

A microscopic image of green plant cells, likely from a succulent, showing a grid-like pattern of cell walls and chloroplasts. The cells are arranged in a roughly circular pattern, filling the entire background of the book cover.

CHRISTINE D'CLARIO

HEALING

FINDING YOUR VOICE ON THE JOURNEY

IN THE

FROM BROKENNESS TO FREEDOM

DESERT

FOREWORD BY
CHRISTINE CAINE

HEALING

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FROM BROKENNESS TO FREEDOM

DESERT

CHRISTINE D'CLARIO

150 YEARS STRONG
DAVID & COOK

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword	7
Understanding the Premise of Our Lives	11
Preface	13
Introduction	17
Chapter 1: The Premise for Our Lives: The Shema.	25
Part I — A Voice to Discover—From Within the Desert	
<i>Realization</i>	41
Chapter 2: Discerning the Healing Journey	43
Chapter 3: Debunking the Myth That Mental Illness Isn't Real	55
Chapter 4: Choosing to Heal (and Carving a Path)	75
Part II — A Voice to Cry Out—Inside the Desert	
<i>Formation</i>	93
Chapter 5: The Cost of Healing	95
Chapter 6: Courage Over Comfort	107
Chapter 7: Rest, Reset, Recover	117
Part III — A Voice to Prepare the Way—Through the Desert	
<i>Preparation</i>	133
Chapter 8: Ready the Way for the Lord	135
Chapter 9: Expect Freedom and Train Expectantly	147
Chapter 10: Anticipate Pain With Purpose	157
Chapter 11: Make Space for Others	167
Part IV — A Voice to Love God—Out of the Desert	
<i>Transformation</i>	177
Chapter 12: With All Your Heart	179
Chapter 13: With All Your Soul	189

Chapter 14: With All Your Mind	197
Chapter 15: With All Your Strength	211
Fulfilling the Purpose of Our Lives	225
Chapter 16: Wear “The Right Shoes”	227
Chapter 17: Words of Encouragement	233
Afterword: The Treasure at the End of the Desert	237

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UNDERSTANDING
THE PREMISE
OF OUR LIVES



PREFACE

"I struggle with the thought of living tomorrow."

I spoke the words softly and slowly as tears streamed down my face. I sat without moving as my midwife gazed at me through eyes full of empathy and kindness. Gently holding my hands in hers, she sat patiently, listening to me quietly inhale and exhale.

What did I feel now? Relief? Distress? More sadness? The feelings I'd practiced smothering for over two years had rushed right out of me—toppling one right over another from my very own mouth. My inner thoughts had just become an external monologue, and when I'd gotten to my darkest, innermost thought, I hadn't held back.

I made an attempt to look full in her face, but tears blurred my line of vision. I could only catch glimpses of the wise, discerning woman next to me. But even through my tears, her presence was filled with knowing. She was the first and only person in twenty-six months who had asked me the simplest two questions: "How's your heart? What's happening inside you? Tell me." I knew I couldn't mask my answers. I knew if I tried to hide, this highly interceding woman would see right through me.

So I told her everything.

With tears in her eyes, she uttered a quick diagnosis that shook me to the core. "You have a severe case of postpartum depression. I know it well, because I went through exactly the same thing you're going through with the birth of my children. You're not first and won't be the last. And you're not alone." She referred me to a Christian, Spirit-filled therapist and held my

hand literally and figuratively until my appointment. That simple act of attention and kindness very well saved my life.

The path that brought me to that moment is the same one that made healing necessary—I just didn't know it yet. To some degree, I was aware that the thoughts and emotions I was experiencing weren't healthy. But even in the midst of my inner turmoil, it never occurred to me that I *could* do anything about it—let alone acknowledge that I *needed* to.

Me? A Christian? Heal? I'd been there and done that. Or so I thought.

I hadn't been compelled to begin a journey of healing for a number of reasons. For starters, I was depleted. At the time, asking me to begin a healing journey seemed impossible. You might as well have asked me to climb Mount Everest. I was tired and exhausted all the time, and I had resorted to trying to make it through the day. The last thing I was looking for was a journey anywhere.

Yet I felt such shame *because* I was depleted. I knew God's grace. I had experienced His promises being fulfilled in my life.¹ I had been a Christian worship leader for years because I genuinely desired to glorify God. The idea that I, as a believer, could be depressed just didn't make sense to me. I couldn't reconcile depression with belief, and shame kept me a prisoner in silence—but screamed at me every day.

I believe my midwife's questions saved my life. Without her guidance, I don't know that I ever would have known just how serious my situation was. I had already done what I thought was fairly extensive inner healing. But mental health? *That's not for me*, I thought. *I'm ok, I don't need to sit with my thoughts and feelings.*

1. Every name or pronoun referring to God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit is capitalized as an act of literary exaltation to Him—including those from all Bible translations. On the contrary the word *satan* (which simply means “accuser”) or any other word referring to him is lowercased. He does not deserve honor, and it will never be given on any of my platforms, including this book.

Maybe you're having those same thoughts. *I'm ok, I'm good.* But perhaps behind those thoughts, you're curious. Maybe you have questions. Maybe you're even wondering if you were meant to be reading these words—just as I was meant to be asked my midwife's questions.

Regardless of where you are in life, what season you are in, or precisely how healed you are, these words *are* written for you. No matter who you are, you will see yourself reflected in some part.

In these pages, I share the story of the healing journey that I didn't think I needed. My hope is that by offering insight into my journey, you will be encouraged to begin your own healing journey. This book stands as a testimony to the ability to heal by the very fact that it exists, and it has been carefully crafted as a resource for everyone in need of healing—which is all of us.

CHAPTER 1

THE PREMISE FOR OUR LIVES: THE SHEMA

“The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.” —Mark 12:29-31

With today’s GPS technology, we’re pretty used to having a clear map for just about anywhere we want to go. And I am certainly a fan of GPS—so much so that I have given mine a name: Gypsy! Running across town for dinner? Check Gypsy. Need the closest grocery store? Search Gypsy. Headed out on a cross-country trip? Plug in Gypsy. But when it comes to navigating life, GPS can’t really help us there. The way forward isn’t always as clear. We seek fulfillment but sometimes aren’t certain how to get there. Add to that seasons of sadness, heartbreaking challenges, and anxiety about the future, and the road can seem shrouded in confusion and doubt.

This is a normal, human response. As both fully God and fully human, Jesus understood this deeply, which is why He provides a clear, concise, and direct roadmap to build meaning and purpose—not once but *three* times in Scripture—yet it often goes overlooked.³

3. The roadmap appears in three Gospels: Matthew 22:36-40, Mark 12:28-31, Luke 10:25-28. Though the passage appears in John (13:34-35), its emphasis varies from the other three Gospels.

The most complete version of the roadmap appears in Mark, after Jesus has arrived in Jerusalem with His twelve disciples. Their first stop is the temple courts, where the Sadducees ask Jesus a question while he's teaching, intending to trick Him into contradicting Scripture. But their plan backfires when a scribe overhears their "debate" and notices Jesus gives them a "good" answer. (Scripture's words—not mine.) This teacher would have been a top-tier expert in the Jewish faith, but he recognized knowledge when he heard it—and seized an opportunity when he saw it. So, the scribe looks to Jesus and asks, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?" (12:28).

We don't get much context around this question. Where was this teacher's head at? Was the man looking to narrow down the commandments so he could focus all his efforts on one? Was he trying to prioritize what he should be teaching? Was he overwhelmed? Confused? Worried? Scripture doesn't indicate that he was ill-intentioned, like the Sadducees who were trying to trap Jesus.⁴ Perhaps he was just genuinely curious. Whatever the reason, we know the premise of our lives because he took the chance to ask this question.

The answer Jesus gives is premise-based—meaning, it provides foundational truths upon which we can build our identity and purpose. Jesus tells the teacher, "Love the Lord your God

4. The title "teacher of the law" and "scribe" are interchangeable in meaning. The scribes (many of whom aligned with the Pharisees) were, as Matthew Henry puts it, "enemies to the Sadducees." You might think that when Jesus debates so well against the Sadducees, the scribes would have jumped in with support—but they were *all* wary of Jesus. Apparently, only one scribe "had so much civility in him" to make a move and "own that [Jesus] answered well." At first, the comparable passage in Matthew may seem contradictory. Mark says the scribe notices "Jesus had given them a good answer" (v. 28); Matthew says, "One of them, an expert in the law, tested Him with this question." But biblical commentators generally agree that unlike the Sadducees, the scribe wasn't trying to trick Jesus. David Brown, for example, explains that the scribe was likely prideful of his knowledge and had not come to believe in Jesus, but confirms that he asked "an honest-hearted, fair" question, "manifestly in no bad spirit." For more, see "Commentary on Mark 12 by Matthew Henry" and "Commentary on Mark 12 by Jamieson, Fausset & Brown" (*Blue Letter Bible*, BLB, 2025).

with all your *heart* and with all your *soul* and with all your *mind* and with all your *strength*.” Then, He gives a second: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” He concludes, saying, “There is no commandment greater than these.” Jesus tells us exactly what our whole life should be founded upon.

To unpack these verses, most readers would begin with the first and move to the second. I take a less common approach when reading this passage, similar to the way my mind approaches reading in general. I am dyslexic, which is a form of neurodivergency. “Neurodivergency” is just a fancy word that describes when someone’s brain functions differently from the norm, which is true for how mine processes information. Science may have their name for it, but I like to think of my brain as more of a “neuro-kaleidoscope.” And my family and team can attest to the constant flow of new and various things that come out of my mind. I’m usually thinking and processing differently than everyone else.

With dyslexia, I naturally tend to process text backwards. When I was in grade school, I wrote in my notebooks starting from the last page and moving backwards. It was comfortable for my brain, like the kind of comfort you feel when you get home after a crazy day, take off your shoes and work clothes, and get into something comfy and loose. It’s how my brain could “breathe.” Then, a teacher who graded the tidiness of our notebooks forced me to write front to back, in the standard way. I learned that to be in the real world, I sometimes had to bend my neurodivergence to fit in, and in this case, avoid sacrificing a good grade. But I still find comfort the unconventional back-to-front way. Whereas most people take a forward-facing perspective, reading left to right, I feel more comfortable doing the reverse—which is actually how I came to understand this passage. When I viewed it backwards, not only did the endgame become clear, but the map to fulfillment did as well.

The map is this: Love yourself *so that* you can love God and love others. To love fully involves your whole being, which consists of four integral parts: heart, soul, mind, and strength. When each part is healthy and healed, your being becomes whole. Only when your being becomes whole can you love with your whole self.

The key is not in just loving, but loving *well*. You must love yourself well, so that you can love others well and love God fully.

And you must *heal* to become *whole*.

The four elements that make up your being must be healthy in and of themselves for two main reasons. One, they function separately to accomplish their individual duties. And two, they come together to form an actual whole. They must be healthy individually first—separate from one another—in order to work as a collaborative unit. If one is not healthy, it won't take long and another will be down for the count as well. But when all four elements are healthy, you are able to function at full capacity—loving with your whole being, giving of your full self. This is very much an all or nothing scenario.

Think about the four legs of a beautifully crafted table built to sustain weight. If any one of the legs is off just slightly, the whole table suffers. If a leg is too long, too short, or too worn, the table won't be balanced or sturdy. Similarly, the table of our life has four legs: the emotional leg, the spiritual leg, the mental leg, and the physical leg. If any one of those is either too long, too short, too tight, or too loose, our life can lose balance or the ability to sustain God's calling on our life. It might even collapse under the pressures of this world. Keeping all four legs in good shape by paying attention to all four is the key to living an abundant life.

When Jesus outlines the premise of our lives in Mark 12, He emphasizes our whole self. With a little digging into Scripture, we can see just how much of an emphasis. Jesus' instruction to

“love others as yourself” is less about the humanistic approach of putting yourself first, and more about the true way to love yourself well: loving God. The greatest act of self love is doing the personal work it takes to love the Lord with *all* the heart, soul, mind and strength. The healing, breakthroughs, growth, character, and freedom that comes from this work is the most self-nurturing work we can do for love. And, of course, when a good thing happens to us, we automatically share it. That’s loving others as ourselves. It’s doing what we can to help and encourage others to thrive in their love of God.

Before I discuss the four elements of self in more detail, let’s first walk through some historical context to get a good look at the larger picture.

The Shema

In Mark, Jesus echoes a passage from the Old Testament that His New Testament audience would have known by heart: the Shema. The “Shema,” Hebrew for “hear” or “listen,” is a declaration of God’s oneness and a call to love Him fully. It comes from Deuteronomy, when Moses gives his final instructions to the Israelites before they enter the Promised Land.

Making it to the border of the Promised Land had been a years-long journey for the Israelites. Forty to be exact. Four hundred if you count the years they lived in Egypt.⁵ They had progressively become oppressed under Egyptian rule, until their suffering became extremely severe. They cried out to God, and He answered by delivering them out of their captivity in Egypt to the land He had promised their forefather, Abraham, that his descendants would inhabit. But when the Israelites were on the

5. Exodus 12:40-41

verge of entering, they hesitated—and then they panicked. They became so focused on the size of the people who were already living there that they flat out refused to go in. They fed into their fear, and it distorted their perspective.

By this point, the Israelites had seen God's miracles and His power firsthand. He parted the Red Sea so they could walk through it (Exodus 14), used a cloud during the day and fire at night to guide them through the wilderness (Exodus 13), delivered food right out of thin air (Exodus 16), and drew water out of a rock (Exodus 17). But even as close as they'd made it to the Promised Land, their fear overshadowed the miracles they'd seen. Though God forgave them (Numbers 14:20), they wandered in the desert for 40 years before finally entering the land.

Imagine living in an actual desert for forty years, let alone wandering around all over it. I doubt many of us could survive our front yards for too long—myself included. And if you're thinking about a flat desert full of sand dunes, think again. The Sinai Desert, where the Israelites likely spent the majority of the forty years, is made up of rock and filled with dust. The wilderness would have been exceptionally harsh and barren, with very little food and water. That desert gets less than two inches of rain *a year*. Temperatures would have been extreme, with blazing heat during the day plummeting to a chilling cold at night. Those dangers don't even take into account all the creatures slithering, crawling, and sprinting across the desert while they slept in tents and walked in sandals.

And yet, the Israelites survived. However, they did not survive on their own. They learned to rely entirely on God for everything—food, water, protection, and guidance. Their journey was emotionally draining, mentally taxing, physically exhausting, and generally disorienting. They had no long-term plan-of-action set out before them, but they did have day-to-day directions that

God consistently provided. By learning to trust God's guidance as they wandered, they experienced a process that changed them significantly, and they entered the Promised Land as transformed people. The time the Israelites spent in the desert was a formative period that shaped their identity and development as a nation.

Before the Israelites entered their land, Moses wanted to be sure they would remember and honor God's faithfulness. He gathered them together at its border, near the same place their previous generation had refused to enter forty years earlier. Here, Moses said, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength." Moses' words became the opening statement of the Shema, a foundational declaration of faith, recited daily in Jewish tradition.

The fact that this Great Commandment came at the end of the Israelites journey through the desert, right before they entered the Promised Land, blows my mind every time I think about it. Moses could have said anything, but God made sure this is what remained in their hearts after such an arduous forty years. Praise the Lord.

The Four Elements of Self

Moses' audience generally viewed the self holistically. Ancient Hebrew culture didn't think of the heart, soul, mind, and body as separate. The mind, specifically, was rolled into the self. The original Hebrew words for "soul" (*nephesh*) and "heart" (*lev*) involved the mind—but in a holistic way.⁶ For them, the inner life was centered in the heart as the source of thought, feeling, and will, and in the soul as the living self.

6. Brown, Francis, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs. *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon: With an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic*. Hendrickson Publishers, 1996.

By the time Jesus was walking around in the first century, Jewish culture had been heavily influenced by Greek language and thought. Unlike ancient Hebrew culture, Greeks treated the mind as a distinct aspect of the person—in large part because of the philosophical thinkers of their culture. Greek philosophers believed that reason—the human capacity to think clearly and rationally—was central to knowing what is real. They identified the mind as the source of both logic and reason, so they emphasized it as a separate part of the self.

When Jesus recited the Shema, He was speaking to a Jewish religious audience that had been culturally influenced by Greek and Roman thought. Aware of this Greco-Roman influence, He expanded on the Shema, adding “with all your mind.” To be sure, He wasn’t altering the Shema; He was simply drawing out its full intent. He was making sure His audience understood that they were to love God with their *whole* self—because for them, adding “mind” emphasized the whole person. This is true for our modern Western civilization too. After the fall of the Roman Empire, Western civilization clung to the Greek model, so our modern Western culture still makes these separate distinctions, giving us four elements of self.

It’s interesting that Jesus didn’t take this moment to make some philosophical argument, proclaiming the old way of thinking was better than the new way, or one right and the other wrong. He simply acknowledged this particular cultural view had shifted and tailored His answer in a way that delivered His point: love God and love people with your *whole* self. His description gives us a clear picture of the premise of our lives and what it truly means to love *well*—beginning with our heart.

Heart, Emotional Being

The heart has long been considered the origin source of emotions. From about 2,000 to 400 BC, the ancient Hebrews believed that feeling deeply was a reflection of the heart's engagement with God, life, and people in general. In the fourth century, the Ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle (384–322 BC) identified the heart as the organ associated with emotions.⁷ The meaning of “heart” in the original Greek—*kardias*—means the center or seat of our thoughts and feelings. Fast forward a few centuries to medieval Christian philosopher Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274 AD). He combined Aristotle's philosophy with Christian theology and deemed the heart the direct source of human emotions.⁸ In the early part of the nineteenth century, Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855) believed the heart to be central to deep emotional honesty.⁹ (The list goes on, but you get the point.)

In our day and age, Hollywood may have given us some unhelpful notions about the link between the heart and emotions, but the heart still represents our emotional core. Everyone has, feels, and experiences emotions. What we do with them is a different topic (which we'll discuss in more depth later). For now, I'll say that we shouldn't base our actions solely on emotion, but we should still honor and understand what we feel.

Personally, my heart has never known how to feel lightly. I love deeply, and strong emotions have always been a part of who I am. You may be closely in tune with your emotions, or you may have developed a habit of pushing them aside, burying them deep

7. See Chapter 10 in Book 3 of Aristotle's *On the Parts of Animals* (*A New Critical Edition*, edited by David G. Horrell, Oxford University Press, 2020).

8. Pasnau, Robert. “Thomas Aquinas.” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman, winter 2024, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aquinas/>. Accessed 7 May 2025.

9. In Part I of his work *Works of Love* (1847), Kierkegaard discusses the heart as a source of emotions. In later works, he explores the concept of the heart in relation to the self, emphasizing the “heart” as critical to one's relationship with God.

inside yourself. But allowing our emotions to pass through our bodies and accept them as part of the human condition is critical to our mental health. Our heart and the emotions that flow from it are a part of us, a part of our whole self.

Soul, Spiritual Being

When the Bible speaks about being human, it is not a mere sum of flesh and bones. In the account of Genesis 2:7, we are reminded that God took dust from the ground and shaped it, but life began the moment He breathed life into his nostrils. That image is powerful: without divine breath, the body is nothing more than inert matter; with this breath, man becomes a living being—complete, able to think, feel, and relate to his Creator.

Throughout Scripture, the term *soul* (Hebrew *nefesh*, Greek *psyche*) is used to speak of being spiritual. It is not an ethereal fragment separate from the body, but the person with thoughts, emotions, and will. That is why the psalmist could cry out: “Bless the Lord, O my soul; let all my being bless His holy name!” (Psalm 103:1). It was not a part of him that worshiped, but his whole inner being.

The *spirit* (Hebrew *ruah*, Greek *pneuma*) points to another dimension—the deepest one, the part that comes directly from God. It is the divine breath that makes communion with the eternal possible. Ecclesiastes 12:7 expresses it simply: when life in this world ends, “the spirit returns to God who gave it.” The spirit, then, not only sustains life but opens human beings to transcendence in eternal life and to relationship with their Creator.

However, the soul and the spirit are not separate. Hebrews 4:12 affirms that the Word of God is so sharp that it can divide them, which indicates that they are distinguishable, even though in our experience they appear united. Mary expressed this in her song when she said: “My soul glorifies the Lord, and my

spirit rejoices in God my Savior” (Luke 1:46-47). In her words, soul and spirit intertwine in a single act of praise.

Jesus Himself, when quoting the Shema in Mark 12:30, commands us to love God with all our heart, all our soul, all our mind, and all our strength. There, the soul appears as a synonym for life—for the inner being. To love God with all the soul means to give Him one’s entire existence—what is visible and invisible, what we think and what we feel.

For this reason, we can say that human beings are body, but also soul and spirit. The body connects us to the earth, but the divine breath makes us spiritual beings, capable of knowing God and living in communion with Him.

Mind, Conscious Being

Much like our souls, we cannot see our minds. Thanks to modern medicine and technological developments, brain scans can show images of our brain patterns and activity—but no distinguishing features of our mind. Even a brain scan can’t fully determine whether someone is conscious or not.

Your mind is the defining feature that marks you as a conscious being. Because we have minds, we are able to process thoughts. A plant, for example, can’t very well do that, even though it is a living organism. “Conscious” is, after all, how we describe our normal state of life. When you are awake, you are conscious. When you faint, you are briefly unconscious. When you sleep, however, you aren’t truly unconscious. Think about the last time you had a dream. Sleep is actually considered a state of partial consciousness because sometimes your mind is still at work.

Since your mind doesn’t have a designated space or any physical attributes, we can’t directly observe it. To make matters even

more complex, only you have true access to your mind—the part of yourself that is aware, that perceives, that notices, that discerns. Merriam-Webster’s definition of “mind” as “the conscious mental events and capabilities in an organism” illuminates the mind as the center of conscious awareness.¹⁰ The original word for “mind” in Mark 12 is *dianoias*, which refers to deep thought. Its use refers to the mind as the faculty of understanding and desiring—which implies that our desires stem from our thoughts and emphasizes the depth of the conscious *and* subconscious mind.

As conscious beings, we are capable of making decisions based on intentions; reflecting on our emotions, actions, and decisions; using logic, reason, and imagination; and sharing ideas through different languages. Over the years of our lives, we make memories and develop a sense of identity. It is our mind, part of the self, that makes all this possible.

Strength, Physical Being

The body is the most visible of all four of the elements of the self. It’s the vehicle that our hearts, souls, and minds travel around in. We are physical beings, requiring oxygen, food, and water. We can’t live in temperatures that are exceptionally cold nor extremely hot. We get sick and hurt, and we need sleep to rest, recover, and repair. Yet for as delicate as our bodies can be, they’re shockingly resilient. We can bounce back from an injury, overcome dire illnesses, and even survive uninhabitable conditions.

Our bodies also naturally define our physical strength. We are both limited to and empowered by the body’s capabilities. A 100-pound high schooler won’t bench press anywhere close to as much as a 230-pound bodybuilder. And a football linebacker

10. “Mind.” *Merriam-Webster.com Thesaurus*, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/mind>. Accessed 8 May 2025.

won't run a sub seven-minute mile pace that a marathoner can maintain for over twenty-six miles.

The original Greek word, *ischyos*, profoundly influences our understanding of “strength” in Mark 12. It means strength, power, might, and force—but it also involves the extent of our ability. I see the latter as encouragement, almost a pep-talk of sorts, to challenge us not to conform, but to expand beyond our limits for the love of God and His glory. When we think about our strength in this context, we start considering what strengths we have, where they thrive, and how we can develop our strength and expand our abilities in those areas.

God purposefully and intentionally creates us as individuals, our body being a part of His creation. Your physical being is an integral part of who you are. Certainly, a marathoner devotes significant time and effort to training, and a linebacker puts in reps on the field in practice. But genetics play a role in our physical makeup as well. We are all created as different individuals, and we all possess different physical strengths and weaknesses. Most importantly, you are “fearfully and wonderfully made” (Psalm 139:14), with skills and attributes that God has made unique to you.

The Whole Self

If you're like me, you get stressed from time to time. Perhaps you, like myself, have a tendency to take on a bit more than you should, only to realize too late that you've surpassed your bandwidth and maxed out your capacity. To create more time in your day, you start clearing your schedule of any fun activities—after all, they're unnecessary anyway. To get more work done, you forgo some hours of sleep—after all, you can get by just fine. To save

time, you grab fast food instead of meal prepping—after all, food is food. Then, if you're *really* like me, you'll catch a cold. It's fair to say a cold is a blip on the radar of life, but the lead up to it is a perfect illustration of how the four parts of your being function.

In one way, the four elements operate *separately from* each other. When you overcommit, you're stressed mentally. As you devote less time to the enjoyments of life, you naturally don't feel as much gladness in your heart. Without resting deeply, your soul becomes weary. Lacking proper nutrition, your body's immune system weakens. At the same time, they work *collaboratively with* each other. As relatively minor of a physical ailment as a cold is, this one didn't start physically. The mind was affected first, but the body ended up being down for the count.

You may not even notice when your choices are negatively impacting any one part of your being. In the case that you do, you might justify your actions with thoughts like *I just need to get through this season* or *it's not that big of a deal* or *I'm stronger than this*. Before my healing journey, I defaulted to this way of thinking. But what we often fail to recognize is just how severely the other three parts are affected as a consequence. While a bit of a nuisance, a cold is pretty easy to bounce back from. But if we do not attend to each part of our being for an extended period of time, we will face more major, life-altering illnesses that are far more difficult to heal—but that doesn't mean we shouldn't.

Beginning in the Desert

The years that the Israelites spent wandering in the desert was a formative period in their history. They became whole as a nation, relying on God for their survival and learning to love Him fully. Although they did not know it at the time, they were living the story

they would tell for years to come after entering the Promised Land.

Though you are likely not wandering in a geographical desert as the Israelites were, you may feel as though you are still wandering in a figurative desert. Descriptions of the Sinai Desert—rock, dust, freezing, blazing, harsh, barren, dangerous, wilderness—may resonate deeply with you. I can assure you that they have with me. Fear of failure, hiding in shame, and dread of judgment created my own personal desert. Feeling severely inadequate, sad, and anxious, especially in the midst of experiencing God’s miracles, only deepened my shame. I wasn’t in a geographical desert, but I was still very much in a desert. I was not loving God with everything in me because I couldn’t—I was broken in every way.

My own healing journey started *from within* the desert.

Take it from me, you must come to terms with the fact that you are in a desert before you can find your way out. You have to take a good, hard look at the parts of yourself that are in need of healing. Each part must be healed individually so your whole self can become healthy. Without a fully healed and whole being, you are hindered in your ability to love God fully. A fractured being cannot give itself wholly, so you must first become whole.

The passage in Mark 12 often goes overlooked as the road-map to fulfillment, but it clearly outlines the premise of our lives. Perhaps it just takes us looking at it with an unconventional—or neurodivergent—perspective to see it.