



Connect Four

Building Wholeness from God to Community
A Theology of Healing, Presence, and Connection

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Epigraphs

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

Psalm 147:3

*"I am the vine; you are the
branches. If you remain in me and I
in you, you will bear much
fruit; apart from me you can do
nothing."*

John 15:5

Vulnerability is the first move that unlocks connection.

It is where God's love finds us,

Where the self, dares to be seen.

Where family learns to hold both joy and pain,
and where community is stitched together in truth.

Healing taught me that motherhood is also ministry.

It is a sacred classroom where love, grace,
and faith are practiced daily.

From these open spaces come the gifts of courage, hope, and creativity. The
very pieces that line up when we connect four.

Latoya Hazell-Alcide



Foreword

Leaning Into the Layers: A Framework Born of Lived Faith

For several years, I have had the privilege of walking alongside Latoya as both a fellow traveler in ministry and also as a friend. I have followed her work as it has unfolded across settings: in church programs, hospital rooms, spiritual retreats, community centers, and academic spaces where the complexities of the human spirit refuse to fit neatly into the categories we often try to impose. This lengthy connection enables me to say, without hesitation, that the insights in these pages are not merely theoretical exercises. They are the fruit of lived experience, hard-won wisdom, and a deep faith that honors both the mystery of God and the multidimensional beauty of God's people.

One of the great gifts of this book is its willingness to challenge the persistent myth of one-dimensionality: the belief that we are, or should be, singular versions of ourselves. Latoya posits that ministry, at its best, embraces the fullness of the human experience: joy and grief, certainty and doubt, health and frailty, courage and fear. This book invites us to reject the false simplicity of narrow definitions and instead lean into the layered, textured reality of who we are, especially when we minister.

The "connect four" framework presented here serves as a powerful guide for doing exactly that. With clarity and compassion, it provides a structure that helps chaplains, pastors, and all those who minister to patients navigate the complex intersections of identity, faith, relationships, and purpose. It provides a practical lens for understanding how people show up in moments of need, and how caregivers can respond with integrity, humility, and insight.

This book is more than a resource: it is an invitation to ministers, caregivers, and anyone seeking to serve others with authenticity and depth.

I believe readers will resonate as I do with Latoya's voice and be inspired as I am by her courage.

Dr. Seanna-Kaye Denham-Wilks, Ph.D., CXO, FPCC

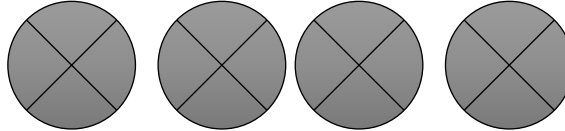
Chief Experience Officer

NYC Health + Hospitals

The Awakening

*The Awakening to the realization that ache is sacred, life is lifechanging,
because when we recognize the sacredness of our pain, we give ourselves
permission to look for God in our wounds.*

LHA

**Dedication**

This book is not mine alone. It is the fruit of many voices, prayers, mentors,
and companions who walked with me when I could not walk alone.

This book is born of many hands and hearts.

This book is also dedicated to my emerging self. I am happy to meet God's
version of me. I have found myself and can show up in life, whole, by
reconnecting with God. Yet the best part of this journey is that I know that He
is beaming with pride and joy! I know it because His word has told me so.

*"Your God is present among you, a strong Warrior there to save you. Happy
to have you back, he'll calm you with his love
and delight you with his songs."*

Zephaniah 3:17 MGS

Therefore, to all the wounded and broken: If you are searching for connection.
May His peace piece you back together, connecting you with the Divine, with
yourself, with family, and with community.

Foreword – A Chaplaincy Lens

Latoya has a gentle spirit backed by courage and steadfastness. I admire her compassionate care for others, which is rooted in her connection with God. Her experience did not trap or freeze her; instead, she turns every challenge into more fuel to shine brighter for God. This book is very helpful for ministers, especially chaplains.

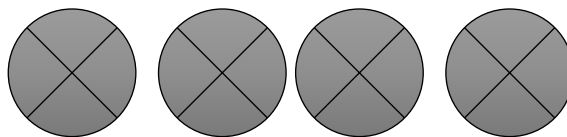
Latoya's thoughtful words and knowledge in spiritual care provide her readers a deeper dive into connecting with God, themselves, their inner circles, and community. In this book, you will find a guide, a friend, and a narrator journeying with your pain and suffering.

Our wounds do not define who we are. Each chapter is prayerfully created for our needs, with practices, methods, exercises, and illustrations. It is also a guide for those who are entering the sacred ministry in chaplaincy. I found a kindred spirit the moment we were connected, and I pray that you will find one as well, as you journey through this book together.

Angela H. Li, PhD, MBA, BCC (APC)

Associate Director,

North American Division Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries



Footprints of Connection: Dr. Angela H. Li
(*Connect-Four Narrative*)

*** (Connection with God)**

At the center of Dr. Angela H. Li's ministry is her deep and unwavering connection with God. Her call into chaplaincy was shaped by an early sense of divine presence and the conviction that God's compassion flows most powerfully through those willing to be present with the wounded, the questioning, and the searching. Angela embraced this calling as both identity and mission, living daily with the awareness that she is first and foremost God's servant, sent to walk with people in their most vulnerable moments.

*** (Connection with Self-Formation, Calling & Credentials)**

Out of that sacred connection, Dr. Li cultivated a disciplined, reflective, and academically rich inner life. She brings to Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries the strength of a PhD, the strategic insight of an MBA, and the spiritual authority of a Board-Certified Chaplain (BCC) through the Association of Professional Chaplains (APC). Her formation is marked by rigorous education, clinical training, and years accompanying individuals and families through grief, trauma, ethical tension, spiritual crisis, and end-of-life transitions. From these experiences, she forged a pastoral identity that is academically grounded, emotionally attuned, and spiritually anchored.

*** (Connection with Family & Heritage)**

Dr. Li's journey is also shaped by the family and heritage that formed her values: diligence, humility, hospitality, and the ethic of showing up for others. These familial roots instilled in her a reverence for cultural diversity, a deep respect for individual story, and a commitment to serve people across backgrounds, faiths, and life experiences. The nurturing she received within her own family informs her patient, compassionate presence with every person she encounters.

*** (Connection with Community & the World)**

From the strength of her connections with God, with self, and with family, Angela extends her ministry outward into the wider community, both within and beyond the Seventh-day Adventist Church:

- As Associate Director of Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries (ACM), www.nadchaplain.org, she supports chaplains across healthcare, education, military, corrections, and community settings.
- She mentors emerging chaplains, strengthens professional standards, and ensures that Adventist chaplains remain spiritually grounded, clinically competent, and mission-focused.

- Her leadership equips chaplains to be sacred companions in crisis, ethical guides in complex systems, and spiritual anchors in communities navigating loss, change, and uncertainty.

Through teaching, advocacy, leadership development, and pastoral presence, Dr. Li embodies a ministry of reconnection: reconnecting people to hope, reconnecting systems to compassion, and reconnecting the church to its global call to care for the suffering with excellence and grace.

Dr. Angela H. Li stands as a powerful witness that when God forms the heart, shapes the mind, and anchors the spirit, one life can connect countless others to healing, dignity, and the love of Christ.

Foreword - A Pastoral Lens

When Chaplain Latoya asked me to write this foreword, I was both surprised and yet honored. Then reality set in, and I had to read what this book is about in order to find a path for an opener that connects. Wow! I was ministered to just from reading the back cover description. The “why” then became clear. She methodically is connecting my four that saved my life and ministry.

As pastors, chaplains, professors, spouses, parents, etc., how often do we visit the four pieces of the puzzle that she articulates in this book? I did not realize how disconnected I was until November 2021. It was a beautiful, cold, crisp Monday morning at our home in Bowie, MD, when I suffered a stroke. This was not on my calendar, but it took over my life for the next three months. Angry, frustrated, and confused, I found myself totally unprepared and disconnected in every category that Chaplain Latoya writes about.

It was during the rehabilitating journey that I was admitted to the Washington Adventist Rehabilitation Center. Surrounded by others more critical than me, younger than me, yet more determined than me, I figured I needed to get my program together. So, I did what I was told and completed all the exercises and little silly games (to me) to get my brain and body coordinated again (perhaps my brain had never been coordinated with my body, LOL). I had no clue how the dots would connect again. And that is when it happened!!!

One day, feeling very miserable and just wanting to go home, knowing that I still cannot quite balance or walk a straight line, guess who walks into my room, uninvited? You got it, the Chaplain. I am now more frustrated because I did not ask for a visit, and she is trying to feel me out! She admits now that this was not my imagination. Pastor James L. Black, Sr., is going to be a handful. Being a woman of God, she knew what to do to get me reconnected. She prayed for me and continued to visit my room every day until I began to appreciate her presence. I knew that her reconnecting strategy was working because the day she did not come by, and I missed her.

When she returned, I saw her as a breath with fresh air and realized that if I am to fully recover and regain my purpose, I am going to need this lady. Her reconnecting strategy worked, and she helped me to start dreaming again. She was also a dreamer and had a vision for helping others who felt disconnected reconnect. Long story short: not only did I get my connection back to God, Self, and Family, the connection back to Community is in the history books. The chaplain was not just ministering to me but also baiting

me. Through all the conversations, she got to really know me and my professional background and realized my connection to her dream of helping the underserved.

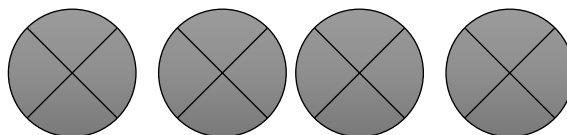
So, because of the four principles that Chaplain Latoya meticulously lay out in *Connect Four: Building Wholeness from God to Community a Theology of Healing, Presence, and Wholeness*, four years ago, the Rev. Dr. Lorraine Brown, D.Min., RN founded and became the executive director for PROJECT SPIRIT SICKLE CELL, INC.(PSSC). PSSC is a 501(c) (3) community-based spiritual organization supporting young adults with sickle cell disease (SCD) as they navigate health and life challenges and transitions, including emerging from adolescence to adulthood, adjusting to adult healthcare, and discovering their own spiritual identity (www.projectspiritsicklecell.org).

So how do these dots connect as a foreword for this book? Guess who became her first Board Chairman for this national organization? Yep, you got it! Because her dots were connected the day she came into my hospital room, she modeled what I needed: a reconnection back to God, Self, Family, and Community. So, as you read, prepare yourself to discover some connecting truths about your current journey and how God will use this discovery to elevate your ministry impact to the next level.

Thank you, Pastor Chaplain Latoya Hazell-Alcide, for being your authentic self and helping others to explore and rediscover their connections with God, Self, Family, and Community. I salute you for your obedience to God!

James L. Black, Sr. (Pastor JB), MDiv.

Pastor of the Bethany SDA Church in Miami, Florida



Footprints of Connection: Pastor James Black & Maxine Black (Connect-Four Narrative)

***(Connection with God)**

Pastor James “JB” Black’s journey begins with his deep connection to God, who called him to embrace his identity as God’s beloved son. From this sacred grounding, God shaped his sense of purpose and direction, guiding him into ministry and inviting him to walk in the fullness of his calling.

***(Connection with Self-Formation & Calling)**

Out of this divine connection, Pastor Black developed clarity about his gifts and vocation. God nurtured in him a heart for youth, worship, and restoration, shaping the inner landscape of a man committed to service. This connection to self, understanding who he is and what God placed in him, became the foundation upon which his ministry life would grow.

***(Connection with Family)**

God’s leading brought JB to his future wife, Maxine, and together they built a family grounded in faith, love, and shared mission. This family connection strengthened his ministry and expanded his capacity to serve with compassion, humility, and joy. Their partnership has remained a central, sustaining force throughout each chapter of their work.

***(Connection with Community & the World)**

From the strength of these connections, God extended Pastor Black’s influence outward into a ministry that spans local churches, conferences, and global communities:

- He served faithfully in the Southwest Region Conference as youth pastor, senior pastor, and conference youth director. He expanded his community impact through leadership roles, including membership on the NAD Youth Committee and serving as secretary of the NAD Pathfinder Committee.
- His ability to connect across generational bridges led to four years of service as president of the Black Adventist Youth Directors Association (BAYDA), shaping youth ministry nationally.
- God broadened his ministry reach further when he became Director of Youth & Young Adult Ministries for the North American Division, where he also nurtured reconnection through NAD Prayer Ministries and served as chaplain for the NAD office staff.
- Coming full circle, Pastor Black reconnected with grassroots community ministry when he returned to local parish leadership as Pastor of the Bethany SDA Church in Miami, Florida.

- Still building spaces of connection, Pastor JB and his wife, Maxine, later co-founded The Devan Group Publishing (www.thedevangroup.com), where they utilize their gifts to uplift emerging and seasoned authors, creating a communal platform where stories, testimonies, and ministries flourish.

Foreword - A Family Lens

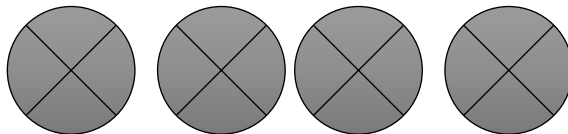
The role that parents play in the formation of their children is essential to how their connections will be formed. When parents have not processed their own pain, it will be passed along to their children. The Bible's teaching that the iniquity of the fathers (parents) is passed along to their children to the third and fourth generation (Exodus 20:5) has been confirmed by the science of epigenetics (The Body Keeps the Score, Bessel van der Kolk). This dysfunctional brokenness will also be modeled in the way the parents relate to one another as well as the children.

The children will not be seen because the parents don't see themselves. Feelings will be stifled or ignored. Conversations will be more about dos and don'ts than sharing from the heart. God may even be presented as an angry rather than a loving God who sees his children and their struggles. Children may learn cognitively about God but not form a connection from the heart. As a result, children will not experience parental soothing when they are hurt. The result is an anxiety that infuses every part of their lives. They are on hyper alert trying to keep themselves safe. They find dysfunctional ways to medicate their pain that often become their addictions, attempting to find the secure attachment that has eluded them for a lifetime.

The greatest gift parents can give their children is having the courage to begin their journey of healing. When one member of the family system embarks on this journey, it has a positive impact on the others as well. Parents who own up to and apologize to their children for their mistakes and deficiencies bless their children. When necessary, children can begin to repent themselves, with God's help. He is an involved Heavenly Parent who has never left us nor forsaken us (Joshua 1:5).

Drs. David and Beverly Sedlacek

CEO & Clinical Director of Into HIS Rest Ministries



Footprints of Connection: Dr. David & Dr. Beverly Sedlacek
(Connect-Four Narrative)

***(Connection with God)**

Dr. David and Dr. Beverly Sedlacek trace the roots of their ministry to their *deep personal connection with God*, the One who called them into a shared life of healing work. Each of them answered God's invitation to serve Him by tending to the emotional, spiritual, and relational wounds of His children. Their individual walks with God ultimately converged into a unified mission, grounded in *biblical principles as the core source for emotional healing*.

***(Connection with Self - Their Formation & Expertise)**

Out of that divine connection, both David and Beverly cultivated strong inner lives, developing decades of clinical expertise shaped by integrity, wisdom, and compassion.

- David Sedlacek, Ph.D., LCSW, CFLE carries more than 40 years of experience as a therapist, pastor, educator, researcher, and author. His identity as a healer and teacher grew through his service as Professor of Family Ministry and Discipleship at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University and now continues through his leadership as CEO of Into HIS Rest Ministries.
- Beverly Sedlacek, DNP, PMHCNS-BC, equally gifted as a therapist, author, educator, and speaker, brings nearly 40 years of mental-health practice. Her commitment to emotional wholeness shaped her ministry as Clinical Director of Into HIS Rest Ministries and as a private-practice clinician. Though retired from day-to-day counseling, Beverly remains a sought-after voice for churches, women's ministries, seminars, and spiritual-restoration retreats.

***(Connection with Family)**

Their connection to God and self naturally expanded to the *family God built between them*. David and Beverly, a *happily married Christian couple*, embody a partnership that models emotional honesty, spiritual grounding, and grace-filled communication. Their shared desire to pour into the next generation is reflected in their devotion to their grandchildren, Beverly especially cherishing this slower season to write, mentor, and nurture family bonds.

***(Connection with Community & the World)**

From the strength of their marriage, God positioned the Sedlaceks to extend healing outward, *connecting thousands of hurting people to the heart of Jesus Christ*. Together, they co-founded Into HIS Rest Ministries, www.intohisrest.org, where their "*ebony/ivory*" approach to counseling allows them to bridge cultures, generations, and spiritual journeys. Through books, seminars, classroom teaching, pastoral training, retreats, and clinical guidance, their ministry creates communal spaces where individuals and families can encounter restoration. Their footprints of connection span local congregations, academic institutions, and global ministry networks, inviting others into the restorative presence of Christ.

Foreword - A Community Lens

Every once in a while, you find a book that connects the dots between theory and practicality. It's like a light bulb has been turned on, and suddenly you have clarity on things you've known in theory but never quite knew how to live them out. This, my friends, is one of those books.

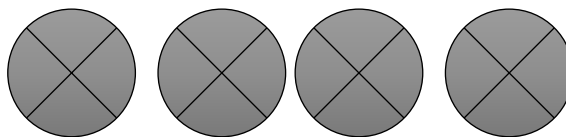
Being a young woman in ministry, it's refreshing to find a resource such as this that focuses on helping us stay connected to our Source. This book seeks to remind us that when you're connected to the Source, you begin to see yourself and others differently. You also become more intentional about exuding His character and cultivating environments that mirror His image.

As you read this book, you'll most likely find yourself reflecting on how you show up in your relationships, your work, your ministry, and in your personal space when it's just you alone with God. It's a gentle, yet effective reminder that wholeness doesn't come from striving but from being grounded in who God says you are. So, as you read this book, I encourage you to quiet the distractions around you and allow God to connect with you right where you are.

May this book be a blessing to you as you read it.

In faith and expectation,

Tatyana Atkins, M.S., CCC-SLP



Footprints of Connection: Tatyana Atkins, M.S., CCC-SLP
(Connect-Four Narrative)

*** (Connection with God)**

Tatyana's journey of service flows from her personal connection with God, a faith commitment she embraced when she became a Seventh-day Adventist in 2014. Motivated by that spiritual foundation, she lives with the prayer: "Lord, keep me humble but useful for your service." It is this God-rooted identity that fuels her passion to guide young people into their God-given identity as beloved children of Christ.

*** (Connection with Self - Vocation & Expertise)**

Out of that divine calling, Tatyana pursued rigorous training in communication and healing. She earned a bachelor's degree in Communication Sciences and Disorders and subsequently obtained a master's degree in Speech-Language Pathology. As a speech-language pathologist (SLP), she belongs to a profession dedicated to evaluating and treating communication and swallowing disorders across the lifespan, including difficulties with speech, voice, language, and social communication. Her CCC-SLP credential signals professional competence and a readiness to help individuals find their voice: literally and metaphorically, empowering them to communicate, connect, and flourish.

*** (Connection with Family & Culture)**

Tatyana's life story reflects cross-cultural roots; born in New York and raised in Barbados until age 18, then returning to the U.S. for higher education. This bicultural background enriches her empathy, sensitivity to identity formation, and ability to relate to youths from diverse backgrounds, especially those grappling with identity, belonging, and purpose. Her own journey gives her a personal frame of reference as she helps young people "find their voice" in Christ.

*** (Connection with Community & Kingdom Work)**

From the foundation of faith and professional skill, Tatyana extends her ministry to younger generations. She currently serves as the Teen & Youth Coordinator for the Southeastern Conference's Women's Ministries Department and chairs the Legacy Women Team for the Southern Union Conference Women's Ministries Department. In these roles, she invests in the spiritual identity, emotional well-being, and growth of teens and young adults, connecting them to God, to themselves, and to a supportive community.

Her dual background, both as a clinician (SLP) and as a ministry leader, enables her to approach youth ministry holistically: addressing not only spiritual formation but also communication, self-expression, and emotional health. Through this, she becomes a bridge-builder, offering healing, belonging, and purpose to hearts and voices longing to be heard. Tatyana Atkins is living out a ministry of connection: God → Self → Heritage & Identity → Young Lives and Spiritual Community. She stands as a testimony that every voice matters, and when anchored in Christ, that voice can become a beacon.

Acknowledgements

- To my mentors: Thank you for seeing what I could not yet see and guiding me toward purpose. To the patients who trusted me with their sacred stories, your courage still teaches me how to listen.
- To the churches I have pastored: You were classrooms of grace, where faith took on flesh.
- To my CPE family at AdventHealth Shawnee Mission: You have shown me that formation is communal, and healing is holy.
- To my beloved children, Sierra, Victoria, and Nigel, and family: You are my greatest learning ground for ministry. Through you, I have learned that healing and motherhood are both sacred callings.





“You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good, to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.” Genesis 50:20

Preface

The enemy tried to block it.
Pain tried to erase it.
Shame tried to bury it, but...
God connected it all.

*

To think of this book’s theme as a “Connect Four” focused through the lens of Grace is to confess that I did not build this framework alone. It was birthed through God’s revelation, confirmed through experience, and sealed through the gift of community. Just as in the game, the victory here is not mine alone, but the work of grace linking lives, stories, and generations together. Operating from the voice of a preacher and now chaplain, I realized that as a preacher, I often proclaimed hope.

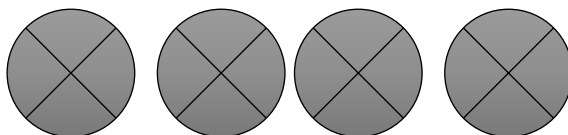
As a chaplain, I learned to practice it. Standing in hospital rooms, I discovered that patients rarely bring only medical charts. They carry the stories of their families, neighborhoods, cultures, and faith traditions. To minister there is to minister to the whole ecosystem of connection. In the pulpit, I could call a congregation to justice. At the bedside, I could hold one hand in silence. Both were holy. Both were needed.

This book carries both voices: the prophetic urgency of pastoral ministry and the contemplative tenderness of chaplaincy. In addition, the voices of the individual selves and the collecting family and community voices echo healing blessings only found in Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

❖ You are Invited!

Week 10 of my first unit of CPE felt like entering deeper waters of chaplaincy, where the call was not to rush toward answers but to sit within the ache of human suffering. My reflection titled “*The Sacred Ache: Sitting with Pain, Searching for God*,” drew me into a rhythm of presence that honored both the vulnerability of patients and the tender stirrings within myself. The ache was not just theirs; it became mine too.

Week 10 reminded me that pain itself is a sacred teacher. It strips away illusions of control and invites both caregiver and patient into a posture of searching for meaning, for comfort, for glimpses of God in the shadows. In this searching, I discovered that my role as chaplain was not to fill the silence with explanations but to embody the presence of One who promises never to leave.



CPE Unit 1 – Summer Intensive – July 29-August 4 **Week 10: Weekly Reflection** **The Sacred Ache: Sitting with Pain, Searching for God**

This week was intense; that’s the best word I have. I looked through our feelings chart and couldn’t find one word that encapsulated everything I was experiencing. So, I’ll be honest about how I got here. I cycled through a series of emotions: agonized, anxious, apologetic, regretful, ashamed, and then found myself feeling indifferent, suspicious, paranoid, and ultimately withdrawing. I assure you; I am not regressing, I promise! But the nearing end of CPE stirred up some unresolved emotions that I needed to face. The recurring cycle of trusting, then hoping, then totally freaking out needed to be examined. At one point, I just wanted the emotions to disappear. But CPE has taught me the value of being present to my inner life. Like in *Inside Out 2*,¹ I realized these feelings are part of me, and they have something to teach me if I’m willing to listen.

A series of unexpected events pushed me to face a few personal giants I had hoped to avoid. For me, the hospital had become a kind of “safe haven,” peaceful, uninterrupted, familiar. But an invitation to an event on Saturday, one I only accepted because of two close friends, became an orchestration by

¹ *Inside out 2*, (Pixar Animation Studios, 2024).

God. I faced people who had been instrumental in causing some of my deepest wounds. I almost didn't go. Friday night, I experienced anxiety and even a bit of PTSD. But after processing and praying, I went for my friends, and unexpectedly, for myself.

One of the most healing things anyone said to me came from my spiritual mother here. She told me, "I believe you're in such a good place now that you can handle it." Her words stuck with me. But chaplaincy has pushed me to ask an even deeper question: Do I believe that I can find God in my wounds? Helping patients see God in their suffering brought me face-to-face with a greater spiritual tension in myself. I believed God loved me and was healing me, but I didn't yet believe He was present *in* the pain. Until recently.

What helped shift this belief was a book I'm reading for my doctoral program: *Dare We Speak of Hope?* By Allan Aubrey Boesak. In one section, he references the theology of the Khoi people of Africa, who speak of God as Tsui//Goab "the God with the Wounded Knee."² When the Khoi thought of God, they first thought of woundedness, then of solidarity. God wasn't first defined by power, but by empathy. A God who bleeds *with* His people. Reading this moved me to tears.

I grew up being taught, often through sermons and reflections, that God was strong, almighty, victorious, never suffering, never vulnerable. That left me believing I had to "toughen up," because that's what God would do. Suffering felt like failure. Weakness, a spiritual flaw. But Boesak's reflection dismantled that. He brought Isaiah 53:5 to life in a new way: "*He was pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on Him, and by His wounds we are healed.*"

In this vision, strength is redefined for me. Woundedness is not shameful; it is sacred. The Khoi named a God who stands in solidarity, not dominance. A God who fights, not from above, but beside. That's real strength. That's divine love. This realization transformed me. It reminded me that the heart of God's love is not immunity from pain, but the willingness to enter it. God doesn't wait for us to come to Him whole; He meets us in the wound. He joins us in the ache. Boesak writes that any God who cannot bleed cannot liberate.³ A detached, invulnerable God offers no real hope. But a God who chooses to suffer with us, that is a God worthy of trust. A God who chose wounds, not just words. Who leads through the valley, not just from the

² Allan Aubrey Boesak, "Dare We Speak of Hope? Searching for a Language of Life in Faith and Politics," (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012).

³ Boesak, "Dare We Speak of Hope? Searching for a Language of Life in Faith and Politics.."

mountaintop. This prompted a set of questions that I now carry with me in chaplaincy:

1. Do I turn to God expecting escape from pain?
2. Am I willing to follow a wounded God into places of injustice, grief, and solidarity?
3. When I encounter others in pain, do I first offer empathy or solutions?
4. Can I sit with someone in their suffering, as God sits with mine?

Scripture affirms this thought. Revelation 12:7 says, “*Then war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon...*” Even in heaven, God joined the fight. God joins the pain before the peace. And again, in Revelation 13:8, Christ is called “*the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.*” Thus is the confidence in Christ that we have and the knowledge of some aforeto hidden messages of hope and presence from God.

God does not stand on the sidelines of history.
He steps in *slain*, not superior.
Suffering, not spared.

This is the God I have come to love more and more; A God whose empathy causes me not to fear, but to worship. A God who has walked the path of suffering and walks with us still. As I continue my chaplaincy journey, I carry this sacred truth with me:

Perhaps I am not called to fix or explain away suffering.
Perhaps I am simply called to stand with others in it.
To witness. To be present.
To fight not from above, but beside.
To bring hope that bleeds before it heals.
Do I dare look for God in the wound?
That is the most sacred question of all.



Why This Book...Why Now?

In many ways, this book is both testimony and invitation. It is testimony because it tells the truth of my breaking and my rebuilding, the ache and the alignment, the shame and the grace. But it is also an invitation, because the story is not mine alone. We all live with scattered pieces. We all encounter the blocks of shame, silence, and fear that threaten to cut us off from God, ourselves, family, and community. And yet, grace keeps moving, keeps connecting, keeps fighting for us. If God could redeem my story, He can redeem yours.

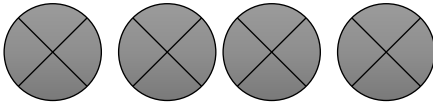
I write because too many of us live disconnected. Trauma fractures us from ourselves. Silence isolates us from family. Fear builds walls between the community and us. And shame convinces us that God is absent. However, I have come to believe, through my own journey and the stories entrusted to me, that God is always the first to make the move to reconnect us. God births us in love before shame. God joins us in suffering before we call out. God knits us into families, communities, and a mission wider than we can see. As I once preached in a women's convention: *"God's healing is not about escaping our stories but about discovering His presence inside them."*

That truth continues to guide me. What you hold in your hands is not a manual of steps but a witness of connection, a reminder that even in the darkest valleys, God is still weaving something whole. This is not a book of answers; it is a book of accompaniment. My prayer is that as you walk through these chapters, you will hear echoes of your own story, and more importantly, God's story in you. Like the Israelites in exile, like Tamar in silence, like Mary at the tomb, like patients I have sat down besides, you will find that God has already made the first move.

The invitation is simply to notice, to trust, and to connect again. So come with me. Let us reconnect with God. Let us reconnect with ourselves. Let us reconnect with family and community. And let us join God's mission of reconciliation, piece by piece, until the line is complete.

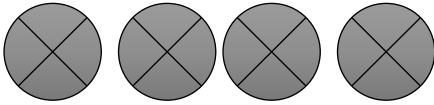
Reader's Guide: How to Journey Through this Book

This book is written to be more than words on a page. It is an invitation into connection with God, with yourself, with your family, with your community, and with God's mission in the world. Each chapter is designed to help you pause, reflect, and practice presence, whether you are reading alone, with a small group, or using these pages as a resource in ministry.



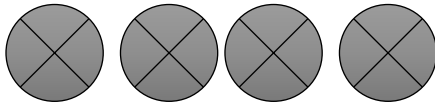
❖ Chapter Flow (most chapters)

- Epigraph: A Scripture that frames the heart of the chapter.
- What You Will Gain: A summary of the key lessons to carry forward.
- Chaplaincy & Pastoral Lenses: Two perspectives that ground the themes in practice:
 - *Chaplain* → presence, listening, accompaniment.
 - *Pastor* → proclamation, justice, guidance.
- Biblical Stories: Explore how Scripture addresses both wounds and healing within the family of God.
- Modern Testimonies: Discover stories from my personal journey, as well as those from patients and ministry settings, that illustrate how these truths are relevant today.
- Reflection & Practice Guides: Engage with questions, prompts, and Practices designed for journaling, prayer, discussion, or application in ministry.
- Closing Prayer of Presence: A prayer to carry with you into daily life, anchoring the chapter in God's love.



❖ Ways to Engage

- Individually: Read slowly. Journal through the reflection questions. Let prayer accompany each chapter.
- As a Small Group: Gather weekly, read a chapter together, share reflections, and pray the closing prayers in community.
- For Pastors & Chaplains: Use the pastoral and chaplaincy lenses as tools for ministry, bringing these practices into preaching, bedside visits, and community leadership.
- For Families: Let the practices spark conversations at the dinner table, during family worship, or in intergenerational gatherings.



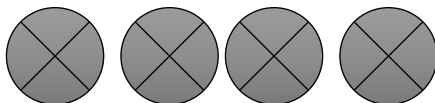
❖ The Four Movements of Connection

Imagine a Connect Four grid where each piece locks into the next. When aligned, these four create wholeness:

- Connect in God: Root your worth in God's first move of love.
- Connect with Self: Facing wounds, reclaiming worth, and embracing belovedness.
- Connect within Family: Naming fractures, seeking repair, and practicing reconciliation.
- Connect through Community: Living presence and justice in the wider world.

These movements are not steps to complete, but rhythms to return to again and again. Like the game *Connect Four*,⁴ the pieces build over time, forming patterns of grace that reveal wholeness.

⁴ Hasbro, *Connect Four* (Pawtucket, RI: 1974).



Reader's Guide

How to Journey Through This Book

This book is an invitation into connection—with God, with yourself, with your family, and with your community. Each chapter is designed to help you pause, reflect, and practice presence

Chapter Flow

- **Epigraph**
Scripture that frames the chapter
- **What You Will Gain**
Snapshot of the lessons to carry with you
- **Chaplaincy & Pastoral Lenses**
Chaplain → presence, listening, accompaniment
- **Biblical Stories**
Characters who reveal both wounds and healing
- **Personal Testimonies**
Prompts for journaling, prayer, or discussion
- **Prayer of Presence**
A closing prayer to ground the chapter

The Four Movements of Connection



Picture #1
Reader's
Guide
Pictograph

My Prayer for You

That as you read, you will notice where God is placing the next piece in your life.

A Note on Tone

- Some stories are painful.
- They touch wounds of trauma, silence, and betrayal.
- Read gently, with compassion for yourself and others.

Remember: healing is not about rushing past the pain but about noticing God's presence in it. My prayer is that as you move through these chapters, you will discover where God is placing the next piece in your life.

Prayer

Lord of Grace and Connection,

You are the One who makes the first move, who knit us together before we knew ourselves, who holds the pieces we thought were lost. I thank You for never wasting our wounds, for turning pain into empathy and brokenness into ministry.

Now, I lift the reader of these words before You. You know where their pieces have been scattered, whether by trauma, silence, fear, or shame. You know the places where the enemy has tried to block their victory. Show them their path to full connection. Reveal Yourself as the first piece, teach them to see themselves in Your Divine Mirror, heal the legacies of family, and anchor them in communities of safety and belonging.

Give them the courage to do the deep work, the faith to believe that nothing is wasted, and the joy of discovering that You are aligning every part of their story for good. As they read these pages, may they notice where You are placing the next piece in their life. May their board of connection align into a pattern of grace that cannot be blocked. May they walk forward not in defeat but in victory, knowing that the game is already won in You.

In the name of Jesus,
Amen.

