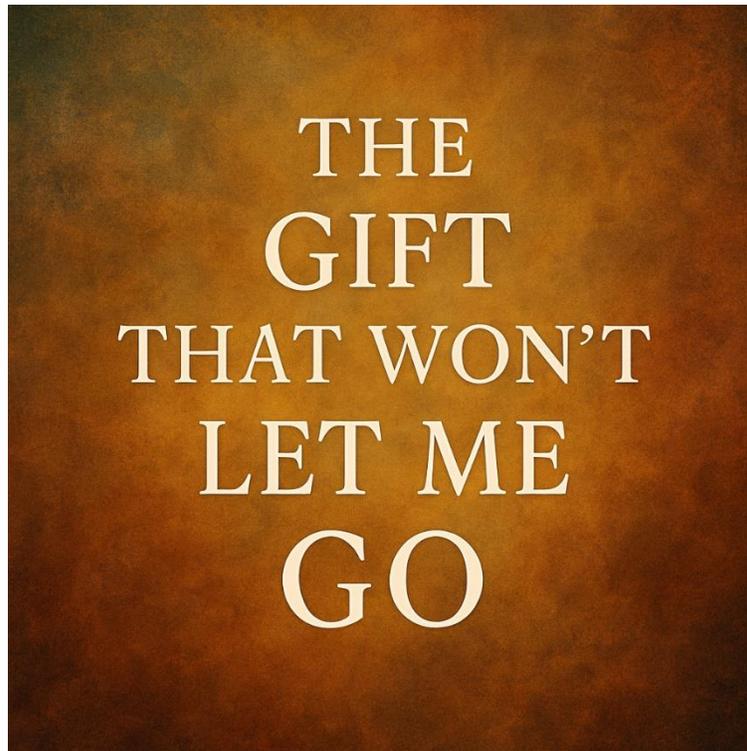


The Gift That Won't Let Me Go: Connection



If you're reading this, it's because you've mattered to me.

Some of you I'm still close with. Others, we've drifted. A few, we parted ways and the wound never fully healed. But regardless of how our stories intersected, you touched my life. And that matters to me.

Wired for Connection

As I reflect on my life and career, with all its ups and downs, what stands out isn't the titles, the letters after my name, or the things I've acquired. It's the people. The moments of shared presence. The conversations that made me feel seen. The phone calls that came at just the right time. The tears that weren't judged. The laughter that healed. In short, it's connection.

We are wired for it, literally. Johann Hari and other researchers have spoken eloquently about this, how we are biologically designed to connect. And from early in my career, I saw it too. At UC Berkeley, I studied interpersonal models of depression. Already I was asking questions about what disconnection does to the soul. Later, in grad school, my dissertation explored how self-



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disclosure impacts marital satisfaction. The more we're willing to be known, the deeper the relationship. And the deeper the relationship, the more we thrive.

But life has a way of pulling us from what matters.

As Daniel Lieberman points out in his book on dopamine, we are driven creatures, especially when we're young. We're fueled by dopamine, motivated to achieve, to build, to pursue. And I was no different. Like Arthur Brooks describes in *From Strength to Strength*, I had that entrepreneurial, fluid intelligence, the need to go, to do, to climb.

And I did. I built things. I succeeded. I acquired. I worked hard, ran fast, pushed through. Until I couldn't anymore.

When the Crash Came

The crash came—the financial crisis of 2008 hit me, like it hit so many others. Family health issues piled on, and my over-acquisition of real estate left me in a vulnerable spot where I simply couldn't keep up. And I had to stop. I had to face the reality that I had driven hard, but I had disconnected. From myself. From others. From what really mattered.

What felt like collapse turned out to be the beginning of a deeper kind of reconstruction.

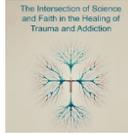
That's when I began to rebuild.

I went to therapy, many therapists, in fact. Most couldn't really find me in the fog. So I went back to the books. I dove into the neuroscience. I read, I studied, I prayed.

Piece by piece, grace found me. And slowly, I began to find myself again.

The "drive" chemicals had gotten me far, but now I needed something else, serotonin, oxytocin, the here-and-now chemicals. The relational ones. I had to learn to slow down. To rest. To reattach.

I leaned into my faith. I rediscovered the fierce love of Jesus, especially through the writings of Brennan Manning—*The Ragamuffin Gospel*, *Ruthless Trust*. I read Henry Nouwen, whose words softened something brittle in me. I started to see, I am loved, not because of what I do, but because of who God is. And connection with Him became the foundation for connection with others.



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“I have loved you with an everlasting love, I have drawn you with unfailing kindness.” —
Jeremiah 31:3

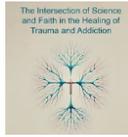
The Gift of Gregg

Around that same time, I began to understand connection on a deeper, more personal level. I think of my twin brother, Gregg.



When we were young, we got it. I mean deeply got it. Emotionally, psychologically, spiritually, we were connected in a way that words can barely capture. We carried each other's wounds. We knew each other's inner world. We were always there, present, available, attuned. One call. One glance. That's all it took. Gregg gave me a living model of what sacred connection looks like.

There was a time, during one of my lowest valleys, when Gregg, living in Oregon, dropped everything and drove up just to be with me. I was a mess. But as soon as I saw him, he didn't say a word. He just threw his arms around me and held me. No advice. No correction. Just presence. His settledness became my lifeline. His autonomic safety, his calm, grounded nervous system, was a gift I will never forget. That moment taught me more about healing than a hundred lectures ever could.



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His presence reminded me that even in our lowest moments, love doesn't leave.

When he died, the pain was searing. The disconnection, the silence, the absence, it was indescribable. And yet, out of that loss came an even fiercer commitment in me, to love well, to connect deeply, to never take relationships for granted. I'm thankful I did cherish him while he was alive. That helps. But oh, the ache remains.

Still, his life, and even his passing, propels me. It's a fire in my soul now. A cry from the heart. Don't wait. Don't assume there's more time. Every interaction matters. Every conversation is a chance to leave something sacred behind.

Because every moment we show up, we place a treasure in someone's heart. Even if it's brief. Even if it's imperfect. Even if we never see the outcome. And yes, on a neuroscience level, our connections literally shift each other's neurobiology. We imprint love or fear, safety or anxiety, into the systems of those we touch. That's not poetic fluff. That's science. And it's sacred.

I saw this too in the models that became the foundation of my clinical work. Polyvagal theory helped me understand that we must feel safe to connect, that the vagus nerve is our biological bridge to others. HeartMath and neurocardiology reminded me that the heart is a healer and a communicator. Dan Siegel's work on interpersonal neurobiology reinforced that we are never isolated systems. We are relational beings, right down to our wiring.

And IFS, Internal Family Systems, taught me to connect within. To know my pain, my protectors, my exiles. To realize that healing comes when I relate to my parts with compassion, not contempt. That's how God meets us too, not with shame, but with welcome.



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“Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.” —1 Peter 4:8

A Call to Remember

My brother never fully made it through. He struggled with trauma and mental health for years. And when it finally overwhelmed him, it left a hole in my life that nothing else will ever quite fill. But it also gave me a mission. A sacred fire. To help others reconnect with who they are, with each other, with the God who never stops loving.

So again, thank you.

You've touched my life. Even if just for a season. Even if from a distance. Even if we never spoke again. You were part of the story. You mattered.

To my younger friends reading this, please don't wait to learn this the hard way. Learn it now. You don't have to climb the whole mountain before you realize what matters. Invest in people. Pursue depth over speed. Choose presence over performance. I've walked with hundreds of clients, mentored dozens of clinicians, and tried to be a spiritual brother to many. And if I could leave behind only one message, it's this: Connection is everything.

This is my call to you: Don't take for granted the ones you love. Repair what can be repaired. Show up when it matters. Lean in when it's hard. Be the connection someone else needs.

We were made for connection, and by God's grace, we can always return to it.

Thank You, Lord, for never leaving me. Not once.

Thank You, Jesus, for staying with me even in the silence.

And thank you, friend, for the imprint you've made in my heart—one that forever endures.

May we all learn to treasure what matters, to love boldly, to forgive freely, and to keep showing up for one another.