

*Slowly  
Unraveled*

changed from the  
inside out

by  
rachel ann craddock

**cdm**<sup>™</sup>  
DISCIPLESHIP  
MINISTRIES



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# *preface*



Yes. Outwardly we are wasting away but inwardly  
we are being renewed day by day.

2 CORINTHIANS 4:16 (NIV)

Everyone has a story. We are all living products of the moments we have experienced in our past; how we interacted with these moments mentally, emotionally, and spiritually, shape the way we live in the present day. In order to better understand how we see ourselves, how we interact with others, and how we interact with God in the present, it is necessary to understand our personal stories and the significant, life-shaping events of our pasts. The understanding of the highs and lows in your personal story will give you a better understanding of yourself, and listening to the highs and lows in the personal stories of others will increase your compassion, empathy, and connectivity to those around you.

Stories tell me not only who I am but also who you are and what we are together. In fact, without you and your story I cannot know myself and my story. No one's story exists alone. Each is tangled up in countless others. Pull a thread in my story and feel the tremor half a world and two millennia away.

— **Daniel Taylor**, *Tell Me a Story*<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel Taylor, *Tell Me a Story* (St. Paul, MN: Bog Walk Press, 2001), 6.

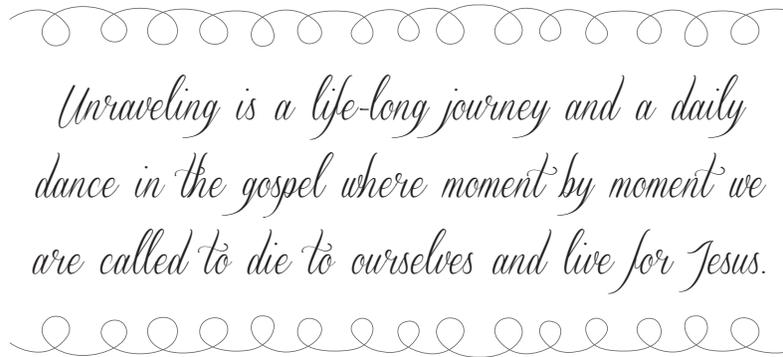
I have written a book about my personal story because for far too long I failed to try to understand and see the beauty in the redemptive story God has been writing for me. My past was something I desired to forget about instead of something I treasured and recognized as an important part of the woman I am becoming. My mother passed away from breast cancer when I was only fourteen years old. After her passing, I struggled with feelings of shame, unworthiness, and not belonging. My family without a mother made me feel like an outsider. For years I tried to find wholeness and I tried to remedy my outsider feelings, but I struggled to find lasting satisfaction in earthly remedies. There was a deeply woven pain I was unable to detach from my inner self.

When I was twenty-one, I understood for the very first time what it means to trust in Jesus and His Work on the cross. A new life given to me in Christ gave me freedom from my old self. I knew I was seen and forgiven by God; however, I still had these threads of shame, unworthiness, and longing to belong woven deeply in the story of my past. As a new Christian, I tried to ignore these deeply woven threads by just covering them up with Scripture, but no matter how hard I tried to forget about the hurtful seasons in my past, the shame and unworthiness always loomed in the shadows.

In the last few years, I have worked hard to look back into the shadows of my past and use God's Word to shine a light on the deeply woven threads of shame, unworthiness, and my longing to belong. Once I brought these little demons into the light, I didn't see my pain in a neat little box; what I saw was many woven layers of pain. When we overcome one layer of shame, unworthiness, and longing to belong, there is always another layer underneath. As I've worked through my personal story over the years, I have seen that I have many lies tangled up with truth in my heart, and because I ignored this shame and these lies for so long, lies and truth became interwoven, making it difficult for me to discern what was a lie and what was truth.

I have had to take a long, hard look at the experiences of my past and unravel the interwoven lies from the truth. This book is a culmination of the work I have done on unraveling my personal

story. Just like a sweater unravels, the first thread is the beginning of the unraveling of all the rest. Once you tug on one loose thread, you will soon be left with a hole in the fabric, a hole revealing and exposing what lies underneath the surface. The exposure, or the unraveling, is outside of human comfort and control. It's scary and makes you vulnerable, but the unraveling is necessary and good.



In my experience, my journey in life has been a slow unraveling and pulling apart of the old so I can fully embrace the new. Unraveling is a life-long journey and a daily dance in the gospel where moment by moment we are called to die to ourselves and live for Jesus. I have had to untangle the past from the woman God is making me to be in Christ. In seasons, it has been painful to unravel; I have felt naked, but at the same time, the unraveling has been wonderful and freeing. I am freed as old patterns wisp away, and in the unraveling, I find new life which I have access to only in Christ.

I am not the one doing the work of the unraveling. This transforming change has had to be supernatural. It is God who sees me revealed and exposed, doing the work to carefully unravel. God is completely in control. Jesus, God's Son, is the image of the invisible God. In the New Testament book of Colossians, Jesus is described as the continual sustainer of creation. "He is before all things and in Him all things hold together" (Col. 1:17). Jesus holds

all things together to keep them from falling into chaos or unraveling out of control. My patchwork is bound together by Christ in me, the hope of glory. The same power that raised Christ from the dead lives in me through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit has great power over sin, death and the unhealthy threads of shame in my personal story. Little by little, The Greatest Story-Weaver of all is unraveling every measure of my old self. God is taking away my old threads and reweaving new threads bound to Christ by His Spirit.

Being unraveled is not easy, but it is good. Being unraveled little-by-little in the hands of a completely in-control and good God reveals less of me and more of Him. This is the journey I have been traveling. I am a woman, a teacher, a mother, a pastor's wife, and I have been unraveling my personal story and learning how to apply God's Word to fight my feelings of shame, unworthiness, and longing to belong in a moment-by-moment, daily dance of dying to the old self and living for Christ. My hope is that as you read this book, you will think about your own personal story and unravel alongside me on the way. In the unraveling we will see the God who, little-by-little, makes all things new.

He must increase, but I must decrease.

JOHN 3:30

part one

*strength*



chapter one

*old strength*



*B*rennan Manning writes, “To live by grace means to acknowledge my whole life story, the light side and the dark side.”<sup>1</sup> So in order to embrace grace, I will begin at what feels like the dark side. While the threads of my whole life story begin at birth just like everyone else’s, the threads of the dark side of this story do not begin at the very beginning at all. This story begins several years later with a girl in the front passenger seat of a silver Chrysler Town and Country minivan and my father behind the steering wheel. This is the moment where I see the beginning of my misunderstanding of what it means to be strong in this world.

### Threads of Unhealthy Patterns

The March day was gray as our family minivan pulled out of the driveway. The shift of a new season drew near, but the grayness of winter still hung over our small town in the Midwest. Tiny specks of rain made transparent polka dots on the windshield as the minivan accelerated to twenty-five miles per hour. My father was driving, and I, a freshman in high school, was sitting in the passenger seat on the less-than-a-minute ride down Sycamore Creek Drive. I was certain I found myself alone and without my younger siblings in the car because my father was going to share difficult news with me that morning. As I buckled up, I anticipated

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<sup>1</sup> Brennan Manning, *The Ragamuffin Gospel* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2005), 25.

my father telling me that my mother would not wake up from her coma and she would soon pass away.

My mother's sickness and soon-to-come passing was difficult for me as a young teenager, but not surprising. My mother was diagnosed with breast cancer when I was only seven years old. Throughout my childhood she fought against breast cancer: hair loss, chemotherapy, medical trials, radiation and even a remission during my fourth-grade year. In the early 1990s, my mom tried everything to fight against this disease, but cancer returned shortly after her remission, and during my freshman year in high school, the cancer metastasized to her liver and then to her brain. Eventually, she was in a coma.

In the car with my father, I physically prepared myself for the life-changing words I anticipated: my breath was held, and my muscles were tightened. Intentionally, I looked out the window at the graying scenery because I couldn't look in my father's direction. My mother was a brave, tough woman, and being the oldest daughter, I decided I needed to be brave and tough too. I feared even an ounce of human connection in this moment would leave me knee-deep in a puddle of my own tears. I was broken beneath the surface, but outwardly I wanted to appear tough-enough to be numb to the overwhelming pain I felt inwardly.

To protect myself from the feelings within me, I built a faulty foundation upon all the human strength I could muster up. In this moment, I layered invisible walls between my father and me; to flee connection, I gazed out of the window and focused on the blurring line where the curb met the grass. I filled my lungs with every ounce of strength I could find in every square inch of the minivan. While I held my breath, my inner monologue chanted ugliness: "Weakness is not an option, Rachel; you better not cry." In that moment, as a young teenager, I did not give myself permission to grieve. As I focused on the line streaking out of my window, my father spoke the life-changing words: "Rach, you know Mom is going to die."

I can't imagine how difficult it was for him to tell me those eight words. I didn't have to look in my father's direction; his words were filled with grief. Even through the invisible walls I had built between

us for the sake of my own self-protection, I felt the weight of the grief in his words tangled up together with the grief and brokenness inside my own heart. The wounds of my mother's sickness and her approaching death quickly turned into lies which whispered, "Without my mother, I am all alone in this world." The lies of walking through grief in isolation turned into vows of self-protection.

Even with my breath held, longing to disengage from the moment, the tears came to my eyes, and the two distinct lines of curb and grass I watched began to swirl together. In all the human strength I could physically muster up, the tears came anyway. The faulty foundation of all my human strength could not hold back the depths of the pain I felt in that moment.

When I caught my reflection in the window, I could see my father's reflection watching mine. Immediately, I was overcome with disappointment in myself. My reflection revealed there were tears in my eyes, and I felt ashamed. I knew if I could see the tears in my reflection in the window, my father could see them too. I felt shame in that moment because I saw my tears as a sign of personal weakness. Reacting out of my woundedness, with a vow of self-protection, I became frustrated with myself for the tears I cried over the approaching death of my mother.

In that shame-filled moment, I began to wire my inner self for more self-protection. Standing on a faulty foundation of human effort, I began to thread unhealthy patterns. My shame led me to believe human strength has no time for anger, sadness, tears, or grief. This wound of my mother's soon-to-come passing was the beginning of the lie I once believed: tears are a sign of personal weakness. Tangled-up in this lie, I vowed to muster up more human strength to be stronger the next time disappointment crossed my path in life.

### Pulling Up Bootstraps on a Faulty Foundation

The memory of that moment is longer than the moment itself. Or perhaps, the memory of that moment has been stretched out and hangs onto everything about me. Each thread has been wrung out and revisited so many times like a stretched-out wool sweater left on

a metal hanger to dry for much too long. That moment, less than a minute in time, and the memory, the pieces my brain has tucked and filed away, seem to have traveled around the world—through time and back again. The wrung-out and revisited threads stretch and weave into my story across years, seasons, places, and relationships.

Peering back into that moment, I know my mother's passing will always be a deeply woven thread in the story God is writing for me. Unfortunately, at the age of fourteen, with a tangled-up view of strength, I did not permit myself to become sad. Instead, I built what I believed was strength upon the faulty foundation of human effort. I learned to try harder. I learned to be stronger. I learned to bury feelings of inadequacy. I learned to accept what life throws my way with the appearance of a smile.

When sadness is seen as weakness, it is easy to hide and bury what is believed to be negative emotion. On the exterior, I wanted to appear to be tough. My nature was to pull up bootstraps, march on, and hold all things together on my own. This tangled-up desire came from longing to appear strong on a faulty foundation and from a misunderstanding of strength.

Faulty foundations built upon human strength are shallow, as shallow as a thin layer of ice atop a neighborhood pond. When I revisit this memory, this story-defining moment in my personal misunderstanding of strength, I see a fourteen-year-old girl building walls around her heart in the name of self-protection. Underneath the layers of self-protection on the faulty foundation of human effort bubble fear, uncertainty, anger, and sadness.

As I go back to the long, drawn-out threads of that moment, I can't reconcile which I am more upset about: the news of my mother's approaching death, or the shame I felt because I cried about it.

Shame is life-dominating and stubborn. Once entrenched in your heart and mind, it is a squatter that refuses to leave. — **Edward T. Welch**, *Shame Interrupted: How God Lifts the Pain of Worthlessness and Rejection*<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Edward T. Welch, *Shame Interrupted: How God Lifts the Pain of Worthlessness and Rejection* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2012), 12.

Shame leads people to develop unhealthy patterns. Shame is present in the first chapters of the Bible, right after the creation of a perfect world. God created Adam and Eve in the Garden and everything was very good. Adam and Eve were both naked and unashamed as they walked with and were in community with God. “And the man and the woman were both naked and not ashamed” (Gen. 2:25). Work, marriage, identity, and creation were all very good in the beginning; shame and brokenness did not exist before Genesis chapter 3.

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’ And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’” But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths. And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, “Where are you?” And he said, “I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.” — GENESIS 3:1-10

Fear, shame, woundedness, and brokenness enter the world in Genesis 3. Adam and Eve disobeyed God's one command to them, and immediately following, they feel fear and shame. In their nakedness they are no longer unashamed as they were in the very good beginning. After they ate the fruit, they felt exposed and they longed to be hidden. In the present day we still feel the ripple effects of this first transgression. We were created for glory, but because of Adam and Eve's first transgression we now experience fear, shame, woundedness and brokenness in life here on Earth.

What is shame? Sometimes shame is thought of as something similar to guilt, but there is a difference between guilt and shame. Guilt is feeling broken over something you have done, but shame is the feeling of nakedness and the longing to hide. Shame causes us to hide who we really are beneath the appearance of a cleaned-up surface, because shame tangles up the way we see ourselves in the world. Brené Brown is a shame expert; in her book *Daring Greatly* she writes, "I define shame as the intensely painful feeling or experience of believing that we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love and belonging."<sup>3</sup>

In that moment, crying as a fourteen-year-old girl after hearing the news of my mother's soon-to-come passing, I didn't feel guilt over the tears. What I felt was deeper; I felt like there was something wrong with the kind of person I was in that moment. The threads of this shameful feeling were woven in my misunderstanding of strength. The feeling of shame led me to a place where I felt unworthy in this world because of my mother's inevitable passing, the brokenness of our family, and the weight of the grief feelings within me that I longed to hide from the outside world.

The human desire to correct and control takes over when we feel shame. In shame-struggles we find ourselves in hiding. We as humans cannot let anyone see there is something wrong with us. Shame leads us to retreat into isolation. In a world of selfie filters, Botox, and weight loss pills, we have learned to quickly clean up and hide the least desirable parts of ourselves. Shame causes us to operate just at the surface-level of our hearts. Just like Adam and Eve, we too are afraid of being seen and exposed, so we hide. It

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<sup>3</sup> Brené Brown, *Daring Greatly* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2012), 61.

is because of shame and the longing to hide that we experience meaningless points of connection with others; we are afraid to let others see us in our imperfections, and this is a lonely and isolating way to live.

Standing in a shame-space, I learned tough-girl behaviors and the appearance of strength. The appearance of strength led me to years of hiding behind a false tough-girl exterior. In this tangled-up belief, I found that the more I hid, the less others could see the real me. I believed the more I learned the pattern of hiding, others wouldn't even see the reflection of me, a sad girl with hot tears in her eyes and a broken heart. In my hiding, I discovered a life of bootstrap-pulling-up and thread-winding around the faulty foundation of human effort. The tightness of the threads I wound held my broken heart together. I thought the bootstraps I pulled up high would protect my feet on the journey as I trekked on a false and faulty foundation.

Thankfully, this was only the beginning of the journey. The beginning was the weaving of unhealthy patterns woven in wounds, lies, and vows, and the rest has been the unraveling of each and every unhealthy thread in the story of redemption God is writing for me. Over time, the threads I began weaving around my heart as a young girl and my understanding of strength, as well as the understanding of everything I thought I knew, have been turned inside out and upside down by the gospel.

“Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have  
called you by name, you are mine.”

ISAIAH 43:1