized the full truth: I couldn't even get up in the morning without drugs. Drugs were my life.

Changing the Outside Doesn't Change the Inside

I returned to the States and moved into a farmhouse way out in the woods of Missouri. I began to live like a recluse—life was just me and my dogs. I did everything I could to change. I let my hair grow long, pierced my ear, and even became a vegetarian. I thought I was really changing, that I could live in peace with anyone and everyone. Then something happened that made me realize that even though the outside circumstances had changed, I hadn't changed at all on the inside.

There was a man on the farm next to mine who couldn't tolerate having a hippie living near him. One day as a friend and I were leaving the farm to go into town, I noticed that one of my dogs was missing. He was a Great Dane pup, and he was as big as a house at six months old. It was very unusual for him not to be

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with the other dogs. My friend and I looked everywhere, but we couldn't find him. We had to go into town, so we quit looking and hoped he would be back by the time we returned home.

As I was driving down the road, I saw my neighbor. I stopped and asked him if he had seen my dog, Eric. I thought it would be just like him to lock up Eric out of plain meanness. When I asked him if he had seen him, he said, "Yes, the dog trespassed on my property, so I shot him." I laughed, thinking he was joking, and said, "Oh, right, so where is his body?"

"Down by the pond," he responded. Just to humor him, I walked the few yards to the pond. There Eric lay—dead, just as the man had said.

I turned around and saw my neighbor eyeing me with a smug look on his face, and I snapped. I knew I was going to kill him—not just hurt him—I was going to kill him! I ran at him and threw him up against the barn. His wife and kids were screaming and crying. He was begging for mercy. My friend pleaded, "Larry, don't!" They all knew I had lost it. At that point, I didn't care what happened to me, even if it meant going to prison for murder. All I wanted was revenge. I couldn't stop myself.

Even then, the God of love and mercy was moving in my life. As I reached up to grab this man by the throat and kill him, my arms literally froze to my sides. I couldn't move them. In a frenzy, straining to lift my hands, I cried out, "God, let me go!" Finally, I gave up the assault and took off. I picked up the bloodied body of my dog and carried him home to bury him.

As I was digging the grave, two highway patrolmen drove up. With my long hair, earrings, and my dog's blood all over me, I must have been a sight. The police officers got out of the car and nervously walked toward me. They told me I had really shaken up my neighbor, who had called them, terrified for his life. "Larry," they said, "we know how you feel..." I cut them off, "You have no idea how I feel. You tell him I'm coming back and I'm going to kill everything he has." Though I meant every word of it, I never did. I was still selling drugs at the time, and I soon found out the guy I had been selling to was a narcotics agent. I knew it was time to get out of town, so I packed up and moved to Flagstaff, Arizona.

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When Everything Changed

Many people have to hit bottom before they can find their way to the top. It was that incident that showed me that, in spite of any external changes I had made, I was still the same out-of-control Larry I always had been. After struggling to make my life different, I was no closer to becoming the person I really wanted to be.

Right after the incident with my neighbor and before I moved, I met up with a friend who had just returned to the States from the Middle East. Knowing I needed to leave, we chose to move to Arizona because I had been reading some books on the Indian religions and thought maybe I could find the peace I was looking for out in the desert. It sounds crazy now, but I was desperately looking for God—whoever and wherever He was.

We moved to Arizona, and just a few days after settling in, God arranged for me to meet a brand-new, born-again Christian. This young man asked me to go to church with him. I didn't especially like Christians, but for some reason I agreed. I went with him to a little church of about thirty people, where I saw a movie on the life of Jesus.

I walked into that church with long hair, wearing thong sandals, a poncho, and earrings. I was also high. I didn't know how to pray, and I certainly didn't know anything about getting saved and being born again. The movie began, and I saw how Jesus hung on the cross and died. Somehow I knew He died for me. I knew I had found what I was searching for. I ended up kneeling and weeping at the altar in the front of the church, and there I said, "God, if You are real, then be real to me."

There is no way I could ever explain to you what I felt the moment Jesus came into my life. I knew He saw right through all my facades and understood everything about me. He took out all the pain and poured in His unconditional love. The years of sin and guilt lifted immediately. As I saw Jesus give His life for me, I gave my life fully to Him.

Ten days later, I went back to the church and was baptized in the Holy Spirit. The next morning, I was rolling my marijuana to

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smoke as I walked my dogs. I looked at the joint and said, “I am so ‘high’ on Jesus, I don’t ever want to smoke that stuff again and come down.”

Free Indeed

We had a saying where I grew up on the streets of South St. Louis, “Once a junkie, always a junkie.” According to that, once you became an addict, you could never change. Thank God there’s another saying that not only applies to the people on the streets, but to loved ones in our homes, colleagues in our workplaces, friends and acquaintances in our neighborhoods, classmates in school, and to Christians we worship with—literally to every person in every situation and circumstance, in every place around the world. That message is this:

If the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.

(John 8:36)

I was a drug addict, putting needles in my arms sometimes ten to twelve times a day. But twenty-five years ago I was set free by the power of a compassionate, loving God, and for over twenty-three years I have traveled the world sharing my testimony. From prisons to churches and from schools to government meetings, I’ve told the story of how Jesus miraculously set me free from the stronghold of heroin and cocaine addiction. But I also experienced God’s deliverance in another area of my life.

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Discussion Questions

1. Do you have something in your life that is trying to destroy the blessing and the future that is already yours in Jesus Christ? If so, what is it?
2. Do people think you have changed on the outside, yet you know on the inside you are still the same?
3. Larry found satisfaction and enjoyment in drugs. What do you feel joy in that you know you should be feeling conviction for instead?
4. Larry thought money must be the answer to the problems in his life. What answers have you found?
5. What are/were the results of those activities?
6. According to John 8:32, what will set you free?
7. Read Hosea 4:6. Why are God's people destroyed?
8. Do you identify in any way with the following excerpt where Larry Huch wrote,

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There were two things I knew my friend was right about. One was that I couldn't change on my own. I'd tried too many times before and knew it was impossible without help. The second was that I had become everything I had hated all my years growing up. But isn't it that way in all of our lives? We become the things we hated as children, the things that scared us, the things that pushed us away. "Like father, like son; he's just like his dad" or "She's just like her mom." That's what the world says, but the Word of God says that the iniquities of the fathers (parents) are visited "*upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation*" (Exodus 34:7).

9. If you are struggling to make your life different but are no closer to becoming the person you want to be, read John 8:36. How do you know you've been set free?