

Tragic Redemption: Healing the Guilt and Shame

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by Rev. Hiram Johnson

Dr. Stephen Seamands, Professor of Christian Doctrine at Asbury Theological Seminary, has written the foreword. Dr. Maxie Dunnam, Chancellor of Asbury, Dr. Myron Madden, AAPC Diplomate (Ret) and former President of the College of Chaplains, FSU Head Coach Bobby Bowden, Promise Keepers founder Bill McCartney, and author/speaker Margaret Therkelsen have all personally endorsed the book.

The message to its readers is one of hope and redemption over the most tragic circumstances: a 17 year-old car passenger dying on Christmas Day. Her father was killed three years earlier in a car accident, and her 15 year-old sister was also killed in an unrelated car accident nine months later. The book is designed to help the general reader overcome any lingering emotional baggage by achieving a more in depth understanding of the divine dynamics of guilt, shame, grace and forgiveness.

Topics include depression, grief, alcoholism, suicide, childhood tapes, embracing our weaknesses, co-dependency, prayer, blessing, intimacy, joy, the value of scars, and finding redemptive purpose(s) and meaning in tragedy, heartache and loss. A true story of one's spiritual pilgrimage *through* trauma and suffering to healing and wholeness through the transforming power of forgiveness.

"The extreme greatness of Christianity lies in the fact that it does not seek a supernatural **remedy** for suffering but a supernatural **use** for it."
French Philosopher Simone Weil (1909-1943)

The following book review is written by CPSP and AAPC Diplomate Jim Pruett, Ph.D., Department of Pastoral Care and Education of Carolinas Medical Center.

Johnson tells his story with both courage and transparency but also models how to reframe the "dark side" of personality in order to claim redemption. As a college junior he was drinking and driving and getting distracted by a friend. The result was a tragic accident in which a high school girl was killed. Johnson resultantly experienced sustained depression, shame, guilt, doubt, and recapitulated family of origin issues that led to psychiatric hospitalization. Midst his "dark night of the soul" Johnson found grace, his deeper self, transformation, re-contextualization of life, and both personal and professional formation.

He models the value of engaging the forbidden at new depths of the soul while finding new insights regarding how God is actively present in the process. He describes his fears, loneliness, questions, and emptiness drawing the reader into his chaos, confusion and pain. He finds meaning by utilizing Scripture, stories of others such as Abraham Lincoln, and the writings of theologians. Pertinent themes addressed include the role of alcoholism, the need for God's power, guilt as bondage with unconscious payoffs, conquering shame and receiving the blessing, common grace, forgiveness midst self confrontation at the cross, positive responses to adversity, and meaningful suffering.

This reader experienced tears of sadness and joy connecting with the writer's soul and inspired by his reflections on his journey. Thus, clients have been encouraged to read *Tragic Redemption*.

Client reactions to Johnson's story have included identification, increased ability to articulate feelings and interpret personal process, self-confrontation of guilt and shame as well as acting out behavior, the cost of tragedy, redefinition of grace, and hope. They have recommended the book to others.

Tragic Redemption is far more than a mere autobiography, sad story with a good ending, or guidebook with simple platitudes. It provides an opportunity to gauge the authenticity and integrity of one's life while asking very important questions. To what degree do I engage myself and the transpersonal? How do I use tragedy to purify and find courage? Have I been willing to travel to places where I facilitate others to go? How do I model by word, deed, and presence the ability to go to life's frightening, forbidden places?

Other quotes from the book:

"Repressions are the power that makes one work against all the avowed and willful intentions. They are strong because they are deep in the vows of the child of the past." Myron Madden

"Hope is a memory of the future." Gabriel Marcel

"When we avoid pain, we avoid healing." author

"We belong to the power we choose to obey." J.B. Phillips

"A thorn in the flesh is nothing in comparison to a thorn in our conscience." Charles Spurgeon

"What happens within us is more important than what happens to us. We can not always choose the latter, but we can choose the former." David Seamands

"Within every process of forgiveness, there is enshrined a great agony." Macintosh

"Shame is a hemorrhage of the soul." Jean Paul Sartre

"What comes into our mind when we first think of God is the most important thing about us." A.W. Tozer

"I believe that Christ died for me because its incredible; I believe that He rose from the dead because its impossible." author unknown

"The church is the only institution in the world whose membership is based on unworthiness." Morrison

"The problem is that people have enough to live by but nothing to live for, they have the means but no meaning." Viktor Frankl