

# **Gentle Assignments:**

## ***From Trauma to Transformation***

### **Chapter 1 & 2: *The Pain of Being In Pain***

#### **A Gentle Assignment: Start with the Basics**

*Choose one of these physical components to focus on this week. Which one disturbs your peace the most? Then make a small Next Right Step.*

- *With your current trial, are you sleeping well? If not, what can you do to improve your sleep or who might you see for help?*
- *Are there small changes you could make to eat healthier? Is there something you could reduce or eliminate from your daily diet? And what would you like to put in-something small for now?*
- *What do you enjoy doing that would allow you to increase exercise or movement each day? Remember, start with something small, and something you like.*
- *Do you have enough information about what financial resources you have? If not, how can you get involved so that you know? Who might you ask for help?*

*Remember, choose just one of these to start. You can return to work on others when you are ready.*

#### **A Gentle Assignment: Slow Down**

- *How is your life slower now?*
- *What is hard about slowing down? What do you like about it?*
- *What is something you could eliminate or simplify in your life right now so that you could accept a slower pace for a while?*
- *What beliefs do you have if you choose to do this?*
- *Share your choice about how you will slow down and your beliefs about doing that with someone safe so you can hear their response.*

#### **A Gentle Assignment: Find Companionship**

- *Will you think of one or two safe people with whom you can share your whole story? One of those might be a counselor. Eventually you may grow this list to a few more safe women.*
- *What beliefs do you have if you choose to share your story?*
- *How did it feel to share your story with someone safe?*

#### **A Gentle Assignment: Invest in Yourself**

*If you pay attention to when you are irritable, exhausted, or resentful, I think you will find a slice of self-care that is calling to you! Ask it what it needs. Maybe you need some time alone. Maybe you want to get away and read. Maybe you need some women who understand your journey. Maybe you need a break from parenting. Maybe you need a warm bath and a nap.*

- *What is something that would feel comforting to you?*
- *What beliefs do you have when you start investing in self-care, or taking care of yourself?*
- *Did you watch parents who modeled self-care?*
- *The opposite of self-care would be becoming a martyr (doing it all yourself and getting exhausted).*
- *Name situations where you struggle with being a martyr.*
- *When you start investing in your self-care, how does it feel?*

### A Gentle Assignment: Create a POYO

- *Walk around your entire house – peeking into closets, storage areas, the basement, nooks under staircases, and unused rooms or spaces – and consider where you might find a Place of Your Own. You will know it is right because you have this burst of energy or passion that emerges. “Aha! I think this will do.”*
- *When you decide where your POYO will be, share your decision with your family. You might also check out if someone else would like to find a POYO, too.*
- *Your next step will be the fun part... how you will decorate it or what will you bring into your new POYO?*

### A Gentle Assignment: Explore the Concept of Both/And

- *As you listen to yourself or someone else, take a sentence that includes “but” and make it into a both/and statement by using the word “and” instead.*
- *Take one of your “either/or” (black-and-white) thoughts and reword it into a statement with “and”.*
- *How does it feel to change the verbiage of your thoughts?*
- *Continue to catch yourself when you say “but” and see if you can change it to “and”.*

### A Gentle Assignment: Remember The Slinky & The Rollercoaster

- *Think about what your emotions or feelings have been like since you experienced a traumatic betrayal or life experience. Name the feelings that come and go when you are going through this trauma.*
- *With what behavior or substance do you try to contain those emotions?*
- *Name the people you can talk to or place you can go to “offload” some of your intense emotions, so that you do not hurt loved ones with your words or behaviors.*
- *What are your beliefs about having intense or difficult feelings?*
- *What did you learn in your family about intense feelings?*

### A Gentle Assignment: Learn to Grieve Well

- *What other losses have you grieved other than the death of a loved one?*
- *Make a list of some of the losses you have experienced in your life. Some may have been intentional (a family move, a change in jobs, a friend moving away), and some may have been a surprise (discovery of sexual addiction, a pandemic, a frightening diagnosis, the death of a loved one).*
- *Have you been able to grieve those losses?*
- *What beliefs do you have about taking time to grieve?*
- *Did you have healthy modeling of adults who grieved losses? What did you learn in your family?*

## **Gentle Assignments:**

### ***From Trauma to Transformation***

### **Chapter 3 & 4: *Surviving or Thriving***

#### **A Gentle Assignment: Take Responsibility for Yourself**

- *When you watch how you talk when you are hurt or unhappy, who or what do you blame for your situation? Think about circumstances in addition to those in your marriage. At work. With children. In your friendships. With extended family members. Do you find yourself blaming them for not being able to live the life you want?*
- *What modeling have you had in your growing up family about taking responsibility for your well-being?*
- *When did family members blame others for their pain and unhappiness?*
- *Do you like the idea of taking charge of the life you want to live? Why or why not?*

#### **A Gentle Assignment: Live Authentically**

- *Are there certain situations where you do not feel like you can be honest about who you are?*
- *What feelings do you hide away?*
- *What beliefs do you have about being congruent or authentic? One belief that many people have is that if you really knew me, you would not like me and would leave me. Do you have that belief? Are there other beliefs?*
- *Do you like being around people who are authentic? Why? Will you start by watching yourself and noticing when you do not believe your words or actions match the “real you”? Just make note of it in your journal. It is something you can slowly work on!*

#### **A Gentle Assignment: See Your Feelings As Messengers**

- *Download a feelings chart from the Internet or use the one in the resource section of this book. One woman in my therapy group made small, laminated cards with many feelings words and passed them out to everyone. You do what is best for you. just keep a list of feelings words handy for this assignment.*
- *In a journal or notebook, jot down what you are feeling four times a day – at breakfast, lunch, dinner, and bedtime. Use feelings words other than good or fine or tired. That can be hard because those words are used by so many people. This first step is just getting used to noticing and naming your feelings, expanding your emotional vocabulary as you do so.*
- *Then I would like you to think about what you learned about having feelings in your early family life. Was it okay to show feelings? Encouraged? Were certain feelings all right and others not? Were certain people allowed certain feelings, like anger, but not others?*
- *You brought many of your learnings and beliefs about feelings into your life and relationships. Which would you like to change?*

#### **A Gentle Assignment: Ask Yourself: How Do I Cope?**

- *Name some of the behaviors or substances you use to exit or minimize feelings that you do not want to feel (coping). They may be on the list in Chapter 2, or you may list other things that fit for you. The possibilities are endless.*
- *Which of your choices were used by other family members when you were young?*
- *Which coping behaviors or substances on your list are the ones you used when you were young? It is usually true that these are the hardest ones to eliminate in your life because they have been used the longest.*
- *Which coping behaviors or substances on your list would you like to reduce or eliminate?*

### A Gentle Assignment: Identify and Communicate Your Needs

- Are you good at asking for what you need? If so, how were you encouraged to do that? If not, what is preventing you from asking?
- What do you do if you ask for help and it is not given?
- What are your beliefs about having needs and/or asking for needs?
- What are your beliefs about helping others with their needs? Do you like having other people ask you for help? Why or why not?
- Why is it easier to help others than to ask for help (assuming it is!)?

### A Gentle Assignment: Explore Your Motivation

- Do you think about your motivation when you make decisions? What influences your decision-making?
- Do you experience yourself as a controlling person? If so, why do you think you are?
- Write down several examples of making decisions based on your motivation to take care of yourself.
- What do you believe about using self-care as a reason to do something?

### A Gentle Assignment: Live Intentionally

- Do you describe yourself as a reactive person or a proactive one? What are some examples?
- When has it been helpful to be reactive? When is being intentional not helpful?
- Are there some reactions you have that lead you to not like the person you have become? What are those?
- What characteristics do you want to become 'more so' as you grow older?

### A Gentle Assignment: Ask Yourself: What Disturbs My Peace?

- When your peace is disturbed, do you think about what it is you need – right now?
- Does it seem possible that the Holy Spirit urges you to make a new decision or change your course by disturbing your peace? Do you have examples of how this has happened in your life?
- When you get frustrated by not being able to change something, will you try using the Serenity Prayer?
- Name what you **cannot** change. Name what you **can** change. What, if anything, will you need to surrender to God?

### A Gentle Assignment: Take the Next Right Step

- Do you find yourself future tripping (worrying what you will need to do or what the future will look like in a few weeks, or a few months, or a few years from now)? What can you do to stay present with today?
- What do you worry about that you cannot change or control right now?
- What can you do to find more time to be quiet to listen to God's whispers?
- What scriptures can you find to encourage you to stay present to your worries or concerns today?

### A Gentle Assignment: Choices

- What are your beliefs about having choices in difficult situations?
- What can you do if you struggle to know what your choices are in a given situation?
- What have you learned about having choices by watching adults in your early life? Were some victims – complaining, blaming others, and having no choices? Who were those adults?
- Did some adults model having choices and being resourceful? Who were those adults?
- Practice saying several times a day, "I always have choices!"

# **Gentle Assignments:**

## **From Trauma to Transformation**

### **Chapter 5 & 6: Exploring You – The Person You Take Everywhere**

#### **A Gentle Assignment: Be a Gentle Observer**

- *Are you able to be a Gentle Observer without being critical of yourself? Give some examples of when you have done that. What did you say to yourself?*
- *What are a couple of things you are noticing about yourself?*
- *Is there anything you think you might want to work on changing in time?*
- *What are a few things you like and do not want to change?*
- *Can you take your Gentle Observer with you when you notice others and just watch and not judge?*
- *List a few times when you noticed without judging. How did that feel?*

#### **A Gentle Assignment: Consider Your Worth**

- *Do you believe you are worthy and valuable? Why or why not?*
- *What experiences in your life have rocked you from that truth?*
- *Were you ever taught that you are fearfully and wonderfully made, and that God delights in you? How young were you? Did you believe it at the time?*
- *Will you find a picture of yourself when you were 4 or 5 years-old and frame it in a beautiful frame? Put her where you will see her several times a day. Notice what you are feeling and thinking when you see her. Start by telling her what you like about her as you pass by.*

#### **A Gentle Assignment: Have the Courage to Be Imperfect**

- *Do you struggle with perfectionism? If so, what do you think you sacrifice in taking time to do things perfectly?*
- *What do you believe about perfectionism? Who were you influenced by to be more perfectionistic? Was this person(s) easy to be around? Give examples.*
- *Did you have parents who would own their imperfections, mistakes and humanness? List examples.*
- *List a few things that you will work on letting go and not doing perfectly. Who can encourage you to make these changes?*

#### **A Gentle Assignment: Open Your Cabinet of Core Beliefs**

- *Make a list of your beliefs when you were young using these categories: money, the value of men, the value of women, success, religion and spiritually, trusting men, trusting women, having needs, men who are unfaithful in marriage, accepting help, providing help, privacy, anger, lying, having fun, showing emotions.*
- *Which of these beliefs have changed in your adulthood?*
- *Which beliefs do you still think you want to change?*

#### **A Gentle Assignment: Find Yourself**

- *Do you have trouble knowing who you are – what you feel or need or like?*
- *Have you slowly lost knowing those things about yourself, or has it always been a problem?*
- *What are your beliefs about taking time and money for yourself?*
- *What is one small step to choosing yourself this week?*

### **A Gentle Assignment: Consider Your Brain Health**

- *Do you struggle with anxiety, depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), attention deficit disorder (ADD or ADHD), sleep disorders, or posttraumatic distress disorders (PTSD)? If so, which ones?*
- *Have you experienced any of these or other mental health issues earlier in your life (prior to your marriage)? What help have you had to mitigate these problems?*
- *Listen to several YouTube presentations on brain health or read a book to begin getting informed. (Dr. Amen's book, *Change Your Brain, Change Your Life*, is an excellent book that builds hope for all, in my opinion).*
- *What are your beliefs about your brain health?*

### **A Gentle Assignment: Anxiety – Where Do You Rev?**

- *On a scale of 1-10 (with 10 being extreme) where do you rev with anxiety?*
- *When you think back to earlier life experiences, what events, people, or circumstances created a lack of safety for you?*
- *Explore members of your family to see what patterns of anxiety you notice. Interview relatives older than yourself. Ask them to talk to you about the anxiety of grandparents or their siblings, or aunts and uncles.*
- *Were there patterns of anxiety in your family for which no one got help?*

### **A Gentle Assignment: Anger – How Do You Respond When You Are Angry?**

- *What do you do when you are angry?*
- *Where did you learn that behavior?*
- *Think about a few situations this last week that made you angry. Write them down in your journal. Then think about what you needed in each situation and write that down next to the situation.*
- *Is that something you could ask for or take care of yourself? Also, name any other feeling underneath your anger in each situation: embarrassment, fear, shame, disappointment.*
- *If you can answer these questions, you are making progress at figuring out the message of your anger.*

# **Gentle Assignments:**

## **From Trauma to Transformation**

### **Chapter 7 & 8: What Is It Like to Be in a Relationship with You?**

#### **A Gentle Assignment: Ask Yourself: How Safe Am I?**

- *We often recognize when we do not feel safe around someone else. Do you recognize elements of how **you** might not be safe? List examples in these categories:*
  - *Verbally?*
  - *Physically?*
  - *Sexually?*
  - *Spiritually?*
  - *Financially?*
- *Decide what one next step you might take to be safe for yourself.*

#### **A Gentle Assignment: Practice Do-Overs**

- *Is there something you did or said to someone recently that you wish you could have a second chance to do it differently? What was the situation?*
- *Practice writing out what you would say or do if you could have a ‘do-over’.*
- *Now go to the person who may have been hurt by you and ask if you could have a do-over. Let them know you are practicing! And then read what you wrote about another try.*
- *How did it feel after you tried a do-over?*

#### **A Gentle Assignment: Check Out Your Perceptions**

- *The next time you get annoyed or resentful by something, notice what your perception is – what are you thinking, what is “The story in your head”? (e.g., A car sped past me, driving in and out of cars and ended up two cars ahead of me at the light. The first story in my head was, “Everyone is in such a hurry these days!” The second thought was, “I wonder if he is in an emergency?”*
- *As you think of your situation and the ‘story’ you are creating in your head, are there other possibilities that would explain why someone did or said what they did?*
- *How would you find out what was true?*
- *Continue to practice naming your perceptions, and when possible, check them out with people you know. (e.g., When you don’t respond to my texts right away, the story in my head is that I am bothering you. Is that true?)*

#### **A Gentle Assignment: Ask Yourself: How Do I Handle Conflict?**

- *What did you learn in your early life about managing conflict (or differences)?*
- *Do you handle conflict in the same way?*
- *Ideally, how would you like to handle conflict as an adult today?*

#### **A Gentle Assignment: Consider the Turtle & the Hammer**

- *Do you recognize being a Turtle or a Hammer in your marriage? Which one? Name a situation where your Turtle or Hammer shows up.*
- *Did you learn this pattern of communication from a mom or dad or someone close to you? Explain.*
- *Talk to a friend, counselor, or pastor about how you can change your pattern.*

### A Gentle Assignment: Ask Yourself: Am I a Partner or a Parent

- Do you notice that you try to change your spouse by offering suggestions or criticism? What are some examples?
- Do you notice that you regularly help your spouse with tasks that he cannot or will not do? What are some examples?
- Do you receive suggestions or criticisms regularly from your spouse? If so, how does that feel?
- Do you need help with some aspects of your life that typically an adult would be able to do? If so, are you willing to learn that skill so that you are not dependent on your spouse?
- What does it mean to you to be a partner in your relationship?

### A Gentle Assignment: Become a Stand-Alone Person

- If you needed to be alone (if you were divorced, or your spouse died or had to be away for a long period of time, say in the military), what would create fear for you? What do you think you would be inadequate to handle?
- How would you describe the difference between 'wanting' to be in relationship rather than 'needing' to be in relationship? Which is emotionally healthier?
- What did you learn about being capable of being alone by watching your parent's relationship?

### A Gentle Assignment: Embrace Authentic Emotional Intimacy

- Are you able to be emotionally intimate – meaning capable of sharing what you are feeling, thinking, and needing or desiring? Why is that important?
- Which one of these is most difficult to share with your spouse – feelings, thoughts, or needs?
- If your spouse were to share feelings, thoughts and needs with you, would it be difficult to receive them without trying to change them, give advice for how to manage them, or judge them?
- Which of your spouse's feelings are hardest to hear – Needs? Thoughts?

### A Gentle Assignment: Accept Handicaps

- Do you have any physical limitations that created long-term struggles? Explain.
- Does a family member, friend, or your spouse have a physical limitation? Explain.
- Are you able to accept physical limitations in yourself or others?
- Have you been hurt by emotional, physical, sexual, or spiritual abuse by someone? Name some examples.
- Have you been neglected emotionally, physically, sexually, or spiritually by someone? Name some examples.
- Have you found coping behaviors or substances to manage the pain from hurt or neglect? What has helped?
- Has your spouse been hurt or neglected by others? Do you notice ways he is coping with that pain?
- Are you able to accept your limitations? And his? Why or why not?

### A Gentle Assignment: Work Towards Unconditional Love

- How would you define unconditional love?
- Have you desired to be unconditionally loved by your spouse?
- What do you do when you are not loved this way?
- Do you think he has longed to be loved unconditionally by you?
- What does he do when he lacks this kind of love?
- How do you each fall short of loving unconditionally?
- What can you do when you don't receive unconditional love from your spouse?

**Gentle Assignments:**  
***From Trauma to Transformation***  
**Chapter 9: A New Trust**

**A Gentle Assignment: Trusting Others**

- *In thinking as far back as you can, who has broken your trust? List the situation, your age, and how trust was broken.*
- *What did you do each time your trust was broken?*
- *What did you learn in your growing up family about trusting other people?*
- *What helps you build trust in others?*

**A Gentle Assignment: Trusting Yourself**

- *Do you trust yourself to make decisions? Why or why not?*
- *Have you experienced the Spirit within to help you with direction and decisions?*
- *In your growing up family, who made most of the decisions? Mom? Dad? Mom and Dad together?*
- *Who are the safe and wise people in your life to help you with an important decision? Or to listen to your thought process so you can make your own decision?*
- *What is your belief today about trusting yourself?*
- *In what ways do others experience you as a trustworthy person?*

**A Gentle Assignment: Trusting God**

- *What did you learn about trusting God when you were little?*
- *What experiences have you had that grew your trust in God?*
- *What has broken your trust in God?*
- *Who are safe people who will allow you to voice your disappointment and anger with God?*
- *Is it hard to be patient with God's timing when you want something to happen? Name several situations when this was true.*
- *What does it mean to you to surrender something to God?*

**Gentle Assignments:**  
**From Trauma to Transformation**  
**Chapter 10: Everything Cries Holy – Letting Life Teach You**

**A Gentle Assignment: Everything Cries Holy**

- *Do you believe God wants to teach you things through life's experiences? Why?*
- *When has God seemed to want to work on changing something in you (i.e., being impatient, being controlling, feeling inadequate, being judgmental, feeling unloved.), and He delivered several opportunities to do so?*

**A Gentle Assignment: Loneliness vs Solitude**

- *Do you struggle with feeling lonely? What do you do when you feel lonely?*
- *How do you practice hearing God? Do you do it regularly?*
- *How would you explain the difference between loneliness and solitude?*

**A Gentle Assignment: Ahas are Personal!**

- *Do you remember having an aha lately? When did it happen and what was the aha?*
- *Have other people tried to give you an aha – or give you advice (an aha) when you did not want it? How did that feel? What did you do?*
- *Sharing your ahas with others is a way to be known. Do you do that? With whom? When?*

**A Gentle Assignment: Stadium Seating**

- *When was the most recent time you went through something traumatic or difficult? Explain.*
- *When you are going through something traumatic or difficult, I would say you have a front row seat – or you are in the game. Do you try and make big decisions when you are in that place? If so, why?*
- *What helps you move to the top row to review, revise, and re-establish a plan?*

**A Gentle Assignment: God Won't Waste Your Pain**

- *List any experiences when you endured a failure of some kind or a hardship, and it eventually led to something good.*
- *Can you think of stories of people who have overcome painful situations to become better? List them here.*
- *How long did it take after a trial to experience growth?*

**A Gentle Assignment: Surrender, Surrender, Surrender!**

- *How would you describe the difference between letting go and surrendering?*
- *Describe a situation when you did all that you knew you could do and then you surrendered it to God. What happened when you did that?*
- *Do you experience your dependence on God growing when you practice surrendering? Does it create less anxiety in your life? Describe what it is like for you.*

**Gentle Assignments:**  
***From Trauma to Transformation***  
**Chapter 11: *Liking The New You – Transforming***

**A Gentle Assignment: *The Posttraumatic Growth Inventory***

- *Take the Posttraumatic Growth Inventory (appendix D). List the date and your total score. Save your results and take it again after you have been working on the practical steps to your well-being – maybe in 6 months.*
- *Did you see changes in the results? In what areas are you growing/changing the most?*
- *Be sure to affirm yourself for working on becoming the person God created you to be!*

**A Gentle Assignment: *The Intimacy Skills Inventory***

- *Take the Intimacy Skills Inventory (appendix E). List the date and your total score. Save your results and take it again after you have been working on the practical steps to your well-being – maybe in 6 months.*
- *Did you see changes in the results? In what areas are you growing/changing the most?*
- *Be sure to affirm yourself for working on becoming the person God created you to be!*

**A Gentle Assignment: *The Fruit of the Spirit***

- *Write a sentence or two about each Fruit and your ability to live with that Fruit. Is it regularly part of your life? Sometimes? Rarely? Would you like to work on growing in the character of that Fruit?*

*Love:*

*Joy:*

*Peace:*

*Patience:*

*Kindness:*

*Goodness:*

*Gentleness:*

*Faithfulness:*

*Self-Control:*

- *God wants you to live in the fullness of all these Fruits. He wants you to thrive!*

**Gentle Assignments:**  
***From Trauma to Transformation***  
**Chapter 12: Trauma & Transformation Can Coexist**

*A Gentle Assignment:*

- *Looking at the list of spiritual components (page 163), which do you claim or are working on claiming for yourself?*
- *Which of the components are hardest for you to work on?*
- *Which one do you want to work on next?*
- *List any difficult or traumatic experiences you experienced when you were young.*
- *List any positive ways you grew from each traumatic experience.*
- *How long did it take after each trial to experience growth?*
- *Do you still experience despair from any of the traumatic experiences? State how that impairs your joy and purpose today?*
- *Are you willing to get more professional help if despair has continued after a traumatic experience? Who might that be?*
- *Do you like using “and” to describe embracing the growth that is experienced in adversity? Why, or why not?*
- *Practice creating several “and” sentences from difficult experiences in your life.*
- *Do you know you are a beautiful person, filled with passion and purpose and God wants you to thrive?*

*You are! And He does.*