

Every teen who self-injures needs to get this book into his or her hands. *Scars That Wound : Scars That Heal* is the compass needed to navigate the storm. And for those who are trying to help self-injuring teens, this book will finally answer your most important questions: Why do they do it? What can I do to help?

—Christian Hill, MA; Alpine Connection Counseling,  
Colorado Springs

*Scars That Wound : Scars That Heal* is a powerful, gripping story marked with practical advice on how to escape the grip of self-injury. Anyone who is caught in its tangled web should read this. It could change their life!

—Megan Hutchinson, author of the eight-step recovery program  
*Life Hurts, GOD HEALS*; Student ministries, Saddleback Church

Cutting . . . it's an ugly reality of life in today's world for far too many young adults, teens, and children. The cuts are cries for redemption and outward signs of that deep groaning for wholeness and healing. Jan takes readers on a difficult yet necessary journey into understanding cutting, but also shows the reader how to enter into that joyous journey that answers the groans.

—Dr. Walt Mueller, president, The Center for Parent/  
Youth Understanding, Elizabethtown, Pennsylvania

Jan has written a sensitive approach to a subject more prevalent than most adults realize. Self-injury is driven by a massive amount of pain. This book offers hope and help through the real-life journey of one young hurting woman, and it doesn't pull punches. It reveals the hidden hurts of many of today's teenagers, using haunting images and stories that will stir your emotions, cause you to think, and at times make you cry. The book also offers strategies for responding to hurting teenagers. I highly recommend this book to students, parents, and youth leaders.

—Dr. Les Christie, chairman, youth ministry, William Jessup University; Youth Specialties Core Team

I just read this entire book, and it is incredible. I think everyone can see a bit of themselves in Jackie. Maybe they didn't hurt themselves by cutting or burning, but there are so many other ways that people don't even realize . . . So many times teens don't feel the love they've always craved from a parent, or perhaps they get involved with drugs or using their body as a toy instead of a temple. *Scars that Wound : Scars that Heal* goes places where other books can't.

For me, this book was so much more meaningful because it shared my pain of hurting myself, in words that I couldn't express. When Jackie had fights with her father, I couldn't help but think how that is an everyday battle for me, and for so many other kids. Like Jackie, I had no way of expressing my pain to others—besides cutting myself. I thought I was a failure and deserved pain because I was a terrible thing that needed more grace than Jesus could give, even when he died on the cross. I was once told, "There is nothing you could do to make God love you any less." This book has that statement written all over it, in many different ways, for many people to understand.

—Jessica, a former cutter

*Scars That Wound : Scars That Heal* breaks new ground in understanding the mind and heart of the self-injurer. Jan Kern has reached into the world of despairing kids with the hope of healing where there has been no hope. Each story compels the reader forward to grasp the deep realm of pain and loss that the self-injurer lives with. Then, at that lowest place, Jan leads us to Jesus—who is already there.

—Mike Petrillo, marriage and family therapist; executive director, Christian Encounter Ministries

I have worked with both young men and young women who self-injure through cutting, bone breaking, hair pulling, eating disorders, and substance abuse in outpatient services, in jails, and in prison. Jan reaches out to these hurting people with tenderness, love, and honesty. . . . *Scars That Wound : Scars That Heal* will help break the chains of your prison and lift you into the presence of God for healing, fullness of joy, and peace. If you know a self-injurer, Jan will help you understand and reach out with compassion and faith in the God who heals.

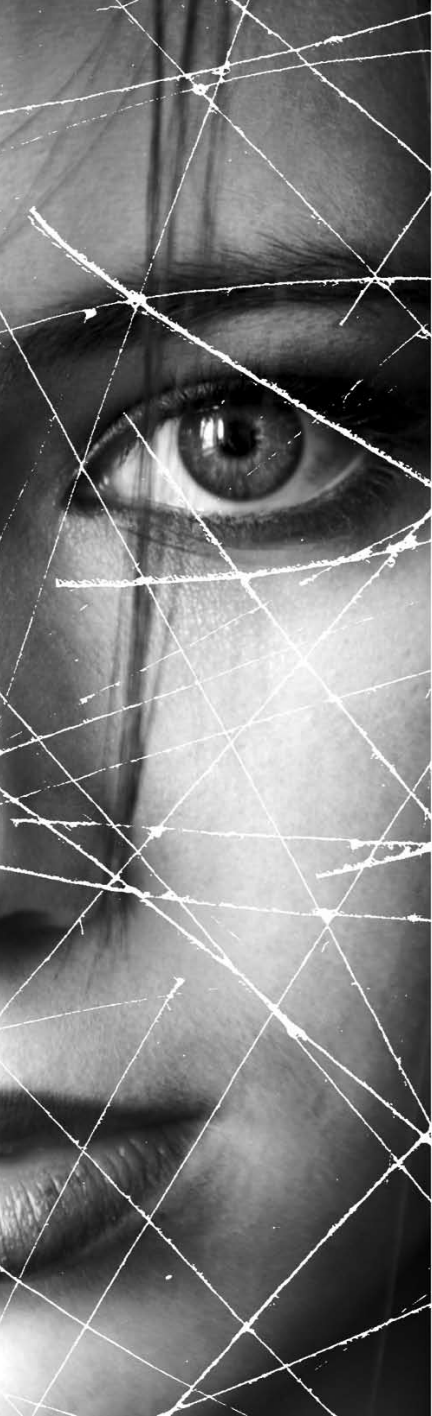
—Yvonne Ortega, LPC, LSATP, CCDVC; author, *Hope for the Journey Through Cancer: Inspiration for Each Day*



**SCARS THAT WOUND : SCARS THAT HEAL**







**Standard**<sup>®</sup>  
PUBLISHING  
*Bringing The Word to Life*

Cincinnati, Ohio

A JOURNEY OUT OF SELF-INJURY // **JAN KERN**

# **SCARS THAT WOUND : SCARS THAT HEAL**

A LIVE FREE BOOK

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

IN MANY WAYS, this book did not begin with me. All the stories were unfolding long before I became aware of them. Jackie's was the first I was privileged to hear. In God's scheme of things, a book was in the making. Somewhere along the way I figured out that I was supposed to go along for the adventure.

Jackie: you wanted to share your story and tears with me so others would know God's love in action. I know it wasn't easy. Thanks for catching me up in the ripples of his work in you. Can't wait to see where they go from here.

Jackie's family—Fred, Betty, and Nikki: your honesty in showing a family-in-progress was awesome. You are beautiful expressions of God's work in real people.

Jackie's friends and her spiritual family at Christian Encounter Ministries: you each said yes to God and made a difference.

All of you who shared your own journeys for this book: you put yourself out there, and that takes courage. You've been amazing.

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Bob Irvin and the staff at Standard Publishing: thanks for catching the vision for this book and making it happen. I

prayed for the right publisher—and never wavered in the belief that I found it.

Many others joined in the adventure through prayer and encouragement. Thanks for helping me keep my eyes on Jesus Christ. He is the author and finisher of our faith, and in many ways, this book. Not a word of it could have been written without him.

## FOREWORD

IF YOU ARE READING THIS BOOK because someone who cares about you asked you to, then trust that you have stumbled onto a very good thing. God is speaking to your heart. Read *Scars That Wound : Scars That Heal* with an open mind toward what he can do in your life. If you are self-injuring and feel that nobody understands why you do it, know that you are not alone—you're one of two million Americans who purposely self-injure. There are many others who experience a deep, immense pain that clouds their thoughts and makes them feel helpless. Allow this book to help you experience the journey toward healing and finding purpose in your life.

Or you may be reading this book because you know someone who self-injures. In either case, Jan Kern conveys a message of hope through the personal, true story of Jackie. Caught in the web of the painful memories of her past and overwhelming feelings of hopelessness, Jackie began to injure herself at the age of fourteen. She desperately wanted to tell those close to her how she felt, but couldn't do it with words. She believed the only way she could express the deep emotions that were building within her was through self-injury.

Have you ever felt like you just couldn't share your deepest feelings with another person? That no one would understand? That's how Jackie felt until she met someone who helped her find the source of her hurt. Healing requires making a personal commitment to positive action. First, make the simple, but profoundly important, decision that you want to heal. Second, consider if you should seek professional help from a therapist

who specializes in these issues. Third, find caring people who will support you through the healing process. Finally, but most importantly, understand how much Jesus loves you and wants you to follow his plan for your life. If you take these steps, you'll be well on your way to recovery. But just as Jackie had setbacks, which you'll read about, don't expect things to change overnight. Healing from years of hurt and emotional pain will take time and patience.

Healing is never an easy journey. But it is one well worth the effort. With this book, Jan does a wonderful job of casting a vision of hope and healing for those who can't see a way out. If you're thinking you can never heal from the pain you have experienced, please consider this: picture a difficulty you had in your past that you eventually overcame. Did you doubt you could survive the ordeal? It may have been the death of someone close, a traumatic event in your family, moving to a new school, your parents' divorce, a suicide, or something else extremely difficult. How did you get through it? Perhaps without even knowing it, you used your personal strengths. I believe those strengths have always been there, that they are given to you at birth. Think of how they helped you through past challenges. Now think of how you can use those same personal strengths to help you through your present situation.

Maybe you also had the support of others to help you through your difficulty; everyone needs that type of encouragement. Getting involved with positive peer groups can help you take that step. Have you ever helped another person, volunteered at a homeless shelter or animal shelter, or helped a hurt or abandoned dog or cat? How did it feel? Using your

God-given gifts to help others is the greatest gift you can give yourself. When you reach out to others who are hurting, you find a sense of purpose in your life.

You can start today by sharing your pain with a caring, trustworthy friend. This book will help greatly. As you take the steps toward healing, God will reveal his plan for your life. His Son is the one who said, “With God all things are possible.”

—Susan Bowman, EdS, LPC; author,  
*See My Pain and Co-Piloting*



## A BEGINNING . . .

YOU'VE PICKED UP THIS BOOK, so you probably have self-injured or you know someone who does. You're not alone. Many have turned to hurting themselves in some way in order to deal with the hard stuff in their lives.

If you self-injure, I hope that in these pages you'll discover—especially through Jackie's true story told here—how much God wants to be involved in your unique story. A story in which you can begin to head in a new direction out of self-injury and closer toward him.

Your reasons for wanting to hurt yourself and the pain and history behind it matter. Don't believe for an instant that no one would possibly care. God does, and he will help you find others who care too.

I don't consider this a self-help book because you can't tackle this alone. It's important you share what's going on with someone you can trust—and especially that you pray to God about what you're feeling. He'll show you more about his love for you and provide ways for you to stop hurting yourself. If you need to, don't hesitate to ask someone to help you find a Christian group, or a church, or a person you can go to for more support. Some resources are listed in the back of this book.

If you don't self-injure but know someone who does, the best way you can help him or her is to pray and be a friend. You may often feel you don't understand the reasons behind self-injury or exactly how to help. But God can use you and your love and patience as you simply listen or offer encouragement in handling the emotions, memories, and stresses differently.

I live and work at a ministry where teens come for help. It was at this place that I met Jackie, when she was eighteen, and we grew to be good friends. She wanted me to tell her story so that you would know that God is bigger than self-injury, anxieties, and fears. Through her story you'll see that in Jesus Christ you can find hope and know you are not alone.

Jackie shared her story with me through hours of conversation and through her blood- and tear-stained journals. In relaying it, she chose not to reveal the names or relationships of those who had molested her. Every attempt has been made to relay the events in Jackie's life as accurately as memories would allow. Real names were used, except for the teens in her youth group.

In the midst of all of Jackie's pain, what stood out most—as we looked back through those days—was how powerfully God worked through people he brought into her life. Even when responses and actions weren't perfect, every relationship brought about a little more healing and a little more revelation of the depth of the love and healing God had for Jackie.

In the second half of each chapter, following Jackie's story, you'll find a commentary section that includes stories from others who have taken similar journeys and are discovering the possibilities God has for their healing. In most cases, the names of the individuals who shared their stories have been changed.

I chose not to list many details about how a person self-injures, but in some cases mentioning some of them has to be part of the story. If you think you may come across personal triggers that make you want to hurt yourself, please read this book with someone instead of by yourself. It might be a good

idea anyway—just to have someone to talk with and pray along with you.

Wherever you are on your journey, I want to encourage you to never give up. God will never give up on you. If you haven't already, begin to pray to him every day. Here's a prayer you can use if you'd like:

*God, I hurt inside so much and it shows on the outside with all the scars and marks I've made. I want to stop believing that I deserve the pain I'm feeling and that everything is out of control. Instead, help me each day to begin to believe that I'm your child and you love me more than I can ever imagine. Help me with the pain that overwhelms me with sadness, anxiety, or fear. Each day may I grow closer to freedom from the desire to hurt myself. Today, as I lift my head up from prayer, I will try to keep my focus on you. If I fail a little, or even a lot, I won't be afraid to pray again tomorrow. AMEN.*

I pray for new beginnings for you.







# one

*I always feel like I did something to deserve this.*

*I just want to know when it's going to be over.*

—Jackie's Journal

JACKIE CLUTCHED THE TEAR-SOAKED COVERS surrounding her as she lay in her bed. Part of her wanted to burrow deeper into the blankets; part of her wanted to run. But where would she go at 11:00 at night?

*I want a cigarette.* Jackie slipped out of the covers, rolled off the bed, and rummaged through the piles on the floor, but only found a lighter. Gripping it tightly, she slammed her fist into her mattress. A new surge of tears racked her body and she slumped to the edge of her bed. *Why is everything so hard?*

Jackie rolled the lighter around in her hand. Her thumb slid down the lighter wheel and squeezed the tab. The flame erupted for a moment before she let it die. Several times she flicked and released the lighter. Each flame surge illuminated her dark, cramped bedroom. A flash: she saw clothes scattered across the floor. Another: pictures of family and friends on the wall and posters of music idols. Still another: two doors.

Jackie's room was a walk-through, meant to be an office. This year, at fourteen, she had moved out of the bedroom she shared with her younger sister. She liked having her own room. Even this small one. Besides, it had a straight shot to the back door—a great way to escape the tension at home.

She flicked on the lighter again. Jackie took several shaky breaths and her tears gradually slowed. Lately she felt upset all the time. *Why?* She released the lighter tab. The room went dark.

Dad had come home irritated about something—as usual. His stomping around sent her fleeing to her room. She was tired of his yelling and making her feel stupid. Tired of his smoking pot and drinking. Tired of seeing Mom look so sad and worn out. And there was something more—something she couldn't identify.

A dark, textured background with white text. The text reads: "Jackie took several shaky breaths and her tears gradually slowed. Lately she felt upset all the time. *Why?*"

She wiped her eyes.

Another press of her thumb and the lighter's flame shot up, illuminating her room again. She glanced down at the strewn clothes.

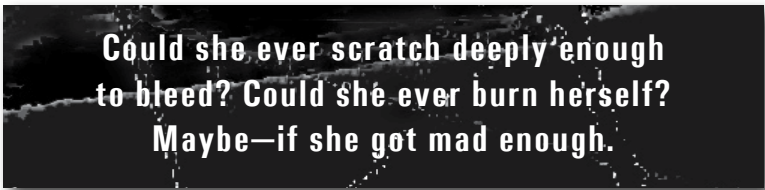
They reminded her of the day just after Christmas when she started cleaning her room. She accidentally stepped on a Christmas ornament, shattering it. As she cleaned up the sharp pieces, she thought of an article she'd read in a teen magazine—a story about a girl who had hurt herself to deal with her intense emotions. Jackie had never heard of people who intentionally cut or burned themselves. She had picked up a piece of the broken ornament and scratched a line across her arm—just to feel what it was like. Her skin welted as if scratched by a kitten, but it didn't hurt much or bleed.

Jackie let the lighter flame go out, then immediately made it flash again. Could she ever scratch deeply enough to bleed? Could she ever burn herself? Maybe—if she got mad enough.

She was getting pretty mad right then. Yeah, her dad frustrated her, but there was more to it. She'd been angry for weeks . . . months . . . maybe years. A couple years ago, her mom had become worried enough that one night she dropped Jackie off at a church youth group meeting. It was fun hanging out there, and she continued going, but it didn't help. The anger only grew. Especially after she saw the other kids who seemed to have perfect families.

*Why is my family so messed up? Why am I so messed up?*

The tears started again and she watched the lighter flame blur. She closed her eyes and swallowed. The anger grew more intense. She felt an awful pain inside that she couldn't name. It surged from deep inside her gut and threatened to grab her and hold her down. Fear flooded through her and her eyes shot open. She wanted to run. Her breathing quickened and her heart pounded. How could she make the feelings stop?



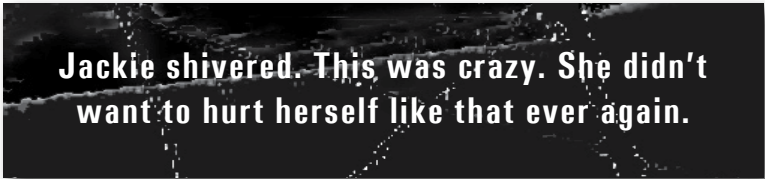
**Could she ever scratch deeply enough  
to bleed? Could she ever burn herself?  
Maybe—if she got mad enough.**

*The lighter.*

She tilted the flame to heat the top metal edge of the lighter and then pressed the hot part against her wrist. It hurt and she gasped, but the panic eased and the anger began to cool. She burned herself again. And then again. All the unwanted

emotions seemed to slip away. Dad didn't matter anymore. The horrible fear was gone. She relaxed.

Jackie sat in the dark for a few moments before she reached over and flipped on the light switch. U-shaped marks covered her arms. She counted them. In just five minutes she had inflicted twenty-one burns.



**Jackie shivered. This was crazy. She didn't want to hurt herself like that ever again.**

As the burns began to blister, they seeped and stung like fire. She knew she should take care of them, but how? Leaving her room wasn't an option. The last thing she needed was to wake up her parents. She grabbed tissues, pressed them over the burns, and climbed back under her covers. The burns hurt, but she preferred this pain over a surge of emotions she couldn't control.

*What have I done?*

Burning had eased the out-of-control feelings, but she'd only meant to try it once. When it calmed her, she thought she had pressed the lighter against her arm only a few more times. How'd she lose track?

Jackie shivered. This was crazy. She didn't want to hurt herself like that ever again. How would she handle these feelings the next time? She wanted to talk to someone—anyone but her parents. They'd only be mad. No way could they find out. She'd hide the burns. Maybe tomorrow at the youth breakfast she could talk to one of the leaders.

The next morning, a Saturday, Jackie and her dad acted as if

nothing had happened between them. *Typical for our family*, she thought. She tugged at her long sleeves to make sure they hid the reddened blisters. Avoiding any conversation, she headed to church for the breakfast.

While Jackie helped serve pancakes, she watched for a chance to talk to one of the youth sponsors. Finally, she served the last person. Crossing the room, she spotted Debbie and asked her if they could talk. They stepped outside, to the backyard of the church, and found a bench to sit on.

At first Jackie couldn't say anything, but Debbie was like a second mom to her. She'd care, no matter what. Slowly, haltingly, the words came. After Jackie explained that she had burned herself, she pulled up her sleeves to reveal the fresh burns. They still stung. Just as fresh was the memory of feeling out of control.

"I was going to burn myself only once, but I was mad and scared and I . . . I kept going."

Debbie squeezed Jackie's hand. "What made you so mad?"

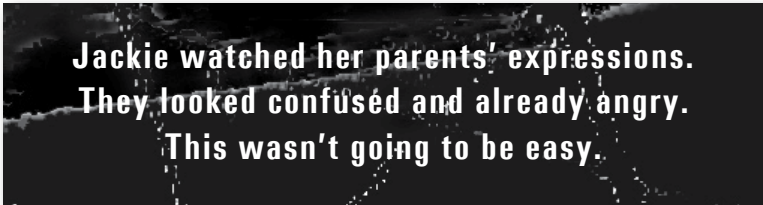
"Dad. Stuff. I don't know." Tears pooled in her eyes. Nothing made sense, so how could she explain? What Dad did shouldn't have made her so mad that she'd hurt herself. "I don't know," she repeated.

"You've got a lot going on inside." Debbie brushed a tear that slipped down Jackie's cheek. "I think you should tell Melody. You've been talking to her a lot. She'd want to know."

"OK, I will," Jackie promised. Melody was the youth pastor and a special friend to Jackie. She would try to talk to her soon.

The next morning Jackie sat next to Melody during the

church service. Partway through the worship, she caught Melody's attention. Jackie lifted her sleeve to show her burns and watched as tears came to Melody's eyes. Gently, her youth pastor placed her hand over Jackie's blisters.



**Jackie watched her parents' expressions.  
They looked confused and already angry.  
This wasn't going to be easy.**

After the service Melody turned to Jackie. "Your mom and dad need to know about this."

"I can't tell them."

"They need to know."

"I . . . I just can't."

"I'll call them, OK? We'll have a meeting here at the church—just me, you, and your parents."

*Great.* It wasn't so bad telling Debbie and Melody, but her parents would be furious. They liked to keep family stuff private. In the past when she said anything, she got in trouble. Her stomach knotted. *Is there any way out of this?*

The meeting time came too quickly. As everyone filed into Melody's office, Jackie watched her parents' expressions. They looked confused and already angry. This wasn't going to be easy.

They were a Hispanic family, their complexions golden brown. As they sat down, Mom's dark, natural curls fell forward and framed her concerned face. Dad leaned back, resting his hands on his thighs. At five-foot-four, Jackie was almost as tall as

he was. Still, with his stocky build he was an intimidating man.

Melody began. “This morning Jackie told me something that you should know. The other night she was upset. She burned her arms.” Melody turned to Jackie. “Can you show them?”

Jackie slumped in her chair and twisted her long hair around a finger. She wished she’d never shown anyone. Slowly, she lifted each sleeve. Her parents stared.

“Those are *burns*?” Dad leaned forward.

“Why would you do that?” Mom demanded.

Jackie jerked her sleeves back down. “I don’t know.” Her eyes filled with tears.

“You don’t just go and burn yourself,” Dad said, his voice rising. “What were you thinking?”

“I don’t know. I was just mad.”

“You were *mad*?” Dad said. “That’s no reason.”

Words wouldn’t come. Jackie was left only with her thoughts. *Oh Dad, you don’t understand. I don’t even understand. Nothing I could say would make a difference. It wouldn’t make you care. It wouldn’t make the hurt inside go away. It wouldn’t change anything.*

She pressed her hand over the burns. Even through the sleeves, they stung. She longed for the escape the pain had brought a few nights before.

Her parents’ voices seemed far away. Jackie stopped trying to explain and sat and stared at nothing. She had shut down.

**I have loved you with an everlasting love;  
therefore I have drawn you with lovingkindness.**

JEREMIAH 31:3

## THE HIDING BEGINS

“Why?”

When Jackie’s parents asked her that question, they didn’t realize how much it demanded. Her honest response—“I don’t know. I was just mad”—was as much as she could risk. One more word, one more feeling would force her to go to places inside she didn’t understand—places she wanted to avoid. She’d have to think through confusing emotions or recall frightening pieces of memories. *Not yet; it’s not safe* is what her mind screamed if anyone—herself included—asked why.

At fourteen, Jackie didn’t connect a lot of what had happened in her life with those moments when she felt out of control. She punched walls, slammed doors, or threw things across her bedroom. Then the day came when she burned herself for the first time. “I was always overwhelmed with emotions and didn’t know what to do. I felt angry, anxious, and afraid,” Jackie said as she looked back on those pain-filled years. “Little things set me off in a big way.”

Her intense emotions pointed partly toward home. For Jackie, home wasn’t a great place to be. Mom and Dad didn’t get along. Dad was often angry and struggled with alcohol and drug abuse. Mom frequently threatened to leave. Jackie’s biggest fear was that her mom would pack her bags and take off.

Though she knew her family struggled, she did everything she could to avoid blaming them. “I thought I was supposed to be responsible for the whole family,” she shared later. “Even if my parents had a little fight, I thought I had failed to keep the

family together. I worried about their finances and taking care of my younger sister, Nikki.”

They didn’t ask her to take on that responsibility; she just did. Her parents had worked since she was born. Though they naturally expected her to help out at home and with her younger sister, she took on much more. “I wanted to please them,” Jackie admitted.

Those were the problems she could identify in junior high. And yet there were many more. Some childhood memories, too painful to describe or even to acknowledge, she tucked deep inside. Those would surface later, but they were a big part of the emotions behind the moment she burned herself twenty-one times.

After the meeting with Melody and her parents, Jackie’s life spun quickly downhill. It no longer mattered if she understood her emotions. She’d cope with them through burning herself, drinking, taking drugs—whatever it took. She burned herself more often and began to cut herself. Her parents and the youth workers didn’t question her about it because she fooled everyone into thinking she had hurt herself only once. She hid the burns and cuts under long, dark shirts and pants.

A couple years would pass before she would tell anyone about her secret self-injury. It would be even longer before she understood the deeper reasons she did it. At fourteen she had discovered only that the pain helped her calm down, and for a while that was reason enough.

In her newness to the Christian faith and her church, Jackie didn’t realize that God could help her. In her eyes, he didn’t care how she was doing. She believed he didn’t like her and had plenty of reasons not to.

The journey ahead would prove to be long and difficult, but Jackie would learn that God loved her. He would gradually fill her heart with hope and bring people she could trust. As much as she initially tried, she wouldn't travel this road alone.

**The most common types of self-harming behavior are cutting and burning. Others include self-hitting, bone breaking, hair pulling, scratching, and interfering with the healing of wounds, such as picking at scabs. Self-injury can include any purposeful choice to harm oneself.**

## **YOUR OWN REASONS**

Does this story sound familiar?

Self-injury—the deliberate choice to habitually harm yourself—doesn't happen without reason. For some of you, it's the only way you can express and cope with the hurt, anxiety, anger, or fear you feel. Even if you don't understand it all yet, you have reasons that you hurt yourself—painful reasons trapped inside with seemingly no place to go. By your own hand you've brought your inside pain to the outside. You see it now in the scars left from the injuries you've inflicted on yourself.

You're not alone. Just like Jackie and just like you, others have faced unexpected, intense situations that blasted them with emotions they didn't know how to handle.

"I felt controlled by everyone in my life—my parents, my pastor, even my friends," one said.

This is what others said:

“My mom’s boyfriend molested me.”

“My parents divorced. It messed everything up.”

“My dad died and I didn’t want to bother my mom. I had no one to talk to.”

“My parents were alcoholics.”

“My mom beat up my sisters and me.”

“I couldn’t stand all the pressure to be perfect in everything I did.”

“I wasn’t fitting in at school. I had no friends and felt really lonely.”

“My girlfriend dumped me.”

“I honestly don’t know why I do it. I just feel empty inside.”

Christian Hill, a Colorado Springs-based counselor who meets with many teens who have self-injured, says, “Rarely is the driving force behind cutting as clean as we would like it to be. Usually it’s a combination of several things.” Emotions overwhelm, depression or anxiety settle in, pain and disillusionment become too much to bear.

For these young people, just as with Jackie, at the time of such intense feelings, hurting themselves seemed to be the only way to cope. When asked what it did for them, they added:

“It calmed me down.”

“It gets my mind off of emotional stuff.”

“I felt like I’m the one in control instead of everyone else.”

“It helped me feel like I’m here—like I am living and maybe I matter.”

“When I did it, I could escape my fears and anxieties.”

“My scars remind me that my past is real.”

“It’s the only pain I could control.”

“I felt like I was bad, like I needed to punish myself.”

“I did it to survive. Otherwise, I might have ended my life.”

Everyone needs people in life who will honor and encourage the person they are becoming, who care about what they think or feel. Someone who has turned to self-harming behavior may not have experienced enough of these kinds of relationships. Maybe you’re one who can begin to provide that kind of support for a friend or family member who self-injures.

## GETTING GOD IN THE PICTURE

Emotions are amazingly intense. Some of yours might tie your painful past to the present situations in your life. You might not know how to begin to talk about the feelings, thoughts, and memories. You’re not alone. A huge number of those who hurt themselves to cope with their emotions have communication difficulties in their homes.

Susan Bowman, author of *See My Pain*, a book on strategies for those who self-injure, says that we tend to model ourselves after the people in our lives who haven’t known how to talk about personal problems or feelings.

Susan Cook, a counselor who has met with teens and young adults who self-injure, adds that pain as a life circumstance “is just not something we’re talking about enough with kids”—

especially in the church. She says, “You’re going to get the impression there’s something wrong with you because you feel intense pain.”

The need to talk is there, but you may feel like no one wants to listen. Confusion slithers its way in when people try to change what you feel or what you remember and make your feelings seem like nothing. They don’t understand, or they aren’t sure how to handle your emotions. “Get over it,” they might say. “Suck it up and be a man.” “Well, we just don’t talk about those things.”

The silencing brings yet another pain that’s difficult to overcome—shame. Your thoughts and emotions seem unacceptable to others, so how could they understand why you hurt yourself? Shame is at least partly what turns your self-harm into a secret that you hide under long pants and sleeves.

Your thoughts, feelings, and memories *are* important and deserve to be heard. You don’t have to keep quiet or hide.

In Genesis 3, you can read about the first man and woman on earth, Adam and Eve. They’re known for feeling ashamed and hiding. Lured by Satan, they disobeyed God. When shame enveloped them, they covered themselves and hid. Later, when they heard God calling them in the garden, they were terrified. But they didn’t need to be afraid. What he wanted most was to bring them out of their shame and back into his arms.

I don’t know where you’ve got God in the picture, but I encourage you to let him into your life now more than you ever have. He knows all the details. He knows what has happened and what you feel. You can tell him what makes you angry, sad, lonely, scared, anxious, or ashamed. You can talk about the

memories and situations in your life that caused your greatest pain. He won't tell you to be quiet. He won't leave you in your shame. He can take it away.

And those things you don't understand or remember right now—if they're important, God will take you through them at the right time. What he has in mind for you is your total healing, from the inside out. He will help you write the next chapters of your unique story and take it in an amazing direction—one that isn't filled with a pain that's impossible to handle on your own. He'll carry it for you, if you let him.

*Jesus, you are there waiting for me to come with the pain, the terrifying memories, the expectations I have of myself and that others have of me—all those things I think and feel and have held inside. I can come to you because you've already come to me. You are waiting to listen in a way others haven't yet been able to. I'm glad you won't turn away or make me feel stupid. You won't look at me with disgust. In your eyes, I am lovable. Today, help me learn to trust you and let you into my life more, especially at those moments when I want to hurt myself. Help me begin to understand how to live differently, how to live free. AMEN.*

**He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.**

PSALM 147:3

## GOING DEEPER

- Maybe you behave in ways—through self-injury or otherwise—that you don't understand and leave you feeling ashamed. In what ways has this prevented you from talking to God about what you think and feel?
- Since God is always willing to welcome you into a relationship with him and since he won't tell you to be quiet—think again about the message of Psalm 147:3—what could you tell him right now about what's happening to you?
- What feels impossible for you to handle on your own? What specific action can you take to invite God to carry it for you?

## DEEPER STILL

Using your favorite art materials, create a picture of your life as you see it now. Then consider how God can become a part of that depiction and draw him into your picture. Make your artwork a form of prayer inviting God into what's happening in your life.