

PEBBLE STONES

' Twenty Questions To Contemplate As You
Progress on Your Healing Journey'

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Book Dedication

To, Aidan

May you always reflect on the deepest questions of Life as you progress on your Hero's Journey

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Answer Your Troubling Questions...

Daily life brings plenty of challenging decisions and trying circumstances. This often raises key questions that rubs against our soul like a pebble in a shoe. And that's why this book 'Pebble Stones : Twenty Questions To Contemplate as You Progress on your Healing Journey' offers wisdom, introspection and encouragement as you unravel your emotional concerns. These 20 questions will focus your heart and mind on how to move towards closure and enter a new life chapter. Answering these questions gives you the opportunity to grow stronger than the circumstances that surround you. The articles in this books were written for a monthly column in a community newspaper called The Mustard Seed which was widely distributed on the South Coast of the province of KwaZulu Natal, South Africa.

About Dr Rani Samuel

Dr. Rani Samuel is a Clinical Psychologist and author, with extensive experience in the area emotional healing and wholeness. She works in private practice as a psychotherapist seeing both hospital inpatients and outpatients. Her work is focused on guiding patients through healing journeys from a place of crisis to one of calm and contentment, in spite of the storms of life. The processes that her patients embrace deals with both the psychological and spiritual aspects of healing.

Dr. Samuel is passionate about releasing people into the fullness of their divine potential and purpose so that they may become more fully alive! Visit www.ranisamuel.co.za for more healing resources.

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Introduction

'Have patience with everything unresolved and try to love the questions themselves'.

Rainer Maria Rilke from Letters to a Young Poet

The art and craft of psychotherapy relies on opening a palette containing multiple hues of meaningful questions. It has been referred to as 'analysis'. Many are familiar with images of a troubled patient lying on the proverbial couch while the contemplative psychologist, pen and notepad in hand probes the psyche in order to better understand what ails and hurts the soul. The psychotherapist of present day is still the 'detective' trying to fathom the intricate puzzle pieces of a patient's vast and varied life experiences.

It's never a dull day in my office and it begins in the initial moments of the first session when new patient is gently asked certain leading questions. What made you decide to make this appointment? What has happened recently that became the catalyst to seeking help? What have been the unique stressors that has led to this moment? Hard questions open the door to crucial conversations.

As soon as patients grasp the methodology of our interactions we become fellow travellers on the most adventurous internal life expedition . As therapy continues we often come to a few ' nagging' questions. It's the often mentioned 'pebble in the shoe' situation. Every patient has a key question from the past that frustrates, annoys and won't go away. It's the pebble that wearies and slows the journey. This book is a collection of some of those poignant questions.

Many eternal questions are also found in the well worn pages of the Bible. They too are worth considering for your own introspection and reflection. God asked Adam: Where art thou Adam?.He also enquired of Elijah who had

retreated to a cave: What are you doing here, Elijah?. And to a despondent but faithful Job he asked: ‘ Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation? These are some of the deepest questions one can ask in order to comprehend a portion of our divine relationship with God as well as understand our unique purpose on this earthly sojourn.

My desire is that this book will allow you to answer the hard questions as you continue your own healing journey.



Question One

What is that knot in my stomach?

Make-up counters in bustling shopping malls can be daunting places. Everything, including the perfectly groomed and flawless lady behind the counter smirks of subtle judgement that points out your own flaws and hidden insecurities. But today she was smiling and I knew exactly what product I required. I confidently started a friendly discussion about the tools of skin care. It was a weekday and there were no queues. Conversation flowed and the talk moved onto our jobs. The first question make-up artist Caroline asked me was: 'Do psychologists really help people?'. I proceeded to explain how psychologists have been uniquely trained to help patients resolve life crisis and re-establish emotional equilibrium.

Caroline was perfectly made up and she exuded a youthful positive energy. She proceeded to say: 'I have this knot in my stomach that's a strange feeling that leaves me overwhelmed at times. I try to quickly pull myself together. My doctor says its anxiety and wants me to see a psychologist'. She explained that all medical tests were completed and she had a clean bill of health. A make-up counter is no place for therapy but I did tell Caroline that anxiety is often experienced as physical sensations - a knot in your stomach, headaches, skin break-outs, dizziness and the list goes on. Every person will have their own 'stress' organ that acts up during periods of high stress and anxiety. It is vital that she listen and interpret these signals and messages. A time to stop, pay attention and take appropriate action!

Earlier in the day the girlfriend of my patient Clive described similar sensations. Clive, a well dressed and manicured senior manager in a corporate organisation had a long history of cocaine use. Before his last hospital admission, he had been involved in a near death motor vehicle accident that left him with back and facial injuries. Clive was a kind and well intentioned human being who lost all coherence and restraint when he abused drugs.

During the last incident he had an aggressive altercation with his girlfriend and stabbed her in her left shoulder. This was his first act of violence. Clive's girlfriend described how she has this 'knot in her stomach' that comes and goes, a feeling that threatens to overwhelm her anytime during the day or night. This was a sign that this dignified lady had to deal with the trauma of being stabbed by a man she trusted and loved. We are now working together once a week on these emotional triggers so that she can once again gain control over her anxiety. And once she deals with these hurtful issues, the knot in her stomach will begin to melt away bit by bit.

Anxiety and panic attacks often happen when the protective fight-flight response stops working in an optimal manner. If you are experiencing symptoms like heart palpitations, light headedness , chest pains and overwhelming thoughts - it is time to seek a professional assessment.

If your anxiety symptoms are milder it is worthwhile to take some time-out and improve your emotional self-care. Focus on getting outdoors for some exercise, connect with someone than can listen and support you without judgement. Anxiety is often lowered when we choose to eat a balanced diet, have a good sleep routine and pursue the creative aspects of ourselves like art, music and photography. Finally increasing your faith foundation through medication on the scriptures and quiet time for prayer plays a vital role in bringing your troubled soul to a place of solace.

Anxiety grips our hearts whenever we step outside our destiny. But a loving God is always available to redirect and order our steps.

Reflection:

- Do you sometimes have a 'knot' in your stomach?
- Does it appear when you least expect it?
- What hidden message are these sensations communicating to you?

Question Two

Why should I reflect on my life?

Priscilla is 44 years old and the youngest of seven siblings. She fondly recalls that she was the 'pet' in her family, especially in her growing up years. Her life has not been an easy one. At age 17 she consented to an arranged marriage to a very kind and handsome business owner. She grew to adore him very quickly as he was always looking for ways to spoil her and make her feel 'like the only woman in the world'. Sadly, he died just 3 years into the marriage when he was hijacked while leaving his business. It was a sudden and traumatic death and Priscilla was lost and inconsolable. She felt alone and full of rage. To compound matters she soon learned that she was pregnant. This news was both comforting and depressing.

Seshni was born on a cold July evening into the arms of a mother that was mourning. She was initially a happy child but learnt very quickly that it was better to be non-demanding. As she grew into her teenage years she daydreamed about escaping from her negative and grief-stricken mother. It seemed her mother had become a martyr and never wanted to stop being a heartbroken widow. Seshni studied diligently and qualified as a teacher and applied for a job out of South Africa. As she packed to leave for London her mother Priscilla packed to be admitted to hospital for depression.

Priscilla told me that she felt that her husband had died all over again. She was absolutely enraged that Seshni would abandon her and move overseas. During our sessions I asked her to reflect on the life that her daughter had lived with a negative, hostile and cold weeping widow. I explained to her that it was very critical to review her actions and behavior over the last twenty years and for her to consider how those actions impacted Seshni's life. She had a choice about what she wanted her future relationship with her daughter to be like.

Priscilla did not like the idea that she had to reflect on her role in the relationship as she always expected others to change because 'she had such a hard life'. Fortunately she realized that if she wanted to enjoy her own child and future grandchildren; she had to change. She told me that she wanted a fresh start and in the future wanted to be the best positive mother a child could have. She began this long journey by calling her daughter and enquiring about her new home in London and how she was settling into her new job. She told me that Seshni invited her for a white Christmas. Priscilla will be packing her bags again.

During Jesus' ministry on earth he was often mobbed and followed by crowds of people. Sometimes when the crowds got too much, he 'took the boat to the

other side'. He needed solitude to reflect. After his reflection he continued his journey with resoluteness and verve.

Reflection:

- Do you need to stop and reflect on how you have run your relationships?
- Do some changes need to be made?
- What are you willing to do to heal, rebuild or improve significant relationships?

Question Three

Am I in Hell?

Brian was 56 years old and lived on a luxury small holding in the deep heart of the rural farmlands in South Africa. He was a wise businessman who had amassed significant financial wealth over the past 30 years of his working life. He owned a huge portfolio of properties locally and abroad, a fleet of luxury vehicles, a home with sophisticated style that could be featured in a glossy design magazine. He also had a significant monthly income from his chain of businesses. So why did suicide become his only way out?

Brian was a hardworking man but never seemed to succeed in his close personal relationships. He learnt quite early that the one who holds the cash, holds the control in relationships. This philosophy seemed to work to a great extent. He married young and had four children in quick succession. Every child loved their father because he was exceedingly lavish in purchasing their affection with cash, cars, holidays and eventually homes. Inwardly, his children resented the financial hold he had on them and after 20 years of his boorish behavior, his wife divorced him. Brian responded by marrying his second wife in the same year. She was 30 years his junior and he could easily control her. But she grew tired of his restlessness, increasing alcohol use and now physical manhandling.

As he saw his new wife drive out of the main gates of his palatial home, Brian took a cocktail of about 80 tablets from the medicine cabinet. He drank them down with a bottle of expensive whiskey from his private collection. As he lay on his imported two seater couch he sent goodbye messages to friends and family. The next time Brian woke up he was in the Intensive Care Unit of a private hospital. As he came into consciousness after five days, he told me the story of how he awoke to find his children and two wives arguing about his will. He said that he thought he had arrived in hell!

Once he was medically fit to be moved out of intensive care, his depressed mood received attention. We began daily therapy sessions and during this time he came to realise the futility of having great wealth but living in emotional and spiritual poverty. He needed to bring alignment and balance into his life. After three weeks of daily introspection he made some new decisions and decided to streamline his financial portfolio and sell all his unnecessary vehicles, properties and 'things' he had amassed over the years. He wanted his focus going forward to be his relationships, caring for the poor and finding God again. Brian left hospital with a quiet resolve.

Human beings were never created to find satisfaction in material goods. Yet, God understood our need to be clothed, fed and sheltered. He also assured us that this will be taken care of as we enjoyed resting in the reality of His love towards us. A daily reality that brings deep contentment.

Reflection:

- Do you measure yourself by your financial worth?
- Does all you own fail to satisfy?
- Where does your real treasure lie?

Question Four

Why Can't I Let Go?

Movies often portray people with emotional problems as scary, unpredictable and disconnected from reality. Psychiatric hospital wards are screened more like prisons, with rows of unpainted metal bars that lock unstable people away. As the camera zooms into a single room we see padded rooms where a patient is forcefully held down in restraints that leave red bruise marks on pale wrists. Movies have added so much drama to a very ordinary world where people seek temporary relief from the stressors and emotional hardships of sometimes unplanned, sudden tragedy. Psychiatric wards are actually mostly calm, warm and inviting with soft furnishings and understanding faces.

Cynthia was in such a place. She was a woman in her 40's with a very modern stylish haircut that framed her high cheekbones. The referring doctor said that she had been on antidepressants for the last five years. Cynthia spoke incessantly. This was quite uncharacteristic for any person in the throes of a depressive state of being. There was something 'stubborn' about her posture - I got the sense she was almost statuesque and immovable. I also learnt that she was immovable in many of her thoughts and ideas.

Cynthia had suffered a tragic loss five years ago when her 19 year old daughter, Candace was killed in a car accident on a busy freeway. Candace was an artistic, vibrant young woman who was on her way home from college. This accident changed a close knit family forever. Cynthia's husband Mark as well as her two younger sons spiraled into what seemed to be an unending pit of sadness, dark nights and no relief from the most gut wrenching pain of loss.

As the years moved on, each member of this family tried to assimilate this grief and find meaning in a senseless loss. Mark shared that Candace loved sitting in the garden and reading and he decided to bit by bit turn a section of the landscape over to her memory. Her brothers joined in gradually and they planted Candace's favorite flowers. It brought some comfort in very tough times. Cynthia however, could not move on in any way and five years later she sat in the hospital ward and said that her only desire was to join her daughter. No arguments of any kind could shift her from this thinking. Yet she had never made any plans to take her life. Cynthia's stance had held her family hostage and she would not let anyone forget or move on to a different future.

However, five years later, her husband decided that beyond the garden he will continue to find ways for him and his sons to honor Candace. He began a

scholarship fund in her memory and supported other parents who suffered a similar loss. His only hope is that Cynthia will join him in these efforts. The fact that she is still alive and speaking of her loss means that the hope of recovery is still alive and well!

There is always hope in our Creator. However, God uniquely crafted human beings with self-will and choice in decision-making and actions. After any and every tragedy each of us has the God-given blessing of being active in our recovery and restoration. Let's choose well!

Reflection

- Have you suffered a tragic loss?
- Have you given yourself time to properly grieve?
- Are you allowing others to help and support you?
- Are you willing to find a way to honor the person you lost?
- What can you do to help others who have also shared in the same loss?

Question Five

Why didn't they want me?

Simon was 35 years old, tall, underweight, flat browed but with a handsome boyish smile. He struck me as a street smart, doggedly persistent and an intrinsically vulnerable individual. At our first meeting he was semi-coherent, restless and had great difficulty sitting still. Simon was on a detoxification regime for cocaine, 'sugars' and alcohol. As he began to settle into his medication he became more forthcoming with information about himself, his family and his slippery journey through life.

His earliest memories were of him and his older brother David living in his grandfather's home. As a child he stated that he could not understand why his parents were not married and living together. Even now in the present time he shared that he will never know the answer to this all important question as both his parents died of tuberculosis a year ago. His grandfather's death set in motion a series of devastating and negative cycles that led to him having a dependent relationship with alcohol and drugs.

At the tumultuous age of 14 years, Simon ran away from home and began to survive in the inner city 'dungeons' of Durban. He sourced manual work quickly and lived with a group of 'down and outers' in an abandoned shipyard building. On a police roundup he was picked up and taken to a place of safety. Simon reported that life there was pure survival on a daily basis. He began to realize that most children living in a place of safety had no parents and were clearly unwanted. Simon's eyes filled with tears as he said to me that he could never understand why he was in a place of safety when both his parents were alive! 'Why didn't my parents want me' he wept? 'Was I such a horrible child?' he asked between stifled sobs. There are no human answers for such heart wrenching revelations. I just sat silently with him as his tears streamed and streamed.

In the next session, Simon shared that his uncle took guardianship of him and he went to live with his 'new' family. Simon's brother, David, had begun work at a mechanic's workshop and was now living on his own in a small granny cottage. Simon worked in his uncle's trucking business and it was here that he was first introduced to cocaine. His uncle sold drugs and he used Simon to hide these drugs in the hard to reach places of the trucking garages and storage area. Simon was often asked to fetch drugs when a 'customer' arrived. He learnt quickly that he could keep some for himself.

Simon was enterprising and sold drugs but also began to use them. This led to a drug abuse, setting up a drug house, police arrests and job losses.

Along the way he met a beautiful woman named Shania and they had an enchantingly lovely little daughter named Rose. Shania and Simon began using drugs together and over time, Rose was removed and kept in a place of safety. Just before Simon came into hospital he visited Rose and she asked him the eerie question: 'But why don't you and mummy want me?' Simon checked into rehabilitation the same day.

In God's Kingdom we are all created to fulfill a great destiny and purpose. Children that grow up simply surviving will always be survivors and never come to the full realisation of who they are in God. It is vitally important that parents create solid family structures with firm spiritual boundaries, emotional connection and provision so that children do not simply survive but become dreamers and pursuers of their divine destinies.

Reflection:

- Do you need to change how you parent your own children?
- What can you do to create more security for children in your immediate world?

Question Six

How Do I Get Some Control Back?

It was Henry Ford who wrote: '*Obstacles are those frightful things you see when you take your eyes off the goal*'. Henry was an American industrialist, the founder of the Ford Motor Company, and early user of the assembly line method of mass production of vehicles. The past few days showed me that Henry knew what he was talking about...

My teenage son and I were preparing for travel to Norway. We were visiting beloved friends and seeing the country of fjords and glaciers. Everything seemed to be falling into place for the trip. Bookings were made with ease, special offers became available on internal flights and my friends were looking forward to welcoming us into the capital city of Oslo. The last month before departure is usually spent getting the appropriate visas in place. Suddenly the word 'Biometrics' was heard for the first time in all non-European countries. It was both an ominous and unpredictable word.

Biometrics is a profiling system for anyone visiting the so called Schengen countries. It involved a series of interviews, scanning of fingerprints and retinas by a futuristic looking robot. My visa application at the Durban embassy was summarily dismissed and we were asked to report to Pretoria where the new machinery was housed. Embassy staff were not ready for a machine that was clearly in the 'testing' phase and fraught with problems. Nobody knew how to troubleshoot when the machine refused to scan accurately. A woman in the queue was here for the second day and her fingerprints were not readable. Embassy staff were offering her a cup of coffee to calm her nerves as she was supposed to leave to Norway the following morning.

Everyone was being pushed to their extreme limits. As a traveller I felt completely out of control and no one could help in getting it back. Nobody knew how to help. People felt pressured as the machine took hours to get partial fingerprints that did not guarantee your holiday. Flights were being missed and frustration increasingly soared between embassy officials and tourists.

All these obstacles were making me lose sight of my travel goals! So what was my primary goal in visiting Norway? It was to visit my dearest friends and spend time enjoying their great company once more. To get through this bureaucratic maze my son and I kept the smiling faces of our friends at the forefront of our minds. We began to feel lighter and more at ease. Even

embassy officials seemed more helpful. We had to step away from the chaos and remember a single, focussed targeted goal and then all frustration melted away like warm butter on corn. As we flew back into Durban, I received a mobile message that said 'visas approved'.

When we as human beings are clear about our goals and who is working with us to make those goals a reality we enter a place of spiritual rest. There is no real earthly control of certain events or circumstances but there is definitely divine control of every aspect of our lives.

Reflection:

- Does an area of your life feel out of control?
- What is your goal in this area?
- Are you willing to enter spiritual rest on the matter of concern?

Question Seven

What is a 'Pocket of Perfection'?

On my recent vacation to the pristine country of Norway, I had the gratifying opportunity to enjoy landscapes of natural and untamed beauty. It was a country of clear aqua fjords, lush forests, soft laden snow and blue ice. Every scene appeared to provide a picturesque portrait of divine design untouched by human fingerprints. One of the highlights of my time with Norwegian friends was our decision to go glacier hiking. This was a unique activity even for the locals and required many months of disciplined physical training to take on this unusual territorial challenge.

On the day of the hike we set out by train from the harbour city of Bergen at 05.30 in the morning. We then had to board a local bus that took us deep into the Norwegian countryside. There were many winding roads that eventually brought us to a little pocket of paradise called Herand. This little mountainside town had the cleanest marine water I had ever laid eyes on. Neat white wooden homes and supply stores were the norm. Chocolate brown and burnt orange boat houses were also sprinkled along the craggy shoreline. Was this place a glimpse of Eden?

A modern boat ushered us with slow precision across the main waterway to a large bus which delivered us to the ski centre at the base of the glacier. The majestic glacier was already in view and the clean streaks of snow and ice on the various peaks and ledges held the promise of an exciting hiking adventure. The bus ride took us through single traffic pathways, steep mountain inclines and precarious downhill slopes. The jutting mountain edges smothered with ice against the backdrop of a clear blue sky made me realize that I was enjoying a moment of inordinate and unparalleled beauty.

Once we arrived at the ski centre and were properly kitted out with harnesses, ice picks and crampons we began our five hour hiking adventure. It was tough and most of the steep journey to the top was very much a head down, step by step undertaking. Once we got to a high point, readjusted our hiking gear and refuelled on chocolate bars, fruit and water we could begin to fully take in and appreciate the unrivalled landscape. I often, in hindsight, am aware of the uniqueness of my travel experiences but that day I looked around and with gratitude appreciated the visual banquet. I was at the right place, at the right time, with the right people and in my heart and mind I carried the right attitude. It was a complete experience, something I will call a 'pocket of perfection'

On my return I began to realise that I can enjoy these pockets of perfection on a daily basis. It unfolds when I am lying on my comfy couch, absorbed in an engaging book with a hot cup of tea by my side and my favourite buttermilk rusk waiting to be dunked.

Reflection:

- What are the daily 'pockets of perfection' in your life?
- How can you change your focus to identify and enjoy them more often?

Question Eight

How did I become a homeless teen?

Joelene is a teenager with natural blonde waves and emerald green eyes. However, in hospital her hair was unwashed and stuck together in clumps. Her eyes had red streaks and the tears rolled uncontrollably down her pale skin. This was her fifth admission to a rehabilitation facility and she felt desperate. Her drug of choice is whoonga. It is a concoction of the antiretroviral stocrin, cannabis and other substances, including chemicals found in detergents and even rat poison! Joelene was craving her next smoke and walked restlessly around the ward wringing her fingers. She also knew that this treatment centre was her very last hope.

As we began our daily therapy sessions, she shared her story of pain, suffering and emotional trauma. Joelene came from a home where her parents fought continually and there was never any prolonged period of peace. Her mother began to increase her alcohol consumption and with it followed more conflicts and daily arguments. Eventually her mother moved out of the home to live in a single bedroom apartment. Joelene was devastated when her mother died suddenly from alcohol poisoning. Life had changed dramatically in a matter of minutes. She missed her mother terribly and noted that her father grew distant and older overnight.

Joelene sought comfort in the corner of the school volley-ball courts where kids met to smoke cannabis and whoonga. She eventually stopped going to classes and spent all her time escaping into the altered zone of whoonga addiction. She was soon so deeply addicted that she began to steal from her father to get her next fix. Her dad reached his last straw when she sold the television for drugs. He then refused her entry into the home and she was forced to live on the streets. Life had become a fearful and dark place at the age of seventeen.

Being homeless was a life of survival. Everything was scarce and limited. Jolene felt vulnerable and helpless but was always seeking her next drug fix. After falling pregnant, she returned home to get cleaned out. She had been to three rehabilitation facilities already but relapsed. Jolene will be chemically free in a few days but will she manage to free herself from her emotional nightmares? She was willing to talk about her mother's death for the very first time. I think she is taking a huge step in the right direction with this brave decision...

When children grow up in a vulnerable, conflict-ridden family environment they become survivors. Survivors only seek to get through the day and the immediate challenge in front of them. God never intended for our children to be survivors. An emotionally stable home ensures that children will be more than survivors- they will be dreamers and visionaries and be connected to their destinies. This is the way of the Kingdom of God.

Reflection:

- Are you a survivor?
- Are you connected to your destiny?
- How can you make your home more stable and nurturing?

Question Nine

What is a dealbreaker?

Darren is 29 years old and admitted to hospital for taking a range of abusive substances from large volumes of beers, spirits and wine to excessive doses of cocaine, heroin and mandrax. He holds down a responsible job but his personal emotional circumstances overtook his sense of work responsibility. Prior to admission he turned up to work drunk and he was given an ultimatum: treatment or immediate dismissal? Darren knew that there was only one choice as he was solely responsible for his 4 year old daughter, Ariana. She doted on him and he had to make sense of his chaotic behavior.

Darren had an open pleasant face and boyish smile. His cropped GI Joe hairstyle gave him an athletic look. There was an earnestness about his speech. He was determined to get better and had that: 'I will do what it takes' approach. Darren told me a story of attending a prestigious private school where he excelled in sports and academics. During this time his younger brother Simon was diagnosed with a terminal illness and became very ill. Sadly Simon died at age 14. This turned Darren's world into chaos. He began dabbling with drugs and not attending school to escape his daily reality. His grief led him to take comfort in the bed of a fellow drug dependent woman named Claudette.

Claudette had never completed school and worked as a part-time waitress. Her drug taking and alcohol use was ever increasing. Despite his erratic days, Darren completed school and began work in the buying department of a textile manufacturing house. He progressed despite the odds stacked against him. Once Ariana was born he stopped taking all drugs and felt obligated to marry Claudette. Their relationship was stable for a few years and then the cracks began to show. One day he came home during his lunch break and found his wife in bed with his best friend. He was crushed.

The relationship deteriorated from there onwards. A second infidelity a few months later hurt him immensely. Claudette moved out into a commune and refused to have any contact with Ariana. Darren said that was the deal-breaker!

What exactly is a dealbreaker? Legally speaking, a deal breaker is 'the catch' that a person cannot overlook and ultimately outweighs any redeeming quality the offending party may possess. It is any issue or factor that is significant enough to terminate a relationship. For Darren the dealbreakers were two infidelities and the neglect of Ariana. He now had to find a way to stop using drugs to medicate his pain. He also had to end this roller-coaster

relationship. His dealbreakers had given him clarity and resolve. For the first time in years he began to have new dreams for his life and for Ariana as well.

When Jesus was tempted in the wilderness by satan he encountered a series of dealbreakers. He refused to compromise because satan's requests were all spiritual dealbreakers.

Reflection:

- What are the dealbreakers in your significant relationships?
- Are you compromising?
- What needs to be done to bring new alignment to God's purpose for your life?

Question Ten

What is my real name?

Brittany was 34 years old, sun-tanned with clear light brown eyes. She ran away from home at 16 years and lived with a man who was older than her father. They lived in a caravan on tribal lands in the Eastern Cape. She nonchalantly described a life of 'living off the land', gathering water from the local spring and bartering for their meals. She stayed married for 10 years but when he emotionally and physically terrorised her- she ran into the arms of her second husband. That marriage lasted 18 months and she was on her own again.

Brittany was taking her first course of antidepressants and sought therapy to rebuild her displaced life. As we got to spend several sessions together and as she went through the pain of a second divorce she indicated that she needed to apply for a new identity document. Yet she was totally perplexed about what her new surname should be. She did not want to carry the surnames of either of her ex-husbands but she was still stuck on her choices. The sad reality was that both her parents had rejected her as a teenager during their messy divorce.

Her father was now unhappily married to his mistress and her mother was a cold and bitter victim. Brittany recalls being shut outside her mother's apartment and told to take her clothing (packed in black bin bags) and 'go to your wayward father'. It was at the pleas of concerned neighbors that her mother would let her re-enter the apartment. Life as a child was traumatic. Her father broke off all contact with her at that time. Now at age 34 she sat with the important questions of 'Who am I really?', 'What is my real name?' and 'Where is my home?'

As we progressed in therapy we both agreed that hers was a life in transition. We decided in therapy that she would get her own apartment. She would rent this place for 6 months and create an environment that was calm, peaceful and homely. This would be her new GPS co-ordinates. With regard to her name change we agreed that for now we would adopt the surname on her birth certificate - her fathers' surname. But once again it will be an interim measure. She was at ease with these choices because in reality home and identity is not so much a place in time and space as it is rather a location in heart, mind and spirit.

When God created human beings He gave each of us a spiritual identity, unique divine DNA and a spiritual home. This home is located in Him - a place of acceptance, affection and belonging. A safe and secure place.

Reflection:

- Are you sometimes confused about your true identity?
- Where is your real home?

Question Eleven

When will this pressure end?

Luke was strikingly handsome. He was 32 years old, sporty and his smile could clearly make a thousand fair maidens weak at the knees. He certainly had that effect on the female nurses in the ward. But Luke did not smile much. He had several bruises on his sculptured face and his fists had smudgy traces of bloodstains. On our first contact he sat in the tiny consulting cubicle and filled the room with his rugby sized physique. He refused to make any eye contact. He either looked at the stark light grey floor tiles or somewhere past me. I let him do that for now. And then the tears flowed and flowed.

Luke was one of three siblings and came from a home where his mother was the indisputable matriarch. His doting father was a gentle man that brought calm to an otherwise feisty household. Despite the loud voices and passionate disagreements; love prevailed. The discussions became especially high pitched when it came to discussing Luke's engagement and upcoming wedding plans. There seemed to be no agreement on any aspect of the event-from the wedding date to the place settings. This set in motion a series of arguments with his fiancé Christine. Arguments that eventually led to the breakup of the engagement and a night of excessive drinking and a pub brawl. Luke was brought into the hospital casualty section by ambulance.

As we met for our daily therapy sessions, I learnt that he was a very creative man who loved to paint, design and landscape. Designing gardens for many luxurious homesteads was his full time occupation. He met Christine at one of the supply agencies that sourced most of his raw materials and indigenous plants. After a year of dating and relaxed fun days they moved in together. And then the pressure began. All of Christine's close friends were getting married one by one and she also wanted a ring on her finger. Luke became increasingly frustrated as his priority was to grow his business and save up enough of money to put a deposit on their first home together. He said all he knew was that his father offered to give him his grandmothers' diamond ring; which got resized and he was engaged.

From then onwards the 'wedding' seemed to become a cruel force of nature. Wedding cards, venues, menus, flowers, vows, honeymoon, decor - the pressure was endless. Luke said that he felt desperate and at the heart of it all he was not ready to become a husband to anyone. He knew he wanted to get married in the years ahead but not now. And so began his journey of freedom from a hospital bed. The freedom to choose his own path in the world, to explore his creativity, to build his finances, to nurture his body, soul

and spirit. After these processes (which could take many months), I am certain that he will freely choose to be a loving husband.

When God created human beings it was an expression of His deepest love for us. This expression permitted him to give us the gift of free-will and choice. A choice to be who He uniquely created each one of us to be.

Reflection:

- Are you feeling pressured in any area of your life?
- Who or what is the source of the pressure?
- Do you need to diplomatically and respectfully exercise your free-will to bring balance back into your life?

Question Twelve

Who will protect me?

In recent weeks we have all been shocked by the brutal and horrific gang-rape and death of a young physiotherapy student in Delhi, India. Men and women across the globe gasped in disbelief at the banality, savagery and abuse of a vulnerable daughter of an airport employee. The world now waits to see the perpetrators punished! While this story unfolded on international headlines, thirty-four year old Cindy from a remote Midlands town tossed uncomfortably on a hospital bed. The newspaper headlines intensified her emotional pain...

Cindy was not a rape victim but she suffered from the trauma of knowing that her two younger sisters aged 17 and 23 were gang-raped three times over the last ten years. How could this happen? How could one family be subjected to this much trauma? The last incident was the tipping point. Her biological family were watching television in their humble country abode. It was a relaxed evening and the sisters were looking forward to spending the weekend shopping in Durban. Without warning, there was the sound of breaking wood as thieves burst through the kitchen door. Five young men with guns and knives were now in the living room. They taunted the family and robbed them of all their hard earned humble luxuries. The trauma escalated as they took turns to rape the women. Hopeless and helpless they called to their neighbours in the early hours of the morning. After police investigation the community tracked the criminals, dealt with them severely and handed them over to the law. Cindy's sisters will never be the same...their lives had been forever altered.

The India headlines also struck a nerve with Nandi as she examined the stitches on her face. She recalls all too clearly that tragic evening when she walked around the corner from her student digs to buy a can of soda. Nandi is a natural beauty with flawless skin, light brown eyes and a fashionable hair weave. She dressed in designer jeans and was the life of any party. She loved her iPod nano and listened to her favourite tunes as she ambled to the cafe. She never saw the car crawl behind her and she never heard the hissing and swearing. All she felt was an arm on her neck and her body dragged into the backseat of the car. She heard a man using profanities and a disgusting substance mixed with alcohol was forced down her throat. The next time she awoke she was naked, bruised and beaten in an unknown apartment. The two men swore at her further and threatened to rape her flat mates if she reported this to the police. She was then driven and dumped on the pavement outside her own flat. Her life had changed forever.

Heaven weeps every time a person is brutalised. He offers the healing balm necessary to restoring a broken body and spirit. In time, His love makes every victim whole again.

Reflection:

- Are you a victim of sexual abuse ?
- Begin your healing process by breaking the silence.
- Take charge of your healing journey by reaching out to a trusted person in your world.

Question Thirteen

Whose fault is it anyway?

Samantha is thirty-five years old, an industrial engineer with a love for all things eco- friendly. She married her first love, Greg -a fellow civil engineer. They had two children after five blissful years of marriage. Sam, as her family and friends referred to her often wondered why people complained so much about relationships? Life was just getting better and better every year. Twelve years into marriage Greg was working on key government projects nationally and Sam was running a thriving consultancy.

Sitting in my office, she began to speak of the first signs that Greg was no longer himself. He began to have difficulty sleeping and he would then have unusual bursts of energy. Sam thought he was just stressed at work. Then came the dark moods, name calling and verbal abuse. Sam brushed it off. Other signs were harder to ignore. Greg was becoming socially obnoxious and would be openly rude at family gatherings and social events. He would often storm off when ignored.

Life was slowly becoming unbearable. Greg blamed Sam for his moodiness. He said she was unsupportive as a wife, annoying and an unwilling sexual partner. He also began to accuse her of having extramarital affairs and demanded that he see all her phone records. Sam complied as she now started to believe that there must be some truth to his accusations. She doubted and second guessed herself. She also began to watch what she ate as he now called her fat and unattractive. Sam's self esteem was eroding.

Months later she woke up in the middle of the night to find Greg in the bathroom about to snort a single line of cocaine. All the pieces began to quickly fall into place. Yet there was no stopping Greg and he blamed her for his drug use- telling her directly that she drove him to drugs. He took no blame and refused any rehabilitation efforts. Life got worse for Sam as Greg who now having regular incidents with the law. She tried to leave home but felt responsible for his well being. She had some decisions to make as he had now hit her for the first time and blamed her for making him angry. She had to also protect her two children. Once she realized in treatment sessions that she was not to blame for any of this bizarre behavior she was more free to act.

A life in God is a life of personal responsibility for our thoughts, words and actions. God created humans with the ultimate gift- free will and choice.

Reflection:

- Do you blame others when things go wrong?
- Is it always someone else's fault when you are in a bad mood?
- Are you willing to look in the mirror and be more honest with yourself?

Question Fourteen

Can This Leopard Change His Spots?

Hospitals can be places of great humility and honesty. Despite the pristine reception areas, coffee shops and helpful faces at the front desk staff; the patient often can't even remember the colour of his shirt. All they can see is the look of concern on the faces of family and friends as they are ushered via wheelchair to a designated bed. At this moment their occupation, bank balance and list of worldly collectibles are on the back burner.

In this maze of efficiency it is a welcome sight to be greeted by a friendly nursing sister who is genuinely concerned about your comfort and care. It is in this environment that nurse Thandi approached me for a confidential side chat. Thandi was neatly attired in her uniform. She said that she had observed me counselling several patients and wanted to know if I could help her with her son who was performing very poorly at school. A few probing questions revealed that her son Nathi, lived with his Dad in Johannesburg. Thandi's eyes welled up in tears as she spoke about the estranged relationship she had with Nathi's father.

The next day Thandi and I met at my office where she further spoke about the absence of love and warmth in her relationship. She shared how sad it was to sit in front of the television for the entire weekend when visiting her boyfriend. Despite her attempts to remain involved in the relationship, there was ample evidence that he was cheating on her. Her pain was palpable and filled the room.

Thandi was not ready to end the relationship so we decided to shift the focus from the boyfriend to her relationship with herself. She realized that she had spent years worrying about his career, his goals, his family and all his needs. She had lost sight of her life goals and other significant people in her life. We decided that this should be Thandi's new focus as she took timeout from the moodiness and pointless drama of an unstable relationship.

Her first action was to enrol for her next level of study in her nursing career. She soon learned that several colleagues had already registered for the course and she joined their study group. She enjoyed the stimulating study sessions as well as the coffee and conversation thereafter. Her next step was to take her driver's test that she had put off for the last six months. Finally she began going to the gym three times a week and church on Sundays.

As the weeks progressed Thandi reported that she was feeling happier and more focused. She mentioned that her boyfriend and his many moods was no longer the core focus of her day. She no longer spent her time waiting for his phone messages or visits. What about the future of this relationship I asked? She smiled and said : I have to have a talk with him very soon because I don't think he will fit into my new world.

Jesus came so that we might have an abundant life. It is our destiny to delight in our divine connections.

Reflection:

- Are you in relationship that feels stifling and full of conflict?
- Does this relationship operate in cycles of drama?
- Have you lost touch with who you are?
- Have you forgotten your life goals and purpose?
- What steps can you take to get back on track?

Question Fifteen

Are you a rebel without a cause?

Spring is a season with freshness and vibrancy in the atmosphere. Although the hospitals are still full of people that need healing; there just seems to be an air of optimism in the environment. It was a Monday morning as I approached the triple volume glass doors of the hospital. I noticed staff smile and chat animatedly about the weekend and their work shifts for the week ahead. And then I saw her....

Just outside the entrance of the hospital stood a lone, clearly underweight woman who was attached to a drip, that was hanging on a mobile stand. She was in her pyjamas and hospital gown. Her pale complexion indicated that she had been unwell for a lengthy period of time. Her hair was uncombed and she looked drained and exhausted. Yet she stood there with an air of rebellion inhaling a just lit cigarette. A posture of defiance that worked against all the efforts her team of devoted doctors were putting in to get her to a place of wellness. Yet she stood there representing everything that sabotaged their dedicated efforts-a real rebel with no real cause! A picture of utter futility and refusal to submit to wisdom that could change her life.

I was on my way to see a patient that had just come out of surgery. He was frustrated because was confined to bed and refused to have a bed bath. The nurses were growing tired of his abuse and I was asked to assist with his anger outbursts. Steven was in his 40's and had suffered a back injury at work. His accident happened three years ago and he had over 30 surgical procedures. He was angry and frustrated-rebelling against everyone that was placed to help and assist him. We had a long counseling session in which he claimed to have accepted his disabilities. Clearly he had not because his behavior did not indicate that he had submitted to the healing process. After further therapy sessions he said he knew he had to make some changes and peace with the length of his recovery. Over the next week he evolved from rebel to a reasonable human being who wisely co-operated with staff. The nurses report that he is a pleasure to have in the ward.

Before Jesus was crucified he was lonely and desperate to have 'this cup taken from me'. Yet, he did not rebel but instead submitted to the process, so that resurrection and restoration might come to all humanity.

Reflection:

- At times are you your own worst enemy?
- Do you sometimes behave in a manner that sabotages your destiny?
- Are you engaged in activities that frustrate the purposes of God in your life?
- What aspect of your life do you need to submit to God's healing and refining process?

Question Sixteen

Why did I do that again?

Sandy was in her late 30's, an English high school teacher and single. She had never married because she had doubts about her sexual identity. After several relationships with both men and women she was left empty, heartbroken and very lonely. Her daily routine was that of spending the day at school and then coming home, taking a fresh shower and heading off to the pub around the corner. She had become a regular patron and confessed that she just wanted to be 'around people rather than sit alone in her one bedroomed apartment'. Her apartment had also become an empty shell and she did not even feel the need to make her bed every morning.

When Sandy grew anxious at the bar, alcohol seemed to soothe the ache of aloneness. But stress at school and financial worries increased the alcohol intake. Sometimes she found herself inviting a stranger home and then worrying in the morning that she may have infected herself with the HIV virus. It was an endless cycle that led to depression, suicidal ideas and hospitalisation every 3-4 months. Sandy would just ask me why she kept on doing the things that did not work and doing things that hurt her life? She was growing tired of her own poor choices. At each hospital admission she also had new health concerns that were alcohol related.

Sandy eventually admitted that the root cause of her poor lifestyle choices was her deep seated sense of loneliness and being disconnected in the world. Living alone seemed to be a daily stark reminder of her singleness in the world. Alcohol did not really ease the emotional pain nor did sex with strangers. It actually left her increasingly bereft and cast aside. She realized that she needed to change her living arrangements and reach out to friends, family, colleagues and her forgotten spiritual community. I look forward to seeing the results of her positive choices.

When God created human beings, He did so as an expression of His infinite love for us. No matter how far we may stray or lose our way He is always there to welcome us back and fill the deep ache of loneliness. He will teach you how to enjoy solitude while at the same time reaching out to others to bring balance and wholeness back into your life. He will reconnect you back to your divine purpose which is the best antidote for loneliness.

Reflection:

- Are you lonely?
- What negative behaviours do you engage in to dull the ache of being alone?
- What step can you take to reconnect with friends, family or your spiritual community?

Question Seventeen

Have I made the Abnormal, Normal?

Peter was a dignified elderly patient. There was something very stately about him and he most certainly had a distinguished sense of style. He walked around the wards like a colonial gentleman with his tweed waistcoats and neatly ironed custom fit trousers. And when he decided to go and stand in the sunshine, he donned a sophisticated hat with a guinea fowl feather. He puffed on an antique pipe that appeared to be family heirloom. The only anomaly about Peter was that he never had shoes to match his gracious garments because his swollen feet could not fit into laced up english footwear. Yet strangely this was a condition well within his control to change.

Peter had chosen to ignore the first signs of foot swelling until they reached a point where it was not possible to fit into his regular hand-stitched loafers. His feet were uncomfortable and large bedroom slippers became the order of the day. He simply ignored the issue and adapted to his new unfashionable accessory. When admitted to hospital for depression following the loss of his brother; doctors also started to investigate and treat his swelling. In one of my early sessions I asked him if he missed his handcrafted shoes? He replied in a posh London dialect: 'Dear, I used to but now I have adjusted my thinking to accept my swelling...yet the doctors say that my feet would be back to its normal size in two weeks! Did I accept my abnormal swelling as normal?'. I told him that he most certainly did.

Everyday I see and experience examples of how people blur the boundaries between order and chaos. The husband and wife that were sitting in my office for their first session were married for 10 years and the wife was concerned that he was too flirtatious with a woman on his mobile contact list. She was very concerned by the intimacy of the messages and the symbols denoting affection in his communication. His response was that this was 'nothing but simple fun'. His wife was distraught and felt that trust was broken because the boundaries were no longer transparent in their relationship. Was he asking her to now accept the abnormal as normal in their marriage? Fortunately after a few sessions of intense couples therapy and a reminder of their marital promises, they realized that there was no place for any indiscretion, however slight in their marriage.

The kingdom of God is a place of immaculate order. There is a divine pattern to every aspect of life. There are no grey zones, just perfect clarity on how to be and live abundantly here on earth.

Reflection:

- Are there any abnormal or grey zones in your life and relationships ?
- Is any aspect of your life in chaos ?
- Do you need to reconnect with the divine pattern for that area?
- What small step can you take to bring back order into your life?

Question Eighteen

Are there really treasures in darkness?

The invitation was intriguing: ' You and your partner are invited to experience Dinner in the Dark at the Oyster Box in Durban'. Did this mean that we were to eat in total darkness? Surely not...perhaps it would be a dinner that used minimal light to entertain its list of corporate clients. On the predetermined evening our group of curious and light hearted new and old friends were asked to take our welcome drinks and head to the dining venue. The hostess politely asked that we remove any items that had the potential to glow in the dark..this was naturally met with a few tongue in cheek comments.

When it was our turn to enter we were asked to place a hand on the shoulder of the person in front of you, close your eyes and walk in. Well it was a complete blackout! Our efficient waitress, Thandeka spoke gentle words of reassurance and asked that we feel the appointed seats given to us. Hmm...that was new...the seat felt like pure leather, studded to hold down the material and oh so very comfortable. All of us once seated just laughed uproariously out of a mixture of relief, discomfort and delight. Our hosting team were all visually impaired...most since birth. The compere was a well accomplished person who ran or cycled every major sporting event and held the land speed record for a blind individual. Yes, he drove the car!

As the evening progressed we grew more comfortable, found the bread and even butter on the table. Our confidence soared as we opened the pinotage and sampled the vine. The risotto starter was sumptuous but we soon realized it was a spoon or fork together with fingers that got the meal to your mouth. Drinks were served with precision and in the room we never heard glasses crashing or plates hitting the floor. The darkness became comforting once you stopped fighting it. We reached out to people around the table by sharing more of our authentic selves. Inhibitions were lowered as no one cared about what they wore or how important you were in the light of day. Here you were part of a small band, appreciating the real treasures around the table. The lights did come on for dessert and we all just marvelled at the deep heart links we made that evening.

Every day I commune with patients that feel in complete darkness. The cocaine addict that has lost a long time lover and feels alone and lost. The business manager who in a moment of vulnerability committed fraud and has lost his job and is now also shunned by friends and family. The abandoned wife who feels helpless over her husband's pornography addiction. All

reaching out and searching for answers from the depths of unending darkness.

“I will give you the treasures of darkness, riches stored in secret places, so that you may know that I am the Lord, the God of Israel, who summons you by name.” – Isaiah 45:3. Sometimes the only way we come to learn about the unfailing love of God is when we are completely at his mercy. In the darkness, He will call you out by name so that you may enter His path of restoration and enjoy the treasures yet unknown.

Reflection:

- Are you in a dark place in your life?
- What are the possible treasures that await you?
- Can your spirit hear God calling your name?
- How will you respond?

Question Nineteen

Do all things work together for Good?

The state of Kerala in India is lush and has a balance of fruitful plantations and scenic waterways. Its inhabitants live simply, value academic excellence and enjoy fresh vegetables and seafood. The cuisine is extra spicy and the winter weather is warm and humid. The 'backwaters' houseboat experience is a must-do when visiting Kerala. Time is spent relaxing and living on a boat that flows on the waterways surrounding the paddy fields. Travellers have the time to appreciate the unique scenery, bird life, local villagers, sunrises and sunsets.

In Kerala many people are poor. I watched as they rose early, bathed in the rivulet, prayed, lit a fire to prepare breakfast and then as the sun rose they began work in the rice fields. In the evening the routine was repeated and now you could also hear music and the occasional drunken brawl. Despite the poverty, life appeared to have balance. The fields and river supported the people and they in turn cared for its crop and harvest. All seemed to work divinely and effortlessly together.

Perhaps this is a good principle for our individual lives also. Most of my patients say they feel chaotic, unhinged and sometimes emotionally brutalised. They report being tossed by a myriad of unrelated external events. It is quite common for a single person to be plagued by financial upsets, relationship catastrophes, work challenges and discipline problems with their children. These individuals live permanently in 'survivor mode'. Yet there is another type of individual who despite having similar stressors, is still able to live in a state of inner calm and peace? What is the distinguishing factor that separates these two individuals?

Perhaps a clue can be found in a TV news clip that aired many years ago. A young team of IT graduates were flying in a small aircraft to a remote rural area. On route, the plane crashed and there were no survivors. The news team at the scene of the crash were interviewing the distraught Jewish father of a young woman who had just died. In the middle of his grief he said that he did not understand why this awful accident had happened to his child and family. But he said that for him life was like a tapestry and that today he was viewing the underside of it. This side had no obvious pattern and was full of knots and loose ends. Yet he knew that one day he would have the opportunity to turn the completed tapestry over and view the masterpiece. Such wisdom in grief, one seldom sees or hears.

God the Father is the tapestry weaver in the Kingdom. He always knows the end of a matter from the very beginning.

Reflection:

- Does your life feel chaotic and unhinged?
- Is it possible that you are viewing the 'underside of the tapestry'?

Question Twenty

Who is a successful Woman?

Pranisha is a dentist who works in a busy multidisciplinary medical practice. She is qualified for 4 years and has a strong academic history of straight A's since high school and passing summa cum laude at university. Pranisha is tall, distinctly thin-looking with light brown medium length hair. Apart from long hours at the dental practice, she spends vast amounts of time at the local gymnasium attending spinning, kickboxing and Zumba classes. She is terrified of putting on any weight!

She was referred to me by the local Medical Practitioners for anxiety around her weight issues and her excessive use of laxatives. Her regular diet consisted of a liquid meal supplement taken with low fat milk, prunes and the occasional fruit. After each meal she took two laxatives to prevent her stomach from bloating. It seemed no one but Pranisha could see any signs of bloating. The rest of her family, friends and colleagues saw dark rings around her deeply sunken eyes, skinny breakable arms, a childlike body and an overall look of fatigue and tiredness. Her mood was always somber and downcast. Depression had found its residence.

Pranisha agreed to come into hospital for a week to begin a course of antidepressants and to have several medical investigations to determine the impact her reduced diet on her major organs. Results showed that she had significant kidney damage from the laxative abuse and required emergency medical attention. As she lay helpless in the medical ward, she was forced to do some serious introspection. An internal process that was long overdue.

I saw her daily and she described her negative transformation from a bright, vivacious student to a diet obsessed plain Jane. She viewed all Hollywood starlets and glossy magazine models as her own role models. She had lost all perspective on her long range dreams. I asked her the all important question of what her definition of Success included? I asked her to think of aspects beyond her physical self. She was completely dumbfounded and said that she 'had hit a blank'. She was jarred into realizing that she had lost all perspective of who she really was. I reminded her that one of her strongest attributes was her mind. She promised me some deep reflection and a written down answer to this critical life question. I look forward to reading her insights.

God created us in physical form to fully enjoy the human experience. This physical form is to be protected, honoured and cared for. However it is not to

be worshiped or abused in any way. This body is the vehicle to place us in time and space in order to accomplish our divine mandate on the earth.

Reflection:

- Are you taking good care and protecting your physical self?
- What is your definition of a successful human being?

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