



THE PLACE WHERE PAIN HEALS

A RIVER RUNS THROUGH IT

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There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells. – Psalms 46:4

Many wonderful things were revealed to me during a recent, significant season of healing in my life. One of those “wonderful things” is the metaphor of a river and four healing streams found in Genesis 2. My prayer is that you will find the healing that Christ offers to your pain. I invite you to travel alongside me as we continue to explore God’s magnificent healing and grace. –Kevin DeVries

A RIVER & FOUR HEALING STREAMS

Eden exists.

It is a true place unknown to any map except the heart. A river runs through it to feed four healing streams. ¹ Where these four streams converge and compliment each other, healing happens.

We live in an age of trauma that has exiled us from our hearts as our home. Overcome with grief and regret, we’ve hung our unhappy harps on trees² that grow as gallows along a river of bitter tears that hurts, but never heals. Alongside this river are forgotten fields that remain forever foreign to our original glory and design. We awoke one day and could no longer find our way home to where our hearts truly belong – *Eden*. Desolate deserts of pain have devoured Eden’s delicate dream. The garden where hearts once laughed and played has become a wounded wasteland. And where wounds linger, lies live. Lies that lead us to cover and wound others and ourselves with the deep shame of self-hatred. Something is terribly wrong with the human heart. Our home (where our heart is) has become a haunted house. An invisible war in the heavens is being waged in a battle for beauty; the human heart; the “priceless pearl” that plunders hell to populate heaven.

Is there a way back to Eden?

If Eden exists as an echo of eternity experienced on earth, how do we experience the river of Living Water and its four emblematic streams of healing? Can we eat from a Tree of Life growing beside this river that feeds these streams and can its leaves, rustling with the rumor of a King’s return, still heal nations that are numb with the nameless numbers and frightened faces of the living dead? ³ Since time can

only tell what eternity means to say, what would it say to our shattered selves? If we silence our shame and remember our original glory, we might hear these words echo from hallowed halls into our hurting hearts:

There is a way back to Eden.

Healing happens where Living Water flows. Where eternity lives in our hearts, we thirst for living water. Deep down, we long for water to flood and heal every secret chamber where pain lurks and lingers in lands where love and laughter are lost. Dark places where trauma hides, frozen in fear, from the voice that calls us out of the shadows by our true and noble names. Places where pain is ever present despite the passing of time.

Healing flows through not one but several streams. In my own experience, I believe exempting one stream tends to compromise the whole. Wholeness is achieved when sin is forgiven AND shame is healed. If we seek the cure from sin through sin management, it only leads to shame *mismanagement*, and we never heal. We continue to hurt others including ourselves. Hurt people hurt people, as the saying goes. Apart from God's grace, we can only give away what we have first received. Providentially, pain redeemed as purpose, can drive us into secondary worlds to drown us in dreams of a primary world more real than our own. Northrop Frye said, "*The real world is beyond time but can be reached only by a process that goes on in time.*" Here are four streams fed by a river that helped my healing process in time as they flow from their ultimate source in eternity:

1. CHURCH - Ephesians 5:25–27

Of all streams mentioned here, only the church and Christ spring eternal because the church is the immortal Bride of Christ. We are the church - His Immortal Bride. Never confuse Christ with the church. The church is made of imperfect people – you and I. The church is not perfect. Only Christ is perfect. Though the church has wounded many, far more have found healing in her waters. The church is the stream that provides corporate celebration and communion, which our hearts crave. We enter His gates and glory with praise and thanksgiving. We enter Christ wounds into wonder

through our pain and trials. The church is a powerful portal to another dimension where wounds are healed with weapons of wonder. The church is a hospital for sick people just like us. If you fail to appreciate the role of the church in your healing process, you deny yourself the fair and tender love only the Bride can give, and you'll only know the fierce and tough love of the Bridegroom. Just like a patient needs a doctor and a nurse, a child needs a father's time and a mother's nature to fully mature. Love is best when it is both both intimate and intense. Though a man or woman reigns and rules in a glorious garden, it is not good for either to be alone. The Church is there to be a place of belief AND belonging for us.

However great the mystic marriage between the church and Christ truly is, it is still not enough to meet all your needs. Where church should be an expression of a sacred romance, our commodity driven culture has turned it into a service station where we get our weekly "faith fix." If you believe church attendance alone will change you into someone you want to become, you will be disillusioned and join the unsatisfied ranks of the un-churched. There are other streams your wandering heart must seek to escape wounded wastelands and enter a field where a feast awaits your famished soul. Professional counseling is a muddy stream that will humble you before it heals you. Without this stream, we can become emotional dwarves; stunted, immature images of our former shimmering selves masquerading as self-righteous, spiritual giants standing on a heap of human wreckage our own wounds have wrought. We must wade into these murky waters if we ever hope to be cleansed of our pain that has left our unfeeling hearts numb with the modern day leprosy that plagues saint and sinner alike – Shame.

2. COUNSEL – Proverbs 15:22

Often at odds with the church, biblically based, professional therapy is needed as much as godly, pastoral care. Due to the many roles most pastors must play, they are the first responders and primary care providers of your spiritual health. Recovery from trauma is akin to safely detonating a bomb. It requires a special set of skills, nerves of steel and steady hands. Annual check-ups require a family doctor. Heart surgery requires a heart surgeon. More complicated cures require more specialized counseling. Sick bodies need doctors.

Hungry sheep need shepherds. Sick souls need soul doctors – Christ-centered counselors.

After years of untreated trauma, my life was simply not working anymore. Church attendance alone was not able to penetrate the inner darkness I was living in. I was beginning to feel more like a wounded animal lurking in the shadows than a human that once sought the Light. I hated myself, and what I had become. My wounds were haunting me. I was a fugitive running from my past leaving a blood trail everywhere I went for the hounds of hell to follow. And like a wounded animal, I was angry, alone and afraid and lashed out anyone that dared rescue me. I was especially leery of counselors. I was too proud to admit I was sick and too sick to admit I was proud. One day I discovered we are only as sick as our secrets so I began to tell all my secrets to a counselor until I was no longer sick. Along the way I discovered godly counselors do not just treat the problem, they help people transform with truth. Christ-centered counselors help us understand a key truth:

You are not a prisoner. You are a patient.

You are no longer a prisoner punished with pain. You are a patient perfected with pain for a redemptive purpose. The pain you feel is so you can heal. You cannot heal if you cannot feel. The goal is progress; not perfection, although pain is part of the process that perfects us. We're beautiful until we try to make ourselves perfect. His power is made perfect in our weakness.⁴ Guilt convicts and hurts to heal. Shame condemns and hides to harm. Guilt is good. Shame is bad. Guilt says you've made a mistake. Shame says you are a mistake. Just like a great surgeon with a good heart whose healing hands holds a hurtful blade, the professional counselor's gift is to hurt you with the truth so you heal in time. We hurt to heal. Healing requires humility. Humble yourself and allow a qualified counselor to probe your wound so your pain heals and becomes your powerful purpose. You will discover it takes more than the church and a counselor to heal. You also need a redemptive community so you do not journey alone.

3. **COMMUNITY** – Acts 2:42-47

We often confuse large corporate church celebrations with redemptive community but they are not intentionally the same. Depending on the health of its leadership, a church or Bible Study Group can be a scary place to hear a safe message when it should be a safe place to hear a dangerous message - the unadulterated, unashamed, proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The only offence should be the cross and Christ crucified. Christ as Truth offends our minds to open our hearts. Open hearts create a safe community where everyone is accepted even if all do not agree. Church attendance can be an anonymous, non- transformational, lonely experience unless you are very intentional about seeking a small group where lasting life-change happens. A small Bible Study/Prayer Group can also be confused with community. However good and needed these small groups are, they often disband when prayer digresses into gossip, bible study becomes a battle to be right over theological differences or a particular curriculum course is completed. Community happens when a small band of brothers and/or sisters disrupt their individual existence and put their individual differences aside for a greater common good and decide to do life together - all of it: the good, bad and just plain ugly. Community is not a substitute for church or Christ; community must be connected to the church of Christ otherwise it will be a heart divorced from its husband and head. Sin is confessed and forgiven in Christ.⁵ Shame is confessed and forgotten in community.⁶ Both confessions are needed to become whole. Rather than singularly focus on original sin, a redemptive community pursues each person's original glory, calling each other numinous names of who they were born to be and become beyond what they currently are. Stories and secrets are told in a room of grace - a lofty and luminous atmosphere that cannot be contrived by human effort through religious means. Here we discover Grace is a lover who is only attracted to our imperfections; a healing stream flowing to our lowest depths of depravity.

I did not discover a room of grace until I was drowning in disgrace. I grew up in church, attended Christian schools and was in full-time ministry for over a decade serving in high-level leadership positions. Despite all these religious credentials and "special access passes," I was unable to find the room of grace. I never experienced the life-

changing transformation that occurs in a biblical community of "gracists" who intentionally live life together with their true and unmasked faces. As I began to share and own my humiliating story of divorce, bankruptcy and loss of home before a band of brothers, something miraculous happened. I began to heal. And when I began to heal, I discovered my shimmering heart and an entire universe once hidden in shame, opening before me. I was no longer afraid. I was consumed with love and awe. My pride and humiliation transformed into power and humility. In redemptive community, being vulnerable and emotionally naked is to be unashamed and true just as it was in Eden's endless summer of grace.

True community is not a scary place to hide. Community is a safe place to heal. It's a place where real questions are rewarded the same as right answers. In community, slaves and servants become sons and daughters of Christ the King. The little boy and girl are healed within so male and female can mature into real men and women. We mature to our level of healing. Community helps to remove the shameful ceiling between our lesser and greater selves so nameless nobles wandering as lonely numbers in a church crowd, return home to their healed hearts. Savages are crowned kings and queens to reign once again in a never-ending kingdom. A Christ-centered community will kill you with kindness to knight you as a ransomed and noble heart. Karl Barth said, "*Grace must find expression in life otherwise it is not grace.*" God's unexplainable grace is best expressed in community because community best expresses the unexplainable - we are the Body of Christ. Community cannot exist apart from connecting to One greater than its many parts. Community is the horizontal beam of the cross. The vertical beam is our next stream: Contemplation. One without the other no longer represents Christ. We must be both missional and monastic if we hope to heal. We need community to connect. We need contemplation to disconnect. Disciples are healed in a small community but destiny is most often heard in silent contemplation. When the crowds and counselors leave, you'll find yourself alone before Him. His best work is saved for last where the last become first before an Audience of One. May we never be so great before others we forget to be good before One.

4. CONTEMPLATION - Psalm 46:10

Contemplation is entering into a deep silence to quiet your mind so your heart can begin to think. It's about letting go of your history to become conscious of His story. Sometimes silence and suffering in solitude is the only cure for our sickness. It was in silent suffering that I heard what only my heart can hear- the voice of God. His voice shouted in my pain and whispered in my pleasure. Silence is the passport that took me to places sound cannot go. Contemplation through prayer, scripture meditation and redemptive reading bent my will so I could begin to be formed into the beautiful likeness of God's Son. It broke barriers so I could pass without sound into a great silence; a silence so deep and profound it can only be shattered by the same silvery voices that sung like morning stars when time was only a wrinkle on eternity's face.⁷

In contemplative silence, there is no church product to consume, no counselor to pay, no community to please, no self-centered prayers attempting to manipulate God into changing our circumstances. Contemplation allows God to change our character through our circumstances so we are truly transformed. We cannot change unless our character is transformed. Contemplation ruthlessly strips off our consumer clothes; illusions of control, egocentric ambitions and deep shame disguised as self-righteous pride that demands to be right. All that remains is our naked soul. The universe shrinks to eighteen inches between our head and our heart. Our past and present are devoured in what Richard Rohr describes as the "Naked Now."

Until we embrace contemplative silence to no longer languish in the agony of obscurity or live for the applause of others, we will never stand in awe before an Audience of One. Silence empties us of self so we are free to love God as He is and not as we have created Him to be in our own shameful image. Contemplation is a way to love God more than yourself so you worship God and not yourself. Contemplation is a two-way mirror to see yourself for who you are and what you can become. Self-hatred and performance-based religion come here to die so real love and a relationship with Christ can live. We are afraid of silence, solitude and suffering because of what it has to say - we are not in control. Control is an illusion. Christ is reality. We fear silence because our false self is too deceived to handle Christ as Truth. Only the Truth can set us free. But first it leads us to misery where marvel and madness struggle for mastery in

God's mystery at the very edge of sanity. The truth is we might have to lose our mind to find our healed heart as home. We might have to sail strange, starless seas before we find the furthest shore where **home is wherever we are**. Far too many of us live in a house but we are never really *home*. The lights are on but the shades are always drawn. Christ had no place to lay His head because He was always at home in His heart. A house is not a home. Home is where the heart lives. It's time to come home to your healed heart. Through contemplation, I stopped chasing sunny days and embraced the silent night. I faced my darkness, and in doing so, a new destiny began to dawn for me; a dawn where tombs became wombs as my wounds were healed with "weapons of wonder." Those mighty weapons wrecked my small world with an asteroid of awe before an Audience of One where I stopped punishing my past or fearing my future as my past and future became immersed in His presence.

5. CHRIST - John 4:13–14

An interesting anomaly is recorded Genesis 2:10. A single river flowed "out" of Eden and then does something most rivers DO NOT do; split into four separate "headwaters" that flowed downstream from a single river source. Almost all rivers are created by multiple sources (tributaries). The exact opposite happens in Eden where nature mirrors the supernatural. When eternity thins out time into what the early Celtic Christians called a "thin place," nature is infused with eternity to become "super nature." For those with eyes to see the lesson is clear: **From Christ all rivers flow**. He is the well at world's end; the eternal spring whose unfathomable source of Living Water causes us to thirst no more. Ultimately, it is Christ alone who can heal us. Unchangeable circumstances exist so Christ can change our character. **Our confidence, therefore, is not in any stream, but the river from which they all flow.**

After a long exile from ministry, I've learned failure can set us aside in humiliation or it can set us apart in humility that brings forth a holy mission. Where shame pushes you to the side, God places apart, and that space in-between is grace. When God calls, He never hangs up. His voice can still be heard as the roar of rushing waters flooding deserts with dreams God dreams when He dreams of us; dreams of beauty beyond the rivers bend that cannot be broken by the flow of

time.⁸ There is indeed “a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells.” (Psalm 46:4)

Sometimes we have to travel to the ends of the earth to reach the end of ourselves and find a new beginning in God that never ends. After a lifetime of church participation, years of counseling and countless hours in community and contemplation, my trauma has begun to heal. I have been touched by Christ in a true place that does not exist except in our hearts where He lives. We have now arrived where we started as if for the first time. Our future runs through our past. It all begins and ends in Eden. I hope you find the same river and streams I found that flows from Eden’s gate to every door. The ingredients for healing are all the same. Add Living Water.

Quotes and Bible Verses Referenced

1. *A river watering the garden flowed from Eden; from there it was separated into **four headwaters**.* - Genesis 2:10

2. *By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion. **There on the poplars we hung our harps**, for there our captors asked us for songs, our tormentors demanded songs of joy; they said, “Sing us one of the songs of Zion!” How can we sing the songs of the LORD while in a foreign land?* - Psalm 137:1-4

3. *Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God...On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. **And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.*** – Revelation 22:1-2

4. *But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for **my power is made perfect in weakness.**”* - II Corinthians 12:9

5. *If we confess our sins, **he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.*** - 1 John 1:9

6. *Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.* - James 5:16

7. *On what were its footings set, or who laid its cornerstone - **while the morning stars sang together** and all the angels shouted for joy? – Job 38:6-7*

8. *I saw the glory of the God of Israel coming from the east. His voice was like the roar of **rushing waters**, and the land was radiant with his glory.* -Ezekiel 43:2

About The Author:

Kevin DeVries is a Keynote Inspirational Speaker, Entrepreneur-Explorer, Author-Adventurer, Dutch immigrants' son and loving father of two from Grand Rapids, MI. In addition to starting and selling several companies across diverse industries, Kevin served as a Director and Consultant for several faith-based, non-profit organizations across the country. As Founder & President of **GRACE EXPLORATIONS** (www.GraceExplorations.com) “a spiritual guide service helping wandering and wounded hearts find home and healing in Christ”, Kevin combines a business mind and a pastor's heart with an explorer's soul and a poet's pen as a passionate voice reaching the hurting hearts of women and men.

From 2009-2013, Kevin was a Lead Mountaineer for ARK SEARCH, LLC engaged in a scientific search of Noah's Ark on Mt. Ararat, Turkey. Kevin has climbed five of the seven continental summits, skied to the North Pole; expedition-kayaked all five of the Great Lakes and is a 2013 Boston Marathon Qualifier and Finisher. His lifelong goal is to complete what only a few dozen explorers have dared to dream and do: The Explorers Grand Slam – Climb the Seven Summits and Ski to the North and South Pole. To complete the challenge, Kevin needs to climb Mt. Everest and Mt. Vinson, the tallest peaks in Asia and Antarctica respectively along with skiing to the South Pole.

Based on all his adventures across six continents in over sixty countries and nearly every state in the US, Kevin is writing an epic, 2000 page, four-book series: **Explorers Of The Lost Ark** (<https://graceexplorations.com/books/>) to fundamentally and figuratively change how people think and feel about God through The Power of True Myth. The series is the literal story of Ark exploration that fades in and out of a sprawling, poetic, dream vision reminiscent of Dante, Milton, Bunyan, MacDonald, J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis' sanctified myths as it attempts to express the unexplainable – Grace. Whether guiding climbers, ministering to men, bleeding words on paper, giving an inspirational talk or leading a faith-based journey to the ends of the earth, Kevin embraces the experience economy where imagination is ignited to distill dreams into destiny.

Kevin DeVries is your next Inspirational Speaker. His epic, unforgettable story of redemption will change your life. While climbing five of the seven continental summits, skiing to the North Pole and searching for Noah's Ark as an intrepid explorer in the award-winning film: **FINDING NOAH**, (www.findingnoah.com) Kevin endured divorce, bankruptcy and loss of home to reach the naked soul of man. In quiet desperation, he climbed into "thin air" where eternity's weight thins time to heal trauma where trails end and Truth begins. Kevin can guide you to this true place unknown to any map except the heart. The greatest journey is within because the greatest discovery is "Who finds you when you're looking for something else." Kevin sought the Ark and found the face of God. You'll be fascinated by what he's discovered for your own life. Be A Hero. Book Kevin To Speak @ <https://graceexplorations.com/speaking-calendar/>