

LARRY HUCH

A
JOURNEY
OF
DESTINY

FROM
Junkie TO
JERUSALEM

Chapter 1

ALL MEANS ALL

I'D BEEN PLAYING outside, doing what most eight-year-old boys do, and time got away from me. I was just ten minutes late when I bolted into the house, but I might as well have been ten hours overdue, because my dad was waiting. When he punched me, he knocked the breath out of me and sent me to the floor, doubled over and coughing. As I tried scooting away from him, he kicked me in the chest and back like he was kicking a football. And he barked insults at me through the entire beating.

Soon I began to cry, and my mom ran from the kitchen to see what the commotion was about. When she saw me, she rushed to my side and went into full nurse mode. Mom had done some nursing work in the past, and she recognized the signs of trouble.

"We've got to get him to the hospital!" she said.

"Why?" my dad asked with a snarl.

"Because his ribs look broken," she said, glaring at him. "This is serious."

"I'm not spending a penny on that blankety-blank," he fumed. "You patch him up! You tape him."

Mom ran to get some sheets and then tenderly bound my chest to hold my ribs in place. Whenever I breathed or tried to move, the excruciating pain made me moan. It was clear that my dad resented how Mom was caring for me; he just shook his head the whole time.

Although the physical abuse I experienced while growing up was unimaginable, the emotional abuse was worse. One time before my younger brother was born I ran into the house and stopped dead in my tracks as I overheard my dad on the phone trying to give me away to an orphanage or some other facility. That moment was seared into my memory like a brand on a cowhide. “I don’t want him here,” my father barked, with his back to me. “I’ve already got one son. Can’t you take him?”

Cold shudders wracked my body, and I staggered into my room, devastated. Collapsing to the floor, I wept. “He’s always so mean, but now he doesn’t even want me?”

I cried and cried, and when I ran out of tears, something inside me snapped. At that young age, I somehow managed to get a grip, and I told myself, “I don’t care what anybody does. No one will ever make me cry again.”

My dad realized I had overheard him, and yet he never tried to make things right. He just didn’t care. He didn’t want me, so I became an orphan in my own home.

The six of us were crammed into a little 850-square-foot flat on Cherokee Street in the inner-city neighborhood of South St. Louis. My two brothers and I shared one extremely small bedroom, my little sister had a bedroom to herself, and my parents had their room. The kitchen and living room were super tiny, with one even tinier bathroom that we all shared. We lived practically on top of one another, bumping elbows and heads, with our terrorizing father squarely in the middle of everything.

My father physically beat us kids, including my sister. Once,

as my brother and I messed around at the supper table, my dad swung at me with his closed fist. I ducked, knocking my full plate on the floor. My dad made me crawl on my hands and knees to eat my food off the floor with no utensils, like an animal. That was more than sixty years ago, and I can still feel the humiliation and shame.

On another occasion in our little kitchen, my brother said something he shouldn't have. My dad responded by throwing a big, hot cup of coffee across the table, and it hit my brother in the face. He screamed as the coffee burned his flesh. Thankfully there were no permanent scars, at least not physical ones.

During another dinnertime episode, after my dad tried to hit me, I ran out the front door wearing nothing but shorts—no shoes and no shirt. My aunt Helen lived a couple of miles away. Even though I was still little, I ran all the way to her house. She called my worried mom and said, "We found him. He's here."

When I got home, my dad made me pay. He had his methods, like taking us kids to the basement and making us bend over and hold our ankles while he beat us with his belt. He'd hold us against the wall by our throats and punch us in the stomach and say, "If you flinch, I'll punch you again."

Things like that happened all the time, prodding me toward a deep-seated hatred of my father. It's no exaggeration to say that he was a monster who tore through our lives and left great damage in his wake. Mom, on the other hand, was our angel. A peacekeeper at heart, she tried to protect us and keep the family intact the best she could. There was rarely any peace, though, and she too lived as a victim, always in fear of my father's rage.

We kids didn't know everything that happened behind the scenes. But what we knew was plenty. I don't remember my father ever hugging any of us. He was just a mad, mean, horrible man. Yet if I showed you our family photos, you'd think

we were a picture-perfect family. You know what they say: “Looks can be deceiving.” My dad could be a nice guy to the world but a completely different man with us.

Life in the Hood

The streets of South St. Louis were just as violent—maybe more so—as our little home. I grew up in what we called “the hood.” In those days you didn’t call it a gang. It was more of a tight-knit neighborhood. It seemed like every other day, we’d be in a brutal street fight against some opposing hood. In that setting, my growing rage became a fierce weapon.

In hindsight I know that God repeatedly sustained and protected me by His sheer grace. I can’t tell you how many times I should have died or been imprisoned. During one street fight, a guy broke a bottle and stabbed my buddy’s face with the jagged glass, slicing his eye in half. When I saw that, I lost it. I grabbed the guy who did it, and I beat his head on the curb. Then, I took a brick and hit his head again, fully intending to kill him.

My anger was out of control. Amazingly, my victim survived (barely), but the police arrested me. Instead of charging me, however, they released me. Members of that guy’s family had committed a series of more heinous crimes, and the police had been looking to put him and his whole family behind bars. When the authorities asked me to testify against him, though, I refused because snitching went against our street ethics. It was OK to almost kill someone, but snitching was out of bounds. That’s how messed up we were!

Located in our neighborhood was the oldest high school west of the Mississippi. It was such a violent place that armed guards patrolled the property (which was a big deal back then). One day during classes, students from a rival school came and

shot up our building. We heard *pa-pa-pa-pa-pa* as they fired on the front of the school. Everybody ran outside, and a brawl broke out. In our foolish rage, we ignored the fact that they were armed and we weren't.

That's the atmosphere in which I grew up. It was brutal. With all the violence I witnessed and suffered inside and outside my home, I grew more hardened and explosive every day. In time, I developed a reputation as someone nobody dared to cross.

Safe Outlets and a Hardening Heart

As I grew into my teens, one of my "safe" outlets was athletics. I was particularly drawn to boxing and football, which allowed me to vent my aggression in legal ways. Our coaches and trainers encouraged us in the hopes of keeping us off the streets as much as possible.

It so happened that I was pretty good at these two sports. I competed as a Golden Gloves boxer and ended up getting a full scholarship for football. At the Illinois Golden Gloves the first guy I fought was expected to win a medal in the Olympics. I knocked him out in fifty-four seconds of the first round. I guess my baby face had some folks fooled. The trainers asked, "Where's all that aggression coming from?"

The answer was simple. Whenever I fought, whether in the ring or on the streets, I always pictured my dad. I hated him that much. It wasn't a formula for success in life, but it helped me win fights.

During the couple of months between high school and college, I did a brief stint in jail for beating up some guy in a street fight. The police let me out but restricted me from leaving St. Louis for several weeks. At that time a military recruiter for the Green Berets heard about my violence and ability on the

street. The Vietnam War was heating up, so he tried to talk me into joining the fight.

At first I was all in. I passed the military tests and physicals and was close to being sworn in. Then my travel ban was lifted, and I received a football scholarship offer. So I decided to skip the military and go to college. I was still on the military's radar, however. They recognized my violent nature and knew I could fight.

After (somehow) surviving my father's beatings, the local street violence, and some jail time, I was set to go away to college, about two hours down the Mississippi River. I saw college as my ticket out—and it was, but not the way I had imagined. When I came home for one of my first breaks, my thirteen-year-old sister met me outside. Her eyes were black and blue, and the whole side of her face was swollen. My dad had used her as a punching bag.

It was more than I could take. From outside, I screamed at my dad, who was in the house, "You get out here now! I'm going to kill you! You hear me? I'm going to kill you!"

I waited for a response and screamed again. "I told you to come out here! I'm going to kill you!"

By then our neighbors had gathered in their front yards to watch the spectacle. Finally, my dad yelled out the front door, "I'm calling the police! You better get out of here."

For the first time I detected a hint of fear in my father's voice. I left and crashed at a friend's house. About a year later I was in a car accident while riding with someone from college, and I was hospitalized for two weeks. My dad wouldn't let my mom or siblings visit me, so I was alone in the hospital. Can you imagine the impact on my self-worth? I felt I wasn't valued or loved enough to receive a visit from my own family.

When the hospital discharged me, the college was closed

for the Christmas holidays, so I caught a ride back to St. Louis with a friend. I called my mom from my friend's house and told her I was on my way home. "Well," she said, "I don't know if that's a good idea."

"I've got nowhere else to go, Mom," I said. "I'm coming."

My friend dropped me off a block from home, and I walked to the house. My dad knew I was coming and was waiting in the driveway. He saw me from a distance, but unlike the father of the prodigal son, he didn't run to me with his arms flung open. He didn't hug me and kiss my cheek. He didn't put his ring on my finger and say, "Go kill the fatted calf. Let's have a party!"

No. As I walked up the driveway, my father acted like he wanted a fistfight. He demanded, "What are you doing here?"

"It's Christmas. I came home."

"You don't have a home anymore," he said.

At least the prodigal had a home to return to. My dad's words could have crushed me, but instead they cemented my hardened, fractured heart. I turned around and walked away. It would be many years before I visited that house or saw my dad again. He never came to any of my college games, and he skipped my college graduation.

Desperately Seeking God

My journey from junkie to Jerusalem began long before I became a drug user. And although I ended up a full-blown addict, the anger and violence within me were just as toxic. As the story in these pages unfolds, you will see how the Lord chased me down with His persistent love and brought me home to my heavenly Father. That Father awaited me with arms wide open. As I ran from the long arm of the law,

I ran into the loving arms of the Lord, and He miraculously delivered me from drugs.

Still, the rage and violence that were embedded in my personality remained as strongholds and eventually bled into my marriage, family, and ministry. Even after I became born again and had the Holy Spirit living inside me, rage's bitter poison oozed out and tainted everything and everyone. One of my pastors saw my struggle and said, "Larry, you will have to learn to let God and people love you."

Doing that would prove to be a challenge. As our ministry exploded and thousands of both young and old people from the streets came to the Lord, it seemed that everyone was focused on how God delivered me from drugs. Although drugs had been my main problem and God's deliverance was undeniably supernatural, I had another issue: I was prone to extreme violence.

When my son, Luke (who is now my associate pastor), was around four years old, he did something rambunctious. I grabbed him and threw him against the wall, and he bounced off it like a football. Mind you, I was a pastor at this time. More importantly I was a father. Suddenly it felt like the Holy Spirit hit me between the eyes with a two-by-four and jolted me to my senses with this thought: "Larry, you are just like your dad."

The reality had never been starker. I had become what I despised. I knew that if the pattern continued, the dark hole that threatened to suck me into its depths and engulf me would also take from me the people I loved most. So I cried out to the Lord in repentance. I sought His face and wisdom. Then, I desperately dug into the Scriptures like a forty-niner digging for gold. I wanted to know whether the Bible talked about what a father passes on to his son.

My research was life-altering. The promise of Matthew 7:7 proved true: “Ask and keep on asking and it will be given to you; seek and keep on seeking and you will find; knock and keep on knocking and the door will be opened to you” (AMP). The Lord started teaching me from His heart. He showed me that family curses and generational curses are mentioned some 325 times in the Bible. I began studying the breaking of generational curses. I realized that Jesus not only died for my sin but also came to break those curses and the iniquity inside me.

Galatians 3:13 says, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.” That truth led to a broader understanding of the seven places where Jesus shed His blood leading up to His death on the cross and how that not only freed us from sin but also won back our willpower, health, prosperity, joy, and more.¹ I said, “God, this rage is a curse in my life that must be broken.”

I also began to understand why Moses wasn’t allowed to enter the Promised Land. Some scholars believe it’s because he never got over his anger. Moses killed an Egyptian in anger, and years later his anger caused him to strike the rock with his rod. (See Exodus 2:11–12; Numbers 20:10–11.) Like Moses I brought the spirit of anger into my faith, my marriage, and my family. God would use me, but He would not let me enter the fullness of my destiny as an angry person.

Ultimately, the strongholds of anger and violence came crashing down. The same power of God that set me free from drugs, alcohol, smoking, and all sin set me free from anger and violence. This was a turning point in my life. Eventually I would write a book about breaking generational curses. God used my deliverance from drugs to help thousands, but what He taught me about generational curses has helped tens of thousands because so many people can relate to the issue.

That is the power of the Holy Spirit! You can come to God with any sin. Nothing is too awful. God wants to deliver you from whatever can ruin your life. The chains won't always fall off the moment you are born again; some will come off in phases. Yet if you stay the course and keep your faith in Him, the Lord is always faithful. The enemy may have ripped you off in the past, but don't hand him your future. With the Holy Spirit you have the power to change any destructive behaviors. Through Christ the curse is broken, but you must choose the paths you will walk in.

A Golden Road

The apostle Paul explained that “we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers” (Eph. 6:12). Grasping this truth was essential to the process of forgiving my dad. I had to realize that he had been abused and that he inherited his anger and violence.

My dad wasn't my enemy. The devil was. Knowing that my battle was not with flesh and blood but with principalities and powers, I was able to forgive my father. The Lord also helped me understand Matthew 6:14–15, which says, “If you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins” (NIV).

When Jesus taught His disciples how to pray, He said, “Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us” (Luke 11:4, NIV). To receive God's forgiveness for my sins, I had to forgive my dad's wrongdoing. When I did that, the Lord replaced the poison of my anger with His peace. I still didn't have much emotion toward my dad, but for many years before he died, I had peace in my soul and was able to

make peace with him. My dad passed away in 2011, while Tiz and I were pastoring here in Dallas. A year before that, he prayed and gave his life to the Lord. Dad's transformation was evident and immediate. His hard demeanor softened as God did a work in his heart.

My dad spent his final days in a coma at a veterans' hospital in St. Louis. My siblings, mom, and I went there to be with him, and some other family members joined us. There were still many unresolved issues, raw emotions, and unhealed wounds in all of us. Yet somehow my heart went out to the man who had so damaged us. I don't know any other way to say it except that the hate was gone. Standing at his bedside, I realized that he was a broken, lonely human being, and I felt compassion for him.

On one of those days, I was at the hospital before anybody else arrived. The nurse came in and asked, "Aren't you the son who's a pastor?"

"Yes, ma'am, I am," I replied. "Listen, how long does somebody last like this?"

"Well, you never know," she said.

"Do they ever come out? Because I wanted to say something to him."

"Can I tell you something?" she asked.

"Sure."

"My mom was in a comatose state and was in a situation much like your dad's. She and her mom weren't close and had gone through a lot of hurt." The nurse continued, "We were gathered around Mom, telling her, 'We love you. We forgive you. If you're ready to go, you can go.' Then suddenly my mom popped out of the coma, sat up, stared straight ahead, and said, 'What's that golden road?' I asked her what she saw, and she said, 'There's a bright light down that golden road. I

want to go. I want to go.’ I said, ‘Mom, go ahead and go. It’s OK.’ My mom lay back down and was gone.”

Then the nurse returned to my question about Dad’s coma. “We’re not sure how long he has,” she noted. “But we think that your dad can hear you, even though he’s in a coma.” She then walked out of the room.

I turned to Dad and said, “Listen, Dad, everything’s fine. I have no hard feelings. I love you. We love you. If you’re ready to go, you can go. Jesus is waiting for you.” When I said that, I could almost see him sigh. Then he passed into eternity.

That whole year of my dad’s salvation and reconciliation was an answer to decades of prayer. Never stop wrestling in prayer for the salvation of your loved ones. Sometimes it’s a lifetime deal, but it’s worth it. There were few tears at Dad’s funeral, but there was forgiveness and reconciliation. Only Jesus could have done that.

And only Jesus could have saved me. Yes, I had been just like my father, but my father didn’t know Jesus until the final year of his life. He didn’t have the Holy Spirit working inside him before that. Only when the Spirit came to live inside him did transformation begin.

The Holy Spirit doesn’t leave us as we are. Some issues take longer to resolve than others, but He is always working, conforming us to the image of Christ and using us for His purposes. It’s a lifetime process. One thing is certain, though: No matter how long it takes, we can be “confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in [us] will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:6).

Romans 8:28–29 says, “We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son.”

Whatever it is—whatever sin, struggle, or misstep—if you give it to Him, He will deliver you and work it for your good and His purposes. This promise holds even if you're a junkie and a violent, angry person like I was. "All things" means *all* things. So believe it!

But what is God's purpose? Romans 8:29 says that He predestined those He foreknew "to be conformed to the image of His Son." If you are His, God is using everything in your life to make you more like Jesus. That is His purpose. Let Him work in you, knowing that it's a lifetime journey. When you stumble along the way or suffer a setback, just grasp His hand and let Him pull you back onto His path. He is faithful!