

Dave knows firsthand the difference between living a life of brokenness or fully living a renewed life of redemption. In his book, *Addition By Subtraction*, Dave guides you through that same journey so your pain no longer holds you back from what God has in store!

Kyle Idleman
Senior Pastor, Southeast Christian Church
Author of *not a fan* and *Don't Give Up*

At last, a book that helps readers understand the real struggles of the heart, the honest cries of the soul and the unending kindness and mercy of a God that heals and restores. Dr. Dave is a master at taking you on a journey in order to bring wholeness to every piece of your broken heart. Help is here!

Bill and Lisa Roitsch
Founders, Power of His Love Ministries
Authors of *Shame, Let's Break Up*

Dr. Dave tackles an issue at the core of every human being's life; identity, and the shame that steals a healthy identity! God created us with a healthy identity by creating us in His Image. Unfortunately, the wounds of the sin nature within us and others muddle that. In his book, Dr. Dave is not just reminding us of our God-given identity, but he is taking us on a journey with God to heal our hearts and restore our true identity and the joy that comes from God in it!!

Dr. Lisa Winchell
Founder, HisImage.me and In His Image Institute of Counseling & Training

Addition by Subtraction offers you the opportunity to be honest with yourself about how to make meaningful changes that will transform your life. Bottom line, you can become free from what holds you back, and find true meaning and hope for your heart. Dr. Ralston masterfully assembled the roadmap so that we can all enjoy the journey!

Rev. Steven M. Baran
President, National Christian Counselors Association

In his book, *Addition by Subtraction*, Dave reveals his heart for teaching people the reality of how God sees them. Through stories, experiences, and explanations, he shares how Christ can lead us out of our misinterpretations of identity, shame, dependence, and the lies we've learned and believed. And he provides us clear direction into the truth of Jesus' soul healing love. In his book, Dr. Ralston weaves together the beautiful harmony between Biblical truth and clinical understanding to lay out a pathway to restoration. This book is overdue, but Dave brings it to us masterfully.

Katie Englert

Founder & President, Compass Counseling

Broken pieces of our lives are often covered up, denied, or completely misunderstood. *Addition by Subtraction* uncovers the beauty of brokenness, how to embrace our brokenness, and the Biblical purpose to brokenness. Learn how our broken pieces, redeemed by Jesus, make us whole. The Master + our broken pieces = MASTERPIECES! Thank you, Dr. Dave.

Denny Stevenson

Care & Shepherding Director, Crossroads Christian Church

Addition By Subtraction:

GOD TURNS OUR BROKEN PIECES
INTO MASTERPIECES



*How to Let Go of Your Past and Discover
Lasting Hope for the Future*

DAVID RALSTON, PHD



Copyright © 2021 David Ralston, PhD.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced by any means, graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping or by any information storage retrieval system without the written permission of the author except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews.

This book is a work of non-fiction. Unless otherwise noted, the author and the publisher make no explicit guarantees as to the accuracy of the information contained in this book and in some cases, names of people and places have been altered to protect their privacy.

WestBow Press books may be ordered through booksellers or by contacting:

WestBow Press
A Division of Thomas Nelson & Zondervan
1663 Liberty Drive
Bloomington, IN 47403
www.westbowpress.com
844-714-3454

Because of the dynamic nature of the Internet, any web addresses or links contained in this book may have changed since publication and may no longer be valid. The views expressed in this work are solely those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the publisher, and the publisher hereby disclaims any responsibility for them.

Any people depicted in stock imagery provided by Getty Images are models, and such images are being used for illustrative purposes only.
Certain stock imagery © Getty Images.

Scripture quotations marked (NIV) are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com The “NIV” and “New International Version” are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.®

Scripture quotations marked (NLT) are taken from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright ©1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked (AMP) are taken from the Amplified Bible, Copyright © 1954, 1958, 1962, 1964, 1965, 1987 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

Scripture quotations marked MSG are taken from THE MESSAGE, copyright © 1993, 2002, 2018 by Eugene H. Peterson. Used by permission of NavPress, represented by Tyndale House Publishers. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked (NASB) taken from the (NASB®) New American Standard Bible®, Copyright © 1960, 1971, 1977, 1995, 2020 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. All rights reserved. www.lockman.org

Scripture quotations marked (ESV) are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

ISBN: 978-1-6642-3716-2 (sc)
ISBN: 978-1-6642-3717-9 (hc)
ISBN: 978-1-6642-3715-5 (e)

Library of Congress Control Number: 2021911657

Print information available on the last page.

WestBow Press rev. date: 07/28/2021

DEDICATION

Dedicated to my wonderful wife Ann, who has been the most amazing partner, encourager, and fan I could ever hope for. And to our four amazing kids – Becky, Sean, Mike, and Seth – and each of their beautiful families. Each of you entered into my journey at different times, yet at exactly the right times. When my days on this earth are finished, my hope and prayer is that you will say of me that your life was more full, your journey was more hopeful, your heart was more whole, and Jesus was more real to you because I was in your life.

CONTENTS

Dedication	v
Introduction: Trust Me, I've Been There	xi

SECTION 1: THE JOURNEY

Piece 1: Identity: *Who Am I?*

Chapter 1	I Don't Even Know Who I Am.....	1
Chapter 2	Being Made Whole.....	13
Chapter 3	Our Identity Is Always Found in Someone (Or Something)	31
Chapter 4	Our Shame-Based Identity.....	49

Piece 2: Shame: *Am I Acceptable?*

Chapter 5	Shame's Menacing Effects.....	65
Chapter 6	Adding to Our Own Shame	83
Chapter 7	Toxic Shaming: An American Icon	105

Piece 3: Soul & Spirit: *Am I Enough?*

Chapter 8	Same Experiences. Different Effects.....	123
Chapter 9	Soul Work.....	151
Chapter 10	Jesus Makes Us New.....	181

Piece 4: Masterpiece: *From the Inside Out*

Chapter 11	Passing Through the Desperate In-Between	197
------------	--	-----

SECTION 2: THE ROADMAP

Piece 5: TURN: *I'm A New Creation!*

Chapter 12	Turn	215
Chapter 13	Phase 1: T – Turn from Toxic People, Places, and Things..	235
	<i>Truth 1: Denial</i>	237
	<i>Truth 2: Jesus' Love</i>	245
	<i>Truth 3: Surrender</i>	261
Chapter 14	Phase 2: U – Uncover Lies and False Beliefs of My Past	275
	<i>Truth 4: Roles</i>	277
	<i>Truth 5: Family</i>	285
	<i>Truth 6: Shame</i>	313
Chapter 15	Phase 3: R – Rediscover My True Identity in Christ	325
	<i>Truth 7: Strongholds</i>	327
	<i>Truth 8: Restoration</i>	341
	<i>Truth 9: Forgiveness</i>	353
Chapter 16	Phase 4: N – Nurture Lasting Hope in Others.....	367
	<i>Truth 10: Boundaries</i>	369
	<i>Truth 11: Identity</i>	383
	<i>Truth 12: Purpose</i>	399
Acknowledgements.....		415
Contributors.....		417
Notes		419
About the Author		425

“Broken pieces become Masterpieces.”

Dr. Dave Ralston

INTRODUCTION

Trust Me, I've Been There

When my personal journey from my broken past began, I was a 26-year-old husband, father, professional, and young “Christian.” I put the word Christian in quotations, because for me to call myself a Christian at that point was literally more of a label than it was anything deep or authentic. Five years earlier, I had “given my life to Jesus” the best I knew how. Yet very little had changed in me or in my life aside from my having a greater assurance of going to heaven when that day would someday come (not that that alone is any small thing). Besides that, I was pretty much the same ol’ Dave living with the same persistent inner struggles, thought patterns, false beliefs, compulsions, and emptiness that had become familiar through a good bit of my life.

Most people had no trouble believing I was a Christian though. I had cleaned up most of the bad behaviors and habits developed in college and grad school. I was very responsible in my roles both at home and at work. My young family and I were in church every time the doors were opened. And we were involved in the lives of others. So, why not think Dave was everything a Christian – let alone a good man, husband, and father – was supposed to be? How could inner peace be something I lacked?

Just a couple years earlier, I had earned my master’s degree from the University of Michigan and became the first person through all of the generations of my family to receive a master’s degree. While in graduate school, I had the amazing opportunity to serve as an assistant athletic trainer for the Michigan Wolverines football team and became personally acquainted with high-profile folks like legendary coach Bo Schembechler, and current coach Jim Harbaugh.

What more could a guy want than to have a great career, a loving family, and a newly discovered Christian faith. Sounds like the American dream. Honestly it had also been my dream since childhood. But as the dream on the inside of me began to become reality on the outside, I still felt just as empty and confused as before. But empty of what? And confused about what? I really had no idea how to answer those questions. I just knew something wasn't right.

For several years, I had tirelessly hoped and prayed and searched for something – anything – that might take away the obscure pain that smoldered deep in my soul. I had tried to placate it with success, approval, prestige, degrees, marriage, religion. These didn't make it go away. And neither did pornography or masturbation or alcohol. These just seemed to make the pain even worse. It was a gnawing that not only could I not explain; but when I attempted to speak about it with others, they just looked at me with a strange look, kind of like my Cavalier King Charles Spaniel, Astro, does when I ask him if he's cute. Head cocked to the side. Eyes half glazed over. Totally perplexed.

It was then that a lifelong friend gave me a book – just out of nowhere – and she suggested I read it... soon. No apparent reason. No specific instructions. She just believed that it could be something I might want to read. To be honest, I had never spent much time reading just for leisure. So, I politely accepted her gift, but with no real intention of doing anything with it.

Hope Became Within Reach

Oh my! While holding my 6-month-old, very-premature, very small son Sean in my lap one evening, I began reading the book that had begun to gather dust on my nightstand. And I read. And underlined. And read some more. And marked with circles and asterisks and double underlines. And kept on reading. At some point, after putting Sean in his crib, I just kept on reading well into the night. Until I had read the entire book. All 240 pages of it!

You're probably thinking that the book was a classic, like *Mere Christianity* by C.S. Lewis. Or maybe *The Hiding Place* by Corrie Ten

Boom. Or possibly a best-selling book by Dr. James Dobson or Pastor Bill Hybels. Nope, it wasn't one of those.

The title of the book was *Bradshaw On: The Family*, by bestselling author John Bradshaw. In the 1980s this wasn't a book you would find at the local Christian bookstore. Or even on the shelf in your church library. Today you can though, through numerous online Christian book distributors. It was a personal growth book written by a very experienced professional counselor. And I have no idea where my friend had even found it. But it was a gift that God had sent directly to me right when I needed it the most!

I had never heard of this guy Bradshaw. But as I read intently through the pages of his book, I literally felt like he knew me more completely than anyone else in my life, maybe even myself. He was telling my story. He was speaking of the emotions I had long felt but could not articulate. He described the family I had grown up in as if he had been our next-door neighbor. It was surreal. Many times, even painful. But miraculously, it was very healing. What I read in this book began to create a bridge – a connection for the very first time – between my wounded soul and the life I knew that God had prepared for me. Up to this point in my life, those were two parallel roads. Now there was a glimmer of hope!

The author spoke of things like toxic shame and dysfunctional family roles and codependency and frozen feelings and compulsiveness and on and on. The validation and hope I experienced in reading and reflecting on that book literally changed the trajectory of my life from that moment forward!

Something Had to Change

Maybe you're thinking or feeling similar to how I was thirty or so years ago. I knew something wasn't right within me. I knew that by growing up in the family system that I had, there were parts of my inner person that in some ways had been underdeveloped, and in other ways even damaged. But I had no idea what all that meant, or how to do anything about it. I just knew something wasn't right. And I didn't want to spend the rest of my life feeling that way, believing I had to strive to prove that I was enough,

seeking others' approval to know that I was accepted, and believing that something about me made me different than other people, especially other men. Something had to change!

This was long before some of the trendy sayings like “broken to be made whole” even began to enter the Christian landscape. Long before personal self-care was talked about at any level beyond just eating right and exercising. Long before the Christian community, let alone the church, began to allow “imperfect” people to enter through their doors. Long before society began to accept that being human was actually an okay thing.

In those early days of my journey, it was a pretty lonely road. It seemed that, at age 27, I was watching an amazing, life-changing movie that hadn't even been released to the public yet. I loved it and craved more of it. Every scene resonated deep within me. But no one I talked to about it could even begin to understand. They seemed to either pity me for being so emotionally undone. Or they tried to fix me because my newly discovered vulnerability caused them to feel really uncomfortable. Or they related to me as though my real life was a poor representation of my claim to be a Christian.

But, as I look back on the many years that I've been on this journey, it has become very evident that through this season of aloneness, I learned to need Jesus more desperately, to love Him more intimately, and to trust Him more fully. Each time I took the risk to be more honest with myself, more vulnerable before others, and more trusting in Him for my hope and my future, I seemed to grow closer to Jesus. I took the risks. God did the rest.

The Road Has Been Narrow and Rough at Times

Despite any resistance I encountered – real or imagined, within me or around me – God has given me the stamina to continue on this amazing adventure with Him, for decades now. If I'm totally honest and transparent, the most persistent obstacle along the path has been me. Sometimes I felt like I had no more energy, no more motivation, and no more hope to keep pushing the ball forward. Yet, other times, when things seemed to be going

well for me, my attentiveness to my inner journey would just get placed on a shelf in my mind. But God was always faithful to draw me back onto the path and to breath new vigor into my soul. And forward movement would resume.

Similar to the process of breathing, the journey of transformation in Christ includes amazing, refreshing periods where we breath in God's love, mercy, and renewing hope. But there will also be just as many seasons where we exhale a deep sigh, honestly not sure we have the energy (or the desire for that matter) to continue onward.

Paradox Became My New Normal

On the mountaintops, as well as in the darkest, driest valleys along this path, I've never doubted that God has been with me. Whether I have been breathing in His love or breathing out my shame, He has remained steadfast in moving me forward on the path He had laid out for me. Therein lies the paradox that gave me the clarity to write this book – my sin, shame, and brokenness made whole only in Jesus. This seeming contradiction is a wonderful reminder that all that I am is found in Him!

Because of the sin living in me — shame, sarcasm, dishonesty, self-righteousness, sexual immorality, criticism, retaliation, selfishness, privilege, giving up, anger, abandonment, unforgiveness, envy, pretentiousness, recklessness, pride – I do the evil I do not want to do.
[from Romans 7:15-20]

Because of Jesus, I am completely forgiven and fully pleasing to God, and I no longer have to fear failure. Because of Jesus, I am totally accepted by God, and I no longer have to fear rejection. Because of Jesus, I am deeply loved by God, and I no longer have to fear punishment, nor do I have to punish others. And because of Jesus, I have been made brand new, complete in Christ, and I no

longer need to experience the pain of shame. [From *The Search For Significance*]

In innumerable ways, both subtle and profound, God continues to turn my darkness into light, my story into His, and my brokenness into a Masterpiece.

- Obstacles become redirects
- Conflicts become opportunities
- Codependence becomes compassion
- Sadness becomes empathy
- Control becomes influence
- Worry becomes meditation
- Loneliness becomes solitude
- Perfectionism becomes attentiveness
- Unforgiveness becomes mercy
- Failure becomes grace
- Hopelessness becomes purpose

“Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face **trials** of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let **perseverance** finish its work so that you may be **mature** and complete, not lacking anything” (James 1:2-4 NIV).

Come with Me on A Journey

“We can make our plans, but the Lord determines our steps” (Proverbs 16:9 NLT).

“If the path before you is clear, you’re probably on someone else’s.” (Joseph Campbell)

“If you are able to see further than others, it is because you are standing upon the shoulders of giants.” (Sir Isaac Newton)

My entire adult life I've been fortunate to stand on the shoulders of many wonderful, trustworthy men and women, and have journeyed along the paths they have cleared before me. I invite you to do the same.

In the words of the apostle Paul, "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1 NIV). Stand on my shoulders. Sojourn a few steps behind me on the path. Trust that where God has led me, He will lead you as well. **Get ready for an amazing, life changing journey!**



SECTION 1

THE JOURNEY

PIECE 1

Identity: *Who Am I?*

***“But to all who believed Him and accepted Him,
He gave the right to become children of God.”***

John 1:12 NLT

CHAPTER 1

I Don't Even Know Who I Am

From the moment the concept of writing this book came to my mind, my hope has been to provide a clearly illuminated pathway upon which hurting people can move from a place of inner pain and brokenness to a future filled with hope and purpose.

Unknowingly, the person each of us has become is externally defined by the unhealthy life experiences and the false narratives we've held onto for as long as we can remember. The inescapable effect of this is a loss of identity – lack of a clear concept of who we are. Regardless our story, if we experienced any form of hurt, rejection, abandonment, or loss during childhood, we continue to battle something inside us that we wish we could fix.

The thread that connects every one of us reading this book is that our identity has been adversely defined by the actions or inactions of others. We're all byproducts of shame-based, emotionally unhealthy family systems, functioning within a fallen world. This can occur regardless of our age, gender, race, nationality, or generation. And in twenty-first century America, this is not limited only to the family, but now underlies the culture of our churches, workplaces, communities, and society as a whole.

A New Life Has Begun

I've found that within some Christian circles, a discussion of soul health often seems to be awkward, off limits, or even taboo. Many well-meaning

church folks strongly believe that when an individual placed their faith in Jesus Christ, every part of their being became “new” – spirit, soul, and body. In 2 Corinthians 5:17 (NLT), the apostle Paul states:

“This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!”

The blood of Christ makes us new from that moment forward. Jesus remarkably sent His spirit to live within the heart of every believer so that we might experience His intimate presence moment by moment, forever and ever. Jesus knew that Him living in the hearts of His disciples was more significant than Him walking beside them. This process of being made new is referred to as “justification.” Jesus took upon Himself the sin of every human being that will ever live (mercy) and placed within us His righteous standing with God the Father (grace).

“For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:21 NLT).

All who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ alone are promised to live in His presence for all eternity in a place called heaven (see John 3:16, John 5:24, Ephesians 2:8-9, Romans 10:13).

At the moment we are justified, God’s spirit within us commences an unceasing transformation of our soul – mind, will, and emotions – into the very nature of Jesus Christ. The lifelong journey of becoming more like Jesus unfolds through the remainder of our life on earth (see Galatians 2:20, 1 Thessalonians 5:23, Romans 12:2, Philippians 1:6, Matthew 16:24). The Bible calls this transformational process “sanctification.” Dying to self. Being transformed into the very nature and character of Jesus.

Please don’t miss this, okay? Justification saves you to be with Jesus. Sanctification transforms you to be more like Jesus. The two are interdependent, yet very distinct. Your Christian life will seem hollow and lacking if one of these two is developed disproportionately to the other. **The maturity of a person’s spirit will not exceed the health of their soul!**

Who (Or What) Have I Given Power to Define Me?

In a very simplistic sense, “identity” is as fundamental as how a person perceives themselves. It addresses the deep question, “Who am I?” Through childhood, how we learned to see ourselves was a result of the imperfect people we were surrounded by and the fallen world we grew up in. Because we were impressionable young children, we believed that everything we learned from these sources was true and right. And in many ways, we still do! Regardless of the best of their intentions or abilities, we gave the power to define who we were to people who were just as human, immature, or lacking as ourselves. Our entire life picture began to be painted upon that very canvas. And we carried that self-portrait into adulthood without even being aware.

Finding My True Identity in Christ

Peter Scazzero, in his book entitled *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality: It's Impossible to Be Spiritually Mature, While Remaining Emotionally Immature*, claims, “The vast majority of us go to our graves without knowing who we are.”

Our relationship with Jesus provides us a **new identity**. Our true identity. His identity! We are no longer merely a collection of messages the world has defined us by, nor are we defined by the pain and shame of our past. Today, our identity is found in Jesus and lived in relationship with Jesus!

The lies propagated in our heart (both passively and actively) through childhood experiences of shame and codependence are what gave rise to our “false identity.” God wants us as His children to be set free from our shame-based identity, and to walk daily in the “true identity” He uniquely knit together within each of us.

“For you created my inmost being. You knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Your works are wonderful, I know that full well” (Psalm 139:13-14 NIV).

Truth Lies within the Paradox

Something about me has always had a need for deeper explanations, answers, reasons, and solutions for things. I've never been one to just accept things at face value. I don't really think it's an issue of trust, though. Maybe I just have an inborn hunger for details. Or possibly a compulsive need to solve things. Who knows?

All I know is that I'm magnetically drawn to enigmas like mysteries, puzzles, riddles, cryptograms, spot-the-difference pictures, oxymorons, and pretty much anything that's counterintuitive or not as it appears. But my very favorite – **paradoxes**.

Very Few Answers Are Actually Black-and-White

According to Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, a "paradox" is defined as: "a logically self-contradictory statement, or a statement that runs contrary to one's expectation. It is a statement that, despite apparently valid reasoning from true premises, leads to a seemingly self-contradictory or a logically unacceptable conclusion. A paradox usually involves **contradictory-yet-interrelated elements that exist simultaneously and persist over time.**"

Human nature seems to be drawn to what is often referred to as "black-and-white" thinking -- good vs. bad; right vs. wrong; true vs. false. So, the inherent nature of a paradox only adds to the confusion that many of us concrete thinkers already have when it comes to understanding God and His teachings. Further, as we'll discuss at great length throughout this book, internalized brokenness and shame from our past only heighten our demand for absolutes. Anything less arouses fear and insecurity within us, which quickly translates into some familiar pattern of control, compulsivity, or perfectionism.

In stark contrast, King Solomon, known in the Bible as "the wisest man who ever lived," says in Ecclesiastes 7:18 (NLT), "Pay attention to these instructions, for anyone who fears God will avoid both extremes."

From the vantage point of paradox, we might deduce that the best and most important answers are neither black nor white. But rather, a synthesis

of both, that, fortunately or unfortunately, cannot be fully comprehended by our human minds. Unlike the two opposite extremes that we are somewhat able to predict or control, the elusive space in the middle can only be navigated through **faith**.

Addition by Subtraction

Prior to the amazing opportunity God has given me to be a Christian counselor, pastor, teacher, and author, I was very fortunate to experience a twenty-five-year career as a certified athletic trainer in Division 1 college athletics. The pinnacle of those years was the opportunity I had to be the lead athletic trainer for the University of Michigan men's basketball team during the historic "Fab Five" era -- Chris, Jalen, Juwan, Jimmy, and Ray. Sounds almost like how someone might describe the Beatles, huh? Paul, John, George, and Ringo.

Well, these guys literally were the "Beatles of Basketball." Drove of people of all ages would line up for hours just to get a picture taken with them, or hopefully to have them scribble an autograph on their game program or t-shirt. At the peak of this amazing ride, we actually had to sneak the entire team out the back doors of some hotels just so they could get to the team bus. At tournament time, when we would stay several days in another city, security would be hired just to contain the crowds of fans that were willing to do almost anything just to get a glimpse. Five eighteen-year-old true freshmen. Two back-to-back national championship games. Unprecedented, and still unduplicated. Go Blue!

My Favorite Paradox Ever

As you might imagine, doing life through those years with these guys and these teams was an amazing ride. Everywhere they went, I was there with them -- every practice, locker room, bus trip, airplane, airport, hotel, restaurant, and game, as well as traversing more states and countries than I could ever make a list of. As a team, we together experienced many of the highest of highs... and a few of the lowest of lows that big time sports had to offer.

I became very good friends with head coach Steve Fisher and his family during my years on his staff. He was a wonderful man, husband, father, and coach, and he exemplified faith, class, character, integrity, and so much more in the way he conducted himself. It was a great privilege to walk alongside him during my time in Ann Arbor.

One particular memory of Steve that I hold dearly is when he had called the team together on short notice for an important meeting in the locker room at Crisler Arena. I assumed something big must have been going on for a meeting of this nature to have been called. When there was a meeting, all team personnel were there. And that included me.

I've slept too many nights since then to remember all that Coach Fisher said in that meeting. But the one statement he said that I will never forget: **“addition by subtraction.”** I absolutely loved it!

It was his respectful, yet honest, way of saying that a teammate had made the decision to transfer to another NCAA Division 1 institution. And apparently Coach felt that the chemistry of the team would be better without him. Basically, he was saying, **“Something was gained by something being lost.”** The perfect paradox!

First in A Series

Addition by Subtraction is the first in a series of books I'll be authoring, each one continuing the paradox theme. I have come to believe that many of us struggle to make sense of our faith because we cannot get God's paradigms to fit into the realm of our logical human understanding and reason.

If we consider what we read about God and His ways as finite and explainable enough to fully comprehend, there's a good chance we're diminishing the amazing truth held within it. It's only by faith that we can even begin to appreciate the depth and breadth of His nature and His ways. And these cannot be found in the extremes. Honestly, the extremes tend to leave little room for true faith, as they compel us to greater levels of human understanding, expectation, and control.

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the Lord. ‘As the heavens

are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8-9 NIV).

God’s Paradoxes

Years ago, there was a beloved Christian preacher and publisher named Henry Clay Trumbull who wrote an entire book about the profound difference in our ways from the ways of God. Trumbull stated,

It stands to reason that if there is a God in heaven, He would look at things differently from us, from a different vantage and perspective. That results in paradoxes – statements that appear to be contradictory but are actually more true than we can even comprehend. The law of the Christian life is, in itself, a paradox. It is made up of seeming contradictions. All its teachings are contrary to the common opinions of man. According to this law, giving is getting; scattering is gaining; holding is losing; having nothing is possessing all things; dying is living; it is he who is weak who is strong; happiness is found when it is no longer sought; the clearest sight is of the invisible; and things which are not bring about things which are.

I’ve been a born-again Christian since I was twenty-one years old. During that entire time, I have been intrigued by the truths of the Bible that land somewhere inexplicably between the opposites. Through the decades, those have been the lessons that have most meaningfully convicted my heart, grown my faith, and deepened my relationship with Jesus.

- **To be whole, we must be broken** (from Psalm 51:17)
- **To really live, we must die** (from Galatians 2:20).
- **To save our life, we must lose it** (from Luke 17:33)
- **To be wise, we must become fools** (from 1 Corinthians 3:18)
- **To reign, we must serve** (from Matthew 25:21)
- **To be exalted, we must become humble** (from Matthew 23:12)

- **To be first, we must be last** (from Matthew 20:16)
- **To bear fruit, we must first die** (from John 12:24)
- **To be strong, we must become weak** (from 2 Corinthians 12:10)
- **To have, we must freely give** (from Acts 20:35)
- **To be free, we must submit** (from Romans 6:18)
- **To gain, we must lose** (from Philippians 3:7-8)
- **To possess, we must accept having nothing** (from 2 Corinthians 6:10)
- **To find happiness, we must stop seeking it** (from Matthew 5:3-10)
- **To be more like Jesus, we must die to ourselves** (from Matthew 16:24)

From Broken Pieces to Masterpieces

There is no greater example of this book's title – Addition *by Subtraction* (something being gained by something being lost) – than God's promise to turn the broken pieces of our lives into masterpieces! That is an incredible paradox – a perfect masterpiece created entirely from broken pieces?

Kintsugi = Precious Recreation

Kintsugi is the centuries-old Japanese art of giving new life to broken pottery. Rather than rejoin ceramic pieces with an invisible adhesive, the Kintsugi technique employed a special tree sap lacquer dusted with powdered gold. Once completed, beautiful seams of gold glint in the conspicuous cracks of ceramic wares, gave a distinctive appearance to each “re-created” piece.

This unique method celebrated each item's unique history by emphasizing its fractures and breaks instead of hiding or disguising them. In fact, Kintsugi often makes the repaired piece even more precious and valuable than the original, remaking it with a new look and giving it a new life.

While Kintsugi's origins aren't entirely clear, historians believe that it dates back to the late fifteenth century. According to legend, the craft commenced when Japanese shogun Ashikaga Yoshimasa sent a precious cracked tea bowl back to China to undergo repair. To esteem the one who owned the item, craftsmen sought to employ an aesthetically pleasing method of restoring, and Kintsugi was born.

I Am God's Masterpiece

The most remarkable element of the word “masterpiece” is **master**. Regardless the nature of the piece itself – art, writing, music, design – it isn't precious because of what it is. No, the greatness of the piece is because of the one who created it! The master.

“For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things He planned for us long ago” (Ephesians 2:10 NLT).

You and I no longer need to wonder or worry about the “why's” in life. Why did this happen? Why didn't that happen? Why was God not there? Why did He not answer my prayers? Why? Why? Why?

When we allow ourselves to fully trust the Master, we can find rest in knowing that He loves us fully and without conditions. He has a plan and purpose for our lives that cannot be disrupted, derailed, or denied by our own doing, or by that of others whose lives have been interwoven into ours. And He knows how to assemble all of the broken pieces into something greater than we could have ever imagined.

“For I know the plans *and* thoughts that I have for you,” says the Lord, ‘plans for peace *and* well-being and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope’” (Jeremiah 29:11 AMP)

As I've contemplated the peaks and valleys of my own life, I've learned a better, much more fruitful question than asking God “why?” I try to ask Him, “What now, God?”

In this question, He constantly reassures my heart that He loves me and cherishes me; He is with me amid every moment of my past, present, and future; He is fully aware of my current circumstances; and He is at work, intricately unfolding the one-of-a-kind story of my life – a **Masterpiece**.

Questions from Dr. Dave

For personal reflection or group discussion of Chapter 1

In this chapter I made the statement, “The maturity of a person’s spirit will not exceed the authenticity of their soul.” Assuming this to be true, is the person you present to others an accurate and authentic reflection of the inner person that only you and God fully know? What may be the reasons you are reluctant to reveal the “real” you?

Jesus teaches that to truly follow Him we must die to our flesh nature so that we might become more like Him. Is your personal journey with Jesus marked with times along the path where more of you died, and you became a little more like Jesus? If not, what would indicate to others that you are a follower of Jesus?

I’ve made a pretty strong case that a life in Christ is not defined by choosing good over bad and right over wrong, but rather in the paradox of the two opposites. As you read and pondered God’s paradoxes in this chapter, in what ways did this cause you to rethink your current views of God and His word? Is it easier for you to live in a dichotomous world, or in the paradox of the two opposites?