



TRANSFORM YOUR MIND

A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO HEALING EMOTIONAL TRAUMA



Ricardo Batista Cavassin

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*“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the
renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the
good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.”*

Romans 12:2

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*To all who carry wounds they did not
choose to receive, yet choose, each day, the
path of healing and renewal.*

Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction: An Invitation to Transformation..... 6

Chapter 2: The Inner Child and the First Wounds..... 13

Chapter 3: The Construction of Identity..... 26

Chapter 4: Limiting Beliefs and False Prophets.....36

Chapter 5: Social Learning and Modeling50

Chapter 6: Emotional Trauma: Definitions and Theories61

Chapter 7: Flesh and Spirit: A Psychoanalytic Reading.....79

Chapter 8: Pain as Mechanism and Motivation..... 94

Chapter 9: Generational Trauma and Epigenetics 110

Chapter 10: Behavioral Consequences of Emotional Wounds 117

Chapter 11: Reconnection, Habits, and Confrontation..... 136

Chapter 12: There Is Hope: Restoration and Healing..... 154

Chapter 1: Introduction: An Invitation to Transformation

The Fertile Ground of Childhood

Childhood is the most crucial period of human life. It is during childhood that the psyche and the mental apparatus, still in formation, begin to be shaped by the child's experiences. The *ego*, the psychic agency that mediates between our inner impulses and the demands of reality, is still immature and developing. For this reason, interactions and stimuli from the environment become decisive in the construction of identity and personality, and they can influence the individual both positively and negatively. During the first years of life, when everything around us profoundly affects our emotions, fertile ground is formed for the creation of psychological patterns that will affect the entire course of our existence.

Children's emotional vulnerability is a central aspect of this stage. They do not yet possess the symbolic resources needed to process what they experience. When a child faces intense stimuli, such as abandonment, rejection, violence, or neglect, the child's brain does not have the maturity needed to process and understand what is happening. Whatever cannot be understood or assimilated is registered in the unconscious and in the body as an

excess, becoming *repressed* (that is, pushed out of conscious awareness) and giving rise to trauma. In this context, trauma is related not only to the event itself, but also to the helplessness experienced, the feeling that the person who should provide protection has become a threat, leaving the child's inner world unstable and unpredictable.

The influences of childhood, including parents, school, friends, and cultural contexts, play a fundamental role in the formation of identity. The bonds formed during this period determine how children perceive themselves and how they will learn to relate to the world. In a harmonious family environment, a child tends to develop a positive view of themselves. Exposure to conflict, neglect, or rejection, however, can result in an emotionally maladjusted adult. The way a child is treated, loved, or rejected directly affects their self-esteem and sense of belonging.

Psychologically speaking, childhood is the period of life most vulnerable to traumatization. A child is not fully able to distinguish "what belongs to someone else" from "what belongs to me." Painful experiences such as rejection or abandonment are often internalized as feelings of guilt: *"If I was rejected, it is because I am not good enough"; "If I was abandoned, it is because I do not deserve love."* When left untreated, these feelings become beliefs that structure identity and shape how individuals perceive themselves throughout life. Over time, this internalization contributes to the development of dysfunctional patterns, including anxiety, compulsions, difficulty forming bonds, and even identity disorders in adulthood.

A child's emotional system is still in a raw state, without mature filters. The areas of the brain responsible for emotional regulation and rational thought are still developing, while the *limbic system*, the region of the brain that controls emotional reactions,

responds intensely to threatening stimuli. Adverse experiences are therefore felt more intensely and stored more deeply and lastingly in emotional memory. These memories are not simply rational records. They are emotionally charged experiences that shape the child's perception and, later, the adult's.

When trauma occurs, the child resorts to primitive defense mechanisms, such as dissociation, repression, or denial, in an attempt to survive the pain. Although effective during childhood, these mechanisms become dysfunctional in adulthood, manifesting as behavioral patterns that limit development and emotional well-being. Difficulty establishing healthy bonds, constant hypervigilance, and a chronic feeling of emptiness are some of the effects of unresolved trauma. Childhood trauma does not disappear. It reorganizes itself and affects how the individual deals with the surrounding world.

When primary caregiving bonds are disrupted and emotional needs are not met, the child develops mechanisms of self-sufficiency to cope with the absence. A lack of security leads the child to act independently, take on responsibilities too early, and build an identity around the need to be seen and recognized. This process produces an adult who often acts as though they cannot rely on anyone, carrying an unconscious fear of being rejected or neglected. The identity formed in childhood, marked by these emotional barriers, is directly reflected in how the person behaves and relates to others throughout life.

Yet our story does not have to be defined by pain. As the Bible states:

“Do not conform to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.” (Romans 12:2)

Here the apostle Paul presents not merely an exhortation, but a profound spiritual and psychological calling, a great principle for the transformation of lives. This passage leads us to reflect not only on changing the mind, but also on changing the inner belief system and the way we interpret life and its events.

Mental transformation is not a magical or instantaneous process, but a reinterpretation of past experiences in light of a new outlook on life. Giving new meaning to one’s personal history is therefore a path toward healing, allowing a person to break free from the bonds of the past and rebuild their identity in a healthy way.

This message calls for an action that presents a great personal challenge, because change is extremely difficult to achieve. *“Our brain prefers familiar hells to unfamiliar paradises.”*

Changes in behavior, beliefs, and mindset are processes in which we often encounter internal resistance. This happens because our minds and bodies are deeply connected to patterns established over time. Imagine that your mind works like a well-defined path through a forest: the more often you travel that path, the clearer and easier it becomes to follow. These neural pathways are formed by our experiences and by the beliefs we acquire throughout life.

When we decide to change, we are essentially trying to create a new path through the forest. The new path must be traveled repeatedly until it becomes as clear as the old one. During the process, we may feel discomfort or frustration because the mind's natural tendency is to return to familiar paths, which require less effort.

Our mind also has a *comfort zone*, a space where it feels safe and familiar. When we try to change something, we challenge that zone, which can generate fear or anxiety. This reaction is a natural defense against the unknown.

The difficulty we encounter when trying to change is not a sign of weakness or inability, but a normal response of the body and mind to something new. The good news is that, like the path through the forest, the new behavior becomes easier as we practice, repeat, and persist. It is like a muscle that must be trained: it takes discipline and good habits to produce hypertrophy. The key is to take small, consistent steps, allowing the mind to adapt gradually.

"The place where God is taking you now requires new habits, a new mindset, and constant prayer." (Billy Graham)

This statement invites us to reflect on the process of inner transformation needed to reach a new stage of spiritual and personal growth. From a Christian perspective, God often guides us to a place of greater maturity, where we are challenged to abandon old patterns and draw closer to Him. This "place" can be understood as a new stage of life, whether a new purpose, a new spiritual understanding, or a new mission.

It is an invitation to dismantle what life built upon dubious and improvised foundations. It is an invitation to those who are truly willing to undertake a difficult but rewarding journey. Change demands conscious effort and perseverance because the brain tends to cling to the comfort of already established routines. The theory of self-control and positive reinforcement is central to this process: the brain must learn that the new behavior also brings a reward, even when that reward is not immediately obvious. Motivation and consistent practice are essential because repetition strengthens new neural connections.

*"WHEN THE PAIN OF NOT LIVING BECOMES GREATER
THAN THE FEAR OF CHANGE, A PERSON CHANGES."
(Sigmund Freud)*

New habits are necessary because, to reach a new stage in our journey, we must change the way we behave in daily life. Habits are one of the foundations of our lives, and the Bible teaches us that our actions should reflect our relationship with God, since relationship is one of the divine attributes. When Paul speaks of the importance of "renewing the mind" (Romans 12:2), he indicates that external changes begin with internal transformations. From a psychological perspective, we know that the brain tends to cling to old habits because they are automatic and more energy-efficient. Creating new habits, however, especially when they are aligned with a greater purpose, requires effort, repetition, and consistency.

The Purpose of This Book

Healing from childhood trauma is possible, but it requires a conscious effort to rewrite one's personal story. The human psyche is resilient and has the capacity to heal, provided that it is given room to do so. By becoming aware of the wounds of the past, individuals can begin to create new memories and experiences that replace the old ones, allowing the pain of trauma to become a source of learning.

It is essential to reflect on how childhood affects the formation of identity and how childhood trauma manifests in adult life. Understanding the origins of dysfunctional behavior and of the emotional patterns formed throughout life is a crucial step toward healing. The process of giving new meaning to one's experiences and renewing the mind is essential if we are to live the abundant life for which we were created. Because Christ offers us a full life, transforming the mind is the key to breaking free from patterns of pain and attaining true emotional freedom.

This book seeks to give readers a deeper understanding of the formation of childhood trauma, its effects in adult life, and the paths toward transformation. By reflecting on these dynamics, we hope readers will be able to identify the patterns that limit their development and, in doing so, open themselves to new possibilities for healing and growth.

If external changes begin with internal transformations, we must return to the beginning, to that place where everything first began to be written within us. That place is childhood. In the next chapter, we will delve into the concept of the inner child and understand how the earliest wounds take root in the human soul, long before we have words with which to name them.

Chapter 2: The Inner Child and the First Wounds

Back to the Beginning

In the previous chapter, we saw that childhood is the fertile ground where the psychological patterns that accompany us throughout life are formed, and that the renewal of the mind proposed in Romans 12:2 is the path toward transformation. But in order to transform, we must first understand what needs to be transformed. This leads us to a fundamental question: how are our oldest wounds? Before moving forward into the concepts of trauma and the mechanisms of healing, we need to look within, at the part of us that continues to react like the child we once were.

The Concept of the Inner Child

When we discuss childhood, we are referring not only to children as people outside ourselves, but also to what psychology calls the *inner child*. This concept, found in approaches such as Humanistic Psychology, particularly in the works of Carl Rogers and John Bradshaw, refers to the set of primary emotional experiences, fundamental emotional needs, and formative memories that we carry

from our earliest years. Thus, when we ask, “How is our inner child?” we are really asking about the state of our primary emotional wounds and how they influence our adult lives.

Many adults continue to be led by this wounded inner child, marked by emotional neglect and by the absence of attention, protection, affection, boundaries, or validation. Developmental psychology, represented by authors such as Donald Winnicott, John Bowlby, and Mary Ainsworth, demonstrates that a lack of *secure attachment*, meaning a stable and dependable bond with caregivers, creates significant difficulties in adulthood: fear of abandonment, a compulsive search for acceptance, patterns of self-sabotage, relationship difficulties, and rigid defense mechanisms.

These wounds are not merely unresolved emotions. They often become internal structures of functioning that shape how we interpret the world. As a result, we learn to repress legitimate emotions in order to ensure social survival and preserve a supposed “harmony” in the environment in which we were raised. We develop compensatory behaviors, such as perfectionism, excessive docility, aggression, emotional avoidance, or hyper-independence. These served as defense strategies in childhood but become emotional prisons in adult life.

Early Experiences and the Architecture of the Soul

Child development is the ground on which the architecture of the psyche is built. A baby is not born with a consolidated identity; the baby forms it in the mirror of the gaze that welcomes them. Internal security develops through consistent care, constant presence, and emotional validation.

When this foundation fails, whether through physical absence, emotional unavailability, or the emotional instability of caregivers, a primary experience of helplessness takes root. The child, still unable to process cognitively what is happening, feels before understanding. What the child feels is engraved in the body and the unconscious.

If love is inconsistent, the child learns that they must adapt to survive. If care is cold, the child learns that their emotions are excessive. If the environment is chaotic, the child develops hypervigilance. If expectations are excessive, the child becomes a perfectionist. If there is neglect, the child may become invisible or hyper-independent.

These mechanisms are not moral failings. They are strategies the brain developed for survival. Yet what served as a defense in childhood can become a prison in adult life. The child who had to remain silent to preserve the bond becomes an adult who cannot express their needs. The child who assumed adult responsibilities too early becomes incapable of resting. The child who experienced rejection becomes dependent on approval.

The soul learns to protect itself before it learns to trust.

Trauma: When Experience Exceeds the Capacity to Process It

Trauma is not only the painful event. It is also the inability to integrate that event. It arises when an experience exceeds the psyche's capacity to symbolize it and no one is there to offer the care that would help make it understandable.

A child who is repeatedly left alone may not consciously remember every incident, but the child's body registers the feeling of abandonment. The nervous system learns that the world is not trustworthy. An emotional memory forms independently of any verbal narrative.

When there is no adult to name the pain, the child must find an explanation. Here one of the most profound movements of the child's psyche emerges: the internalization of blame.

The Child Who Takes the Blame

For a child, parents are absolute points of reference. Admitting that the people on whom the child depends are flawed or negligent threatens their sense of survival. It is psychologically safer to conclude, "I am the problem."

This is how the silent belief of unworthiness is born:

"I was not loved because I am unlovable."

"I was left because I do not deserve anyone's presence."

"I was rejected because there is something wrong with me."

This internalized guilt structures the superego as a critical agency that watches, accuses, and demands constant reparation. The person grows up trying to compensate for a deficiency that is not real but was felt as an absolute truth. They live in pursuit of approval, performance, impeccable religiosity, or extreme self-sufficiency as a way of paying an imaginary emotional debt.

From a theological perspective, this dynamic reveals something profound: the human experience of psychological guilt often becomes entangled with moral and spiritual consciousness. The person begins to perceive God through the filter of their traumatic history. If the earthly father was absent, God may seem distant. If he was harsh, God may seem punitive. If he was unpredictable, God may seem inconsistent.

The image of God becomes an extension of the internalized parental image.

Neglect and Excess: Two Extremes, the Same Void

Curiously, both neglect and excess can produce similar wounds.

Neglect communicates: “You are not important.”

Controlling excess communicates: “You are not capable.”

Disorganized permissiveness communicates: “You are not worthy of guidance.”

In every case, the wounded core is the same: a fragile identity. When that identity is not consolidated, the individual looks outside for what was not found within. They seek recognition, power, symbiotic relationships, or performative spirituality. They may become dependent on validation or rigidly self-sufficient. In either case, it is the same child trying to survive.

The Spiritual Dimension of the Wound

The biblical tradition affirms that a human being is an indivisible unity of body, soul, and spirit. There is no ontological fragmentation between the psychological and the spiritual. Emotional wounds therefore reverberate through the experience of faith. A person who learned to repress emotions may have difficulty experiencing intimacy with God. Someone who developed rigid defenses may fear spiritual vulnerability. Someone who internalized excessive guilt may confuse grace with merit.

Yet the central message of Christianity points toward a movement opposite to defensive self-sufficiency: reconciliation and adoption. The Christian faith portrays God not as a magnified extension of flawed parental figures, but as a Father who restores identity. If trauma fragmented, grace integrates.

If guilt distorted, love redefines. If fear structured defenses, trust opens space for new emotional experiences.

This does not mean denying the need for psychological treatment. On the contrary, authentic faith encourages truth. Facing the truth includes recognizing one's wounds, dismantling internalized beliefs, and allowing the inner child to be heard.

Healing as Integration

Healing is not a naive return to childhood, but its mature integration. It means allowing the inner child, once silenced or blamed, to be welcomed by adult consciousness and spiritual hope. Psychologically, this involves revisiting beliefs formed in pain, developing new relational experiences, and learning to distinguish the

past from the present. Spiritually, it involves giving new meaning to the image of God, understanding grace as a gift, and abandoning the logic of compensation.

True maturity does not eliminate the inner child; it becomes reconciled with that child. Faith does not replace the psychic process; it gives that process direction and meaning. Human beings carry within themselves the memory of what they experienced even before they could speak. They also carry the mark of the guilt they assumed in order to survive emotionally. Between trauma and transcendence, they build their identity. When neglect or excess wounds childhood, defensive structures form and shape the whole of existence. These structures can distort relationships, spirituality, and self-image. Yet they do not constitute an irrevocable destiny. Psychoanalysis teaches us that what has been repressed can be brought into consciousness. Christian theology announces that what has been wounded can be redeemed. Both converge in the same direction: integration.

Healing means allowing the inner child to stop carrying guilt that never belonged to them. It means rebuilding one's self-image in the light of a love that does not depend on performance. It means understanding that frailty is not condemnation, but the meeting place between the human condition and grace.

Only when the wounded child finds psychological and spiritual acceptance can the adult finally live, not defensively, but freely.

The Formation of Identity Begins Before Birth

If childhood wounds leave such deep marks, we must recognize that the process of identity formation begins even before birth. From life in the womb onward, the human being does not exist in isolation. The fetus inhabits a relational, emotional, and symbolic field that precedes and surrounds it: the mother's body, her history, her feelings, her fears, her hopes, and the context in which she lives. The womb is not merely a biological space for gestation, but a psychic and relational environment where the first inscriptions of human experience begin to be traced.

Psychoanalysis understands the subject as constituted in relationship with the other from before birth. Authors such as Freud, Winnicott, Bion, and Françoise Dolto point out that the baby is sensitive to emotional variations in the maternal environment. The fetus receives information from the external world mediated by the mother's emotional experience. Winnicott describes the mother as the baby's *environment*: before there is a structured "self," there is an experience of the continuity or disruption of being. Chronic anxiety, fear, violence, abandonment, or intense stress experienced by the mother are not merely external events; they become shared bodily experiences. The fetus does not cognitively "understand," but it *feels*, and this primitive feeling is organized as implicit bodily memory, forming the foundation of what may later manifest as security or anguish, trust or hypervigilance.

Wilfred Bion expands this understanding through the mother's *containing function*: she emotionally metabolizes the baby's raw experiences and returns them in a tolerable form. When this function

is overloaded or fails, the baby may be exposed to unsymbolized emotional states that remain as psychic marks. Thus, the external environment reaches the fetus not directly, but through the way the mother lives, feels, and gives meaning to the world.

The “Good Enough” Environment

The individual is not born complete; they are constituted through relationship with the environment. Freud indicated that the psyche is organized from the earliest experiences of pleasure and displeasure, especially in the bond with caregivers. Radically dependent, the baby receives not only nourishment from the environment, but also meanings: the tone of a voice, the gaze that welcomes or ignores, predictability or chaos.

Winnicott described the *good enough environment* as one that supports, protects, and responds sensitively to initial needs. This is not about perfection, but about a presence consistent enough for the child to develop basic trust. When the environment repeatedly fails, the subject learns to adapt in order to survive, and this adaptation often comes at the cost of spontaneity.

Some environments function like a psychic womb: places where words are firm without being violent, where boundaries do not humiliate, and where love is not conditional. In these contexts, the subject learns that the world can be trusted.

David: Overcoming

The episode of David’s anointing is paradigmatic. When the prophet Samuel visits Jesse’s house, the older brothers are presented first. David is not even summoned. He remains in the field, invisible. This initial exclusion is not merely a narrative detail, but

a symbolic structure in the constitution of his subjectivity: the unseen son, the one passed over, the one whose identity finds no mirror in familial recognition.

From a psychoanalytic perspective, the formation of the self depends profoundly on the gaze of the other. The absence of that gaze can produce feelings of inadequacy, insecurity, and a relentless search for validation. Real or perceived primary rejection often becomes a matrix for compensatory behaviors. Yet the same trauma can become a driving force for creative processing when the subject finds a new symbolic place that reorganizes their identity.

In David's case, this new place emerges at the moment of his anointing. What he lacked in paternal recognition is bestowed upon him through divine election. Biblical theology affirms that God sees the heart, not outward appearance. Psychologically, such an experience is equivalent to internalizing an absolute gaze that validates the subject in their uniqueness. Rejection is not denied; it is given new meaning.

Thus, the wound does not disappear, but it ceases to be determinative. Trauma is integrated into the personal narrative, not as a sentence of inferiority, but as the setting for a calling.

Joseph: Affection That Sustains in Adversity

Joseph, in the book of Genesis, grows up amid rivalry and injustice, but carries within him the marks of a formative affection received from his father. Even when thrown into a cistern, sold as a slave, and forgotten in prison, Joseph does not lose his capacity to symbolize suffering. His early environment did not immunize him against pain, but it gave him internal resources that kept him from confusing himself with it. His story illustrates how an emo-

tionally secure environment in the early years can provide a foundation for passing through the most severe crises without losing one's identity.

Jephthah: When Rejection Shapes Identity

By contrast, the story of Jephthah, told in Judges 11, begins not with a calling, but with a wound. Before becoming a judge in Israel, Jephthah was a rejected son. The text is direct:

"Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty man of valor, but he was the son of a prostitute." (Judges 11:1)

This mark is not merely biographical; it becomes social, symbolic, and bound up with his identity. Jephthah grows up in an environment where his origins place him on the margins. When Gilead's legitimate sons become adults, they drive him away:

"You shall not inherit in our father's house, for you are the son of another woman." (Judges 11:2)

Here the core of the trauma is established: rejection, expulsion, and a rupture in belonging. Jephthah loses not only his material inheritance, but also the right to exist within his own family. The environment that should have provided protection and a name becomes hostile, exclusionary, and violent.

The text recounts that Jephthah flees to the land of Tob, where "worthless men joined him" (Judges 11:3). Psychologically, this reveals a common pattern in people rejected early in life: the

search for belonging in marginal settings. When the family rejects someone, that individual finds acceptance wherever it is possible, even in unstable or morally ambiguous environments.

Jephthah's identity begins to be shaped not by care, but by the need for self-defense. He becomes a "mighty man," a warrior not only by vocation, but by adaptation. Hostile environments produce hypervigilant, combative, and often emotionally rigid individuals.

When the elders of Gilead seek him out to lead the war against the Ammonites, Jephthah responds with distrust:

*"Did you not hate me and drive me out of my father's house?
Why have you come to me now?" (Judges 11:7)*

His words reveal a psyche marked by rejection: the past has not healed. Jephthah agrees to help, but he demands guarantees. He needs formal recognition, power, and position. He does not trust the relationship; he trusts the contract, the bargain. This same logic appears in his relationship with God. Before the battle, he makes an extreme vow:

*"If You deliver the people of Ammon into my hands, whoever
comes out of the doors of my house... shall be the Lord's."
(Judges 11:30-31)*

Here we see a profound consequence of living in a hostile environment: difficulty trusting in grace. Jephthah relates to God as someone who must negotiate, bargain, and offer something in order to secure acceptance. His vow reveals a spirituality marked by emotional insecurity.

The outcome is tragic: Jephthah's vow culminates in the death of his own daughter. A decision made out of woundedness produces irreparable consequences. Jephthah wins the war but loses what matters most. The environment of rejection that drove him out is tragically reproduced in his own home. The biblical text seems to suggest that unresolved trauma tends to repeat itself, not because of conscious malice, but because healing has not taken place.

The stories of Joseph, Jephthah, and David show us how the early environment can structure or fragment identity. But what happens when that identity begins to be constructed consciously? Who are we, in fact, behind the masks life has made us wear? In the next chapter, we will delve into the fundamental question of identity, from God's original design in creation to the forces that distort it throughout life.

Chapter 3: The Construction of Identity

The Question That Haunts Us

In the previous chapters, we came to understand how childhood shapes the emotional patterns we carry throughout life and how our earliest wounds, some of them predating birth itself, are inscribed upon the human soul. Now we arrive at an inescapable question: *Who am I?* This question is not merely philosophical; it is profoundly existential and spiritual. The answer we give to it, or the answer we receive from others, determines how we live, how we relate to others, and how we see our place in the world.

Inspired by Friedrich Nietzsche's words, "*Become who you are,*" an unknown author offered the following reflection:

"But who am I? Ever since I was little, people have told me who I should be. A good girl, responsible, strong, well-behaved, intelligent, but not overly sensitive or weak. I collected versions of myself the way one wears borrowed clothes. Some fit for a long time. Others were so tight that they left invisible marks.

Then I heard that phrase: become who you are. But how can I become something I still do not know how to name? Who am I beyond what others expect of me? Who am I when no one is watching? Who am I when I am not trying to please anyone? When I am not trying to survive, when I am not trying to convince.

Maybe I am not a finished definition. Maybe I am only a process, a territory being discovered, a book that writes itself as it goes. Maybe becoming who I am does not mean discovering a fixed identity, but having the courage to remove the identities others placed upon me. It is not about inventing new things for myself, but remembering who I truly am.

Remembering the girl who felt the whole world in her chest. Remembering the woman who still dreams, even when she is tired. Remembering the voice that existed before the fears.

Who am I? I am what remains when the masks fall. I am what persists, even after the falls. I am only one of the versions that died, and the courage of the one being born.

Become who you are is not a destination. It is a calling. And perhaps the answer will not come in words, but in choices, in silences, in necessary departures. I do not need to know exactly who I am before I begin to become. I just need to stop running away."

This reflection precisely captures the dilemma of identity: most of us do not know who we truly are because we have been buried beneath versions imposed from the outside, by family, culture, and wounds. As we will see, the construction of identity is both a psychological process and a spiritual project.

Identity in the Process of Creation

From a biblical perspective, human identity begins with the creation of Adam and Eve. In the book of Genesis, we read:

"Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness.'" (Genesis 1:26)

This foundational verse reveals that human identity is rooted in the fact that we were created in the *image of God*, the theological concept known as *imago Dei*. This means that, as human beings, we reflect the divine nature and possess a connection with the Creator that confers intrinsic value upon every life.

The concept of being made "in the image and likeness of God" implies that human identity is spiritual in its essence, with the capacity to reflect God's attributes: reason, creativity, morality, and the capacity to love. This bond with God is the central point of human identity because it is through this bond that we find our value, our dignity, and our purpose.

The Fall and Separation from True Identity

With original sin, described in Genesis 3, human identity was distorted. By disobeying God, Adam and Eve not only broke the perfect relationship they had with the Creator, but also became dis-

connected from their true identity. From that moment onward, humanity began to live in a state of spiritual alienation, seeking satisfaction in fleeting things and often outside the divine plan, just as our society reflects today.

Sin brought with it the loss of original innocence and the arrival of a new concept of identity, marked by selfishness, shame, and separation from God, since before sin they were naked and felt no shame. Instead of seeing themselves as the image of God and living according to their purpose, human beings began to live egocentrically, often seeking identity in success, power, possessions, or outside influences.

Human identity is undoubtedly one of the most challenging and enriching questions the human experience offers. It is built throughout life and influenced by many factors, from individual psychology to the cultural and social forces around us. Identity is not fixed, but a constantly evolving process in which each individual has the opportunity to discover, reinvent, and, above all, find themselves. Ultimately, the construction of identity is the search for a “self” that is authentic, meaningful, and connected to others.

The Role of the Father Figure in Identity Formation

Before a child is born, even before receiving a name, the main question the world asks is, “Boy or girl?” The sex assigned at birth, although biological, carries a symbolic weight that begins to shape identity from the first moments of existence. Sex, however, is only the starting point of a much more complex process in which the earliest external influences, especially the father figure, play a crucial role.

Psychologically speaking, the father represents to the child the principle of authority, differentiation from the mother, and, in a fundamental way, validation of what the child will become and how the child will see themselves in the future. The mother, by contrast, is responsible for transmitting and developing affection, tenderness, nourishment, organization, welcome, and relationship in the child. Identity is defined largely by the relationships the child establishes with the people around them. The father has the task of affirming and validating the identity of both son and daughter, helping them understand not only who they are, but also their purpose in the world, because he is the one who will establish healthy boundaries.

Representation for Sons and Daughters

For a son, the father is often seen as a model to follow, a figure of autonomy, strength, and assertiveness. He is envisioned as the one who will pass on the traditions, teaching his son what it means to be a man and what is expected of him as a mature and responsible man. The father becomes the principal mirror through which the son understands his masculinity and feels capable of taking an active role in the world.

For a daughter, the father fulfills a different but equally essential function. He is the first male figure with whom the girl has a relationship and therefore has enormous influence over the way she will see herself as a woman. The way the father treats his daughter and her mother, and how he validates and recognizes his daughter, is fundamental to the construction of feminine self-esteem. The relationship with her father can directly influence the way the daughter relates to other men throughout life: whether she feels valued or needs to seek elsewhere the validation she should have received at home.

For both son and daughter, the father's absence or failure to offer affirmation can generate distortions in identity. For a son, this can result in difficulty affirming himself as a man. For a daughter, it can result in difficulty seeing herself as worthy of love and respect. The father's presence, on the other hand, offers the child a solid foundation of trust and recognition.

Research on Father Absence and Sexual Orientation

Following an informal study based on evidence provided by sexuality specialists who closely follow this reality, as well as by people themselves who identify as homosexual, the author found that more than 90% of the reported cases indicate some kind of trauma related to the father figure, whether from the father's absence, excessive behaviors, or physical, verbal, or sexual abuse. The experience with this figure appears to have a profound impact on identity formation and, in some cases, may influence sexual orientation. The father's emotional or physical absence may leave a significant gap in a child's development, while abuse committed by him, or even by the mother or siblings, also leaves scars that reverberate throughout life, shaping how the person relates to others and to their own sexual identity.

It is important to remember, however, that sexual orientation is a multifaceted phenomenon involving not only trauma or parental absence, but also biological, social, and cultural factors. No matter how significant the influence of the father figure may be, it does not definitively determine a person's sexual orientation. Every story is unique, and the construction of sexual identity is a profound and individual process in which the interaction between the individual and their surrounding environment plays a significant role.

The Affirmation of Jesus' Identity by the Heavenly Father

To better understand the impact of paternal affirmation upon identity, we can look at the life of Jesus and the moments when God the Father affirms Him as His Son. Even as the Son of God, Jesus was not immune to the need for paternal affirmation. At key moments in His life, the Father made His voice heard to reaffirm Jesus' identity, making clear who He was and what His mission would be.

The Baptism (Matthew 3:16-17): As Jesus emerged from the waters of the Jordan, the voice of God the Father was heard: *"This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."* This moment of public affirmation was fundamental to the formation of Jesus' identity. In being affirmed by the Father, He received not only confirmation of who He was, but also validation of His mission on earth. It was not merely a declaration of paternity, but an affirmation of purpose and identity.

The Transfiguration (Matthew 17:5): At another significant moment, when Jesus appeared in His glory before Peter, James, and John, the voice of God was heard again: *"This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him."* This affirmation reinforces the recognition of Jesus as the Son of God and highlights His authority.

These moments are crucial to understanding that, even though He was divine, Jesus needed paternal affirmation to fulfill His mission with courage and conviction. In the same way, sons and daughters need the affirmation of their parents to understand fully their identity and their place in the world.

The Influence of the Environment on the Construction of Identity

The construction of human identity is a continuous and dynamic process, profoundly influenced by the social and cultural environment in which we live. From the earliest years of life, children begin to interact with the world around them: family, school, neighborhood, and electronic devices. Each of these spaces contributes significantly to the formation of how children perceive themselves and their role in the world.

At school, children encounter a new set of influences. Teachers, classmates, social norms, and the expectations that arise in this environment are fundamental to the socialization process. Children learn to compare themselves with others, conform to collective behaviors, and identify with groups that share similar values.

The social environment also has a profound impact. A child who grows up in poverty or on the margins of society may develop a limited view of themselves, nourished by the belief that they are incapable of reaching certain goals. This feeling of inadequacy can leave deep marks, producing a fragile identity that has difficulty integrating and asserting itself.

It is not only observed behavior or spoken words that have power in the construction of identity, but also the values children are taught to live by. From a very early age, parents and caregivers transmit what they consider important, such as honesty, respect for authority, and care for others, or, in some cases, an emphasis on competition and personal achievement. These values become the lenses through which the child interprets the world.

As globalization advances, cultural boundaries begin to dissolve, creating new forms of identity expression. Social media plays a crucial role in this process, enabling connections around the world and creating a constant negotiation between the “local self” and the “global self.”

Carl Rogers’ Concept of Congruence

Psychology helps us understand how all these factors interact in the formation of identity. Carl Rogers, an important humanistic psychologist, introduced the concept of *congruence*: the alignment between the *real self* (what we actually are) and the *ideal self* (what we aspire to be). When congruence is present, a person feels authentic and at peace with themselves. Otherwise, *incongruence* arises, which can lead to anxiety and emotional disturbances. Congruence is seen as one of the principal elements of personal growth and mental health.

When people cannot integrate the different parts of themselves, internal conflicts arise, such as the discrepancy between the “real self” and the “ideal self,” generating anguish and suffering. In this sense, the search for authenticity is an attempt to achieve congruence between what we feel internally and what we express externally.

Throughout life, identity may be challenged by changes and adversity, including transitions between stages of life, existential crises, and losses. Each of these moments requires a renegotiation of identity, a reevaluation of who we are in relation to the world and to others.

Finally, identity is not only about who we are in the present, but also about who we wish to become and how we see ourselves in relation to the future. The search for purpose and for a greater

meaning to our existence is a fundamental part of this process. In a constantly changing world, identity becomes an anchor that helps us preserve our integrity, while also serving as a reflection of our experiences and a beacon that illuminates our path.

We now understand how identity is constructed, from God's original design in creation, through paternal influence, to the forces of the environment that shape us. But what happens when this identity is built upon foundations of pain? What happens when childhood experiences produce not only insecurity, but deep beliefs that begin invisibly to govern our choices? In the next chapter, we will explore the formation of limiting beliefs, the "invisible glasses" through which we see the world, and how they become false prophets that distort our perception of reality, of ourselves, and of God.

Chapter 4: Limiting Beliefs and False Prophets

In the previous chapters, we explored how childhood functions as fertile ground for the formation of identity, how defense mechanisms take root in the face of pain, and how the wounded inner child continues to operate in adult life. We now move into a central dimension of this process: limiting beliefs, the internal structures of thought that, once formed, begin silently to govern our decisions, our relationships, and our perception of ourselves. Alongside them, we will examine the figures who function as “false prophets,” people who, consciously or unconsciously, planted these beliefs in our emotional soil.

Decisions Guided by Invisible Patterns

How many of our decisions have been guided by patterns the world imposed on us? How often have we been led to follow fragmented emotions, disordered desires, and wishes incompatible with God’s purposes? How many choices have we made based on fears and pains that are still active in the unconscious, without even realizing how much they influence us?

Imagine someone who was frequently rejected as a child and did not receive the necessary attention and affection. As this person grows, they become extremely careful to avoid any situation in which they might feel rejected again. Throughout adult life, they avoid becoming deeply involved with others because they carry a fear of being abandoned or ignored, exactly as happened in childhood.

Even if this person rationally knows that the people around them are trustworthy and that there is no real threat of rejection, something within still prevents them from opening up completely. They end up making decisions that keep them distant from others, avoiding close relationships or opportunities for professional growth, even when those situations could bring them happiness and fulfillment.

The conception of the world we create within ourselves is often shaped by pain, rejection, trauma, and fragmented experiences. In this way, we form an “inner world” that may be profoundly misaligned with the standards of the Kingdom of God. This is how patterns of living form without our realizing it, and we cling to behaviors because, from our limited perspective, we believe they are best.

When Personal History Shapes Patterns

A man once told me that he had great difficulty trusting women. This affected his relationships, which were sometimes superficial, and made it very hard for him to give himself fully or form deep and lasting bonds. He sabotaged his relationships so that they never reached a certain depth. Unconsciously, he would pull away.

As I talked with him further, I learned that when he was about four years old, his mother had abandoned him after his parents separated. In that environment, he witnessed fights and arguments during a period marked by family chaos in which emotional instability, fear, and insecurity prevailed.

When his mother left home, his grandmother took her place. His grandmother, however, suffered from alcoholism and also behaved aggressively and authoritatively, constantly beating him in an attempt to “educate” her grandson. His father, though an upright and loyal man, was emotionally distant and also turned to alcohol in an attempt to relieve his inner pain, often using drinking as an emotional escape. Concerned with providing for the family, he focused on work and was unable to connect with his son’s emotions in a functional and healthy way.

A short time later, the man’s mother and grandmother died.

The stage had been set. The figures who should have offered affection, tenderness, love, nourishment, security, protection, validation, and comfort, all structures of a healthy relationship, did not fulfill that role effectively. The child learned that these bonds brought him insecurity. From this dynamic, amid chaos and an unstable, unsafe environment with little emotional connection, he unconsciously learned that loving and relating to others was too dangerous. He normalized chaos, reproducing chaotic and stressful moments in his relationships and creating conflict. His unconscious reproduced the “familiar hells,” attempting to bring into adult life a pattern established in childhood.

This child registered in his inner system that forming bonds was too dangerous, given the pain of abandonment and rejection he had suffered at the hands of female authority figures. Throughout his life, he built defensive patterns to avoid being hurt in

intimate relationships. He internalized a punitive way of relating emotionally: he would enter a relationship and soon withdraw, leaving emotional devastation and the wounds of romantic disillusionment in the other person. When a breakup seemed imminent, which often occurred only in his imagination, he acted first, sabotaging the relationship so that he would not have to suffer yet another pain, yet another rejection.

These behaviors do not occur because the person wants to be unhappy, but because, on some deep level, they are trying to protect themselves from the same pains of the past. The fear of rejection forged in childhood continues to influence their choices, leading them to seek safety in withdrawal, even if that means sacrificing good things that life could offer.

Internal Schemas: The Invisible Glasses

Psychology recognizes this phenomenon as the construction of *internal schemas*, cognitive structures that, when formed out of suffering and emotional neglect, lead to distorted interpretations of reality (Young, 2003). Schemas are patterns of thought and belief that structure our perceptions and actions, functioning as mental shortcuts that help us process information quickly. For example, if someone has a “distrust” schema, that person will probably interpret the actions of others as deceptive or malicious even when the evidence does not support that interpretation. This simplifying mechanism is useful, but it can also be flawed and distorted, especially when based on negative or traumatic experiences.

We can imagine this phenomenon as the construction of invisible glasses through which we come to see the world. These “glasses” begin to form very early, especially in moments of pain, rejection, or emotional neglect. When a person suffers repeatedly, their

mind tries to make sense of the experience in order to survive it. The mind therefore creates internal interpretations about the self, other people, and life.

If someone grows up feeling unseen, unheard, or unwelcomed, they may come to believe that they are unimportant or unworthy of love. Over time, this idea ceases to be merely a thought and begins to function as a fixed lens: everything that happens afterward is interpreted through it, forming a pattern of distorted thoughts and structures of functioning.

In this way, silence may be understood as rejection, correction may sound like humiliation, and a boundary may be experienced as abandonment. Reality has not changed, but the way it is interpreted has been shaped by the wounds of the past. The person is not reacting to what is happening now, but to what it awakens within them based on earlier experiences.

Transformation begins when the person realizes that these lenses are not who they are, but something constructed during a time of pain. By recognizing this, they can gradually remove the glasses and learn to see life with greater clarity, freedom, and truth.

Ana's Story

Let us imagine the story of Ana, a young woman who went through a painful situation in childhood: her family constantly criticized her, making her feel that she was never good enough. Those words of reproach and gestures of disapproval became etched in her mind, and even after many years, she still remembers the criticism as if it were yesterday.

Ana's trauma was not merely a passing memory, but something that left a deep mark within her. She began to internalize those words and attitudes as though they were the truth about who she was. Over time, she began to believe that she did not have enough worth to be loved or respected and that her actions would always be inadequate. These beliefs began to govern the way she saw herself and interacted with the world around her.

Based on these beliefs, Ana developed patterns of behavior that were, in fact, attempts to protect herself from the pain she had felt. She began to avoid exposing herself in situations where she might be criticized, such as presentations at work or new relationships. The fear of failure and rejection was always present, preventing her from trying new things. Even though she was capable of taking on new challenges, the belief that she was not good enough kept her from acting.

This process of creating limiting beliefs is natural when trauma occurs because the human mind seeks a way to protect itself from what caused pain. When something deeply negative happens, especially in childhood, the brain tends to create a "reading" of the world based on that experience. This can lead to the formation of beliefs such as "I am not good enough" or "I do not deserve to be happy." Over time, these beliefs become part of one's identity and begin to influence choices, actions, and even the opportunities we seek or create.

The problem is that these beliefs often do not correspond to reality. They are distortions created by the pain and fear of the past. Over the years, Ana, like many of us, makes decisions based on the belief that she cannot be successful or loved when, in fact, she has all the qualities needed to attain what she desires. Without

realizing it, she creates a vicious cycle in which her actions confirm her limiting beliefs, and those beliefs reinforce her patterns of avoidance.

These are learned behaviors, mechanisms created when the *reptilian brain*, the most primitive part of our nervous system, activates fight-or-flight mode to ensure survival. At first, this is an ingenious response by the brain. The serious problem arises when these behaviors do not switch off and remain constantly active in the emotional system. We must understand that some behaviors were valid at that moment. In those circumstances, they were the best we could do to escape the pain. Now, however, we need to face things differently by acting instead of continuing to react to a painful stimulus.

The good news is that, although these beliefs and behavioral patterns may form after trauma, they can be challenged and changed. The first step is to recognize that these beliefs are not absolute truth and that the human mind has the capacity to be renewed (Romans 12:2). Through self-awareness, emotional support, and practices that strengthen self-esteem, it is possible to dismantle these limiting beliefs and create new ways of thinking and acting that are more closely aligned with each person's true capacity and potential.

Thus, what once seemed to be an inner prison can become an opportunity for growth and transformation.

The Main Limiting Beliefs

Let us look at how some dysfunctional behavioral structures are built, and how beliefs begin to germinate in the soil of childhood.

"I Am Not Good Enough"

This belief may form when a child receives constant criticism or does not feel enough approval from parents or important figures, leading the child to believe that they will never be able to meet a standard of acceptance.

"I Do Not Deserve to Be Loved"

This belief arises in contexts of emotional rejection, abandonment, or emotional neglect. The child begins to believe that their value is not recognized and that they cannot be loved or accepted by others.

"I Need to Be Perfect to Be Accepted"

If a child grows up in an environment where perfection is expected, or is constantly corrected without receiving support, they may internalize the belief that they will be accepted only if everything they do is flawless, forming a perfectionistic adult.

"The World Is a Dangerous Place"

This belief develops in an unstable or unsafe environment where the child is exposed to abuse, violence, or unpredictability, leading the child to believe that the world is threatening and that they must constantly protect themselves.

"I Am Responsible for Other People's Problems"

This belief forms in dysfunctional families where the child feels that they must care emotionally for their parents or others around them, even when doing so overwhelms their own needs.

“I Am Not Intelligent Enough”

This belief may be created when a child has difficulty at school or is frequently compared unfavorably with others, leading the child to believe that they are incapable of learning or excelling.

“I Cannot Trust People”

This belief is generated by trauma related to abandonment, betrayal, or dishonesty by people close to the child, resulting in a pattern of distrust toward others.

“I Will Always Fail”

This belief forms through repeated experiences of failure, criticism, or negative comparisons during childhood, causing the child to believe that they are incapable of succeeding at anything, regardless of their efforts.

“I Cannot Express My Emotions”

This belief develops in environments where the child’s emotions were ignored, ridiculed, or punished, creating the belief that it is neither safe nor acceptable to be vulnerable or express feelings.

“I Have No Control Over My Life”

This belief may result from an environment in which the child feels powerless, such as situations of abuse or neglect, where there is no room for them to exercise autonomy or make decisions about themselves.

These limiting beliefs can become so deep and ingrained that, throughout life, they influence choices, behavior, and even how a person sees themselves in the world. Dismantling them and creating new beliefs that foster growth and well-being often requires a process of self-knowledge and overcoming these patterns.

The False Prophets in Our Lives

In the biblical context, the term “prophet” refers to a person chosen and called by God to convey His message to the people. The word comes from the Greek *prophetes*, meaning “one who speaks on behalf of another,” specifically, on behalf of God. The prophet’s mission is to be a divine messenger, communicating God’s will, warning of spiritual dangers, announcing judgments, and at the same time proclaiming hope and restoration.

This can also represent the role of the authority figures who pass through our lives. Our authority figures should often fulfill the role of God’s messengers, bringing life through their words and their message to those under their influence. Yet we often see a figure who should bring a message of comfort, authority, encouragement, and approval do the opposite, becoming a *false prophet* who brings words of destruction, discouragement, obstruction, and emotional death.

In the biblical and psychological context, a “false prophet” can be understood not only as someone who distorts religious or spiritual truth, but also as a person who consciously or unconsciously influences others negatively, creating limiting beliefs that imprison them in a cycle of suffering and deception. Limiting beliefs are often formed from life experiences, especially during childhood

and adolescence. Certain people encountered along this journey can have a significant impact on the formation of these beliefs. Let us consider the main figures.

Parents or Caregivers

Negative influence: Parents who constantly criticize, compare, or ignore their children's emotional needs may create the belief that a child is not good enough, does not deserve love, or must be perfect to be accepted.

Positive influence: Parents who encourage self-confidence, teach that mistakes are part of learning, and offer unconditional love help form beliefs in healthy self-esteem and the ability to face challenges.

Teachers

Negative influence: A teacher who devalues a student's contributions, makes negative comparisons, or ignores a child's learning difficulties may reinforce beliefs of inadequacy or inability.

Positive influence: Educators who recognize individual talents, offer support and encouragement to improve skills, and help children develop confidence in their abilities can foster beliefs in competence and personal worth.

Friends and Peers

Negative influence: Friends or peers who mock, marginalize, or ridicule someone may create or reinforce beliefs that the person is unworthy of friendship or not good enough to relate to others.

Positive influence: Healthy relationships and friendships that demonstrate support, acceptance, and respect help form beliefs in belonging, trust, and the ability to build meaningful connections.

Authority Figures (Religious Leaders, Mentors, Coaches)

Negative influence: Leaders or mentors who impose rigid standards, make unattainable demands, or induce feelings of guilt and shame can create beliefs that the person will never be “good enough” or will always fail.

Positive influence: Leaders who encourage positive reflection, self-compassion, and forgiveness help build a growth mindset and resilience.

Siblings or Close Relatives

Negative influence: Siblings or other family members who compete in a hostile way, provoke jealousy, or belittle one another’s achievements may foster beliefs of insecurity, envy, or an inability to succeed.

Positive influence: Family members who offer mutual support, celebrate victories, and show understanding during difficulties can strengthen the belief that it is possible to grow, improve, and be loved.

Romantic or Marital Relationships

Negative influence: Partners who manipulate, devalue, or emotionally abuse a person can create beliefs that the person does not deserve to be treated with respect or that their needs and desires are irrelevant.

Positive influence: Healthy and respectful romantic relationships foster beliefs in self-esteem, mutual trust, and the ability to love and be loved in a healthy way.

Society and the Media

Negative influence: Social pressure, including standards of beauty, success, and behavior widely promoted by the media, can create beliefs of inadequacy or dissatisfaction with one's own appearance, ability, or status.

Positive influence: Campaigns that promote diversity, inclusion, and the importance of self-knowledge help form positive beliefs about one's own value, regardless of external expectations.

Professional Authorities (Therapists, Counselors)

Negative influence: Therapists or counselors who invalidate feelings or label a person in derogatory ways may reinforce beliefs of inability or of being unworthy of help.

Positive influence: Professionals who listen attentively, validate emotions, and help people find their own strength contribute to the formation of beliefs in empowerment and confidence.

Role Models (Celebrities, Idols, Social Leaders)

Negative influence: The idolization of public figures who promote unrealistic standards of perfection can cause harmful comparisons and beliefs that these ideals are impossible to attain.

Positive influence: Public figures who share stories of overcoming, failure, and vulnerability can teach that it is possible to grow, learn, and change throughout life.

An Invitation to Trust

In many situations, the influence of these people, when combined with personal experiences and cultural contexts, contributes to the formation of limiting beliefs. By becoming aware of these influences and working over time to dismantle them, a person can break free from limiting patterns and build a new narrative for their life.

*"Commit your way to the Lord; trust in Him, and He will act."
(Psalm 37:5)*

This verse is an invitation to faith and rest. It means transferring our worries, anxieties, and difficulties to God and trusting in His providence instead of trying to control everything on our own. Surrendering is not giving up; it is trusting that God will take control of what is impossible for us.

If limiting beliefs are the fruit of what we have learned, it is natural to ask: how, after all, do we learn? How did the models around us in childhood shape not only our behavior, but the very structure of our thought? In the next chapter, we will explore the mechanisms of social learning and modeling, the process through which we absorb, imitate, and internalize the patterns of those around us, for better and for worse.

Chapter 5: Social Learning and Modeling

In the previous chapter, we saw how limiting beliefs are formed through painful experiences and through figures who act as “false prophets” in our lives. But these beliefs do not arise in a vacuum: they are learned. We learn to believe what we believe, to feel what we feel, and to react as we react, and much of this learning takes place through observing and imitating the models around us. In this chapter, we will delve into the mechanisms of social learning, modeling theory, and the conditioning processes that explain how emotional and behavioral patterns are transmitted and, at times, perpetuated across generations.

The Child as Fresh Cement

“A child is like wet cement: whatever falls on it makes an impression.” (Haim Ginott)

From the first breath, a child is immersed in a vast ocean of experiences that contribute to the construction of their identity. This is a continuous developmental process in which the child, like concrete that is still fresh, receives an endless stream of

information from the surrounding environment: interpersonal relationships, sensory experiences, emotions lived through, and messages conveyed by that environment. Through this continuous, dynamic interaction, the child begins to learn who they are and to build the foundation of the “self,” which will reflect what they have experienced, interpreted, and absorbed.

As the child begins to speak, the world takes on a new meaning. Language is not merely a collection of words or phrases learned for communication, but a powerful vehicle for understanding oneself and the surrounding world. The way others speak to a child, and the way society uses words, profoundly influence that child’s perception of self and others.

When someone calls a child “intelligent,” “capable,” or “different,” the child begins to understand what those words mean for them. Verbal affirmation and words of encouragement, or their absence, have the power to build a self-image or destroy it. At the same time, labels imposed by society, such as “difficult child” or “shy,” also shape and limit the way the child sees themselves. The child begins to believe the words they hear about themselves and gradually incorporates those meanings into their concept of identity.

The Concept of Modeling

From the first months of life, a baby already begins to mirror adults, smiling when they see a smile or imitating simple gestures. As the child grows, they notice patterns of behavior around them and unconsciously begin to replicate them. If a child sees an adult acting with kindness and respect, they are likely to imitate that behavior, understanding kindness to be something valuable. On the other hand, if the child witnesses aggression or disrespect,

they may learn to react in the same way in similar situations, because modeling is, in essence, the imitation of observed behavior.

In addition to direct imitation, modeling also occurs in subtler ways through adults' attitudes and reactions. A child may not be directly taught to express emotions in words, but by seeing their parents handle frustration calmly and assertively, the child internalizes that behavior as an appropriate way to deal with their own emotions. Children learn not only from what is said, but also from what is demonstrated.

The influence of modeling on child development is not limited to social and emotional behavior. It also encompasses the way children learn to see the world and form their beliefs and values. The values that parents and educators convey, often without realizing it, shape a child's view of what is right and wrong, what matters, and even how the child sees themselves.

Children, therefore, are not passive recipients of information. They become active participants in their own learning. They absorb everything they experience and, over time, form a mental picture of the world, their relationships, and their own abilities. *Learning through modeling* is one of the most fundamental mechanisms of human development: the process by which individuals acquire behaviors, values, beliefs, and skills through observing and imitating others. Modeling presupposes the presence of a significant model whose conduct serves as a reference for building the learner's cognitive, emotional, and moral repertoire. This is especially intense during childhood, a period when the brain displays high plasticity and greater sensitivity to environmental and relational stimuli.

Bandura and the Bobo Doll Experiment

In the scientific field, *social learning theory*, developed by Albert Bandura, provides a solid foundation for understanding modeling as a central phenomenon in human learning. The Bobo doll experiment, conducted by Bandura in 1961 and revisited in 1963, is a landmark in the psychology of social behavior.

In the experiment, Bandura placed an inflatable doll called “Bobo” in a room with an adult who served as a model. The adult interacted aggressively with the doll, punching it, kicking it, and shouting at it. The other half of the participating children watched an adult interact with the doll in a calm, nonaggressive manner.

After this observation, the children were left alone in the room with the doll and other toys. The results were striking: the children who had observed the aggressive model were much more likely to imitate the violence, attacking the doll in the same way. Furthermore, they not only copied the behaviors they had observed, but also created new aggressive behaviors. This suggested that observational learning took place actively and creatively, without the need for direct reinforcement.

This experiment revolutionized the understanding of learning. Bandura challenged the traditional view in behavioral psychology that learning was merely a matter of direct reinforcement. He demonstrated that people, especially children, can learn simply by observing the behavior of others, without personally experiencing a reward or punishment.

Self-Efficacy: Belief in One's Own Ability

Bandura also emphasized the concept of *self-efficacy*, the belief that we can control the events that affect our lives. It is an individual's perception of their ability to perform the behaviors necessary to achieve certain goals or face specific situations. By observing models, whether aggressive or not, a child internalizes not only the behaviors, but also confidence or uncertainty in their ability to carry out those actions.

People with high self-efficacy tend to feel more motivated, persistent, and resilient when facing difficulties. Those with low self-efficacy, on the other hand, generally avoid challenges and give up more easily because they doubt their ability to succeed. Self-efficacy is not a concrete skill, but a subjective perception that can vary across different areas of life.

Trauma can severely impair this self-efficacy because the person begins to doubt their ability to face situations or change their reality, creating a cycle of self-sabotage and hopelessness. Bandura believed self-efficacy to be essential to trauma recovery because believing that one can overcome adversity is crucial to the healing process.

Outcome Expectations

Another important contribution from Bandura is the concept of *outcome expectations*. When a person goes through a traumatic experience, they may begin to expect future events to bring suffering or pain. This is called a *negative expectation*. That expectation can be learned and internalized, creating a distorted view of reality and perpetuating emotional trauma. Bandura believed that by

changing cognitive expectations and helping a person challenge their negative beliefs about the future, it would be possible to modify their emotional and behavioral responses to trauma.

Skinner and the Operant Conditioning of Trauma

B. F. Skinner, one of the leading figures in behavioral psychology, focused his theory on observable behavior and the consequences that behavior produces. For Skinner, trauma can be seen as a *conditioned response* to specific events, particularly when they involve fear, pain, or suffering.

Skinner proposed the concept of *operant conditioning*, according to which human behaviors are shaped by the consequences that follow them. When individuals undergo a traumatic experience, they may consciously or unconsciously learn to associate certain stimuli with sensations of pain or emotional discomfort. For example, someone who has lived through a traumatic event such as an accident may associate certain sounds, places, or even bodily sensations with that pain, leading to a reaction of fear or avoidance. These avoidance and defensive behaviors may be positively reinforced when they relieve suffering, creating a conditioning cycle that perpetuates the trauma.

Emotional trauma is therefore maintained and reinforced over time as the individual continues to avoid triggers or respond defensively. According to Skinner, these responses can be modified or “reconditioned” if they are replaced with more adaptive behaviors through behavioral therapies that teach the individual to respond differently to trauma triggers.

The Five Monkeys Experiment: The Cultural Transmission of Trauma

Some of the most revealing insights into trauma and its effects on human behavior can be found in classic experiments conducted with primates, which demonstrate how we learn, repeat, and perpetuate patterns without understanding their origin. Among these studies is the widely recounted *five monkeys* experiment, inspired by the principles of social learning and operant conditioning.

The scene is simple: five monkeys in a room, a ladder in the center, and a bunch of bananas hanging at the top. When one of them tries to reach the food, *all* of them are sprayed with cold water. The association between the attempt and the punishment forms quickly. To avoid the discomfort, the monkeys begin aggressively preventing any of them from climbing the ladder. External punishment becomes social punishment, and the rule is maintained not by fear of the spray, but by group dynamics.

When one of the monkeys is replaced by a newcomer who has never experienced the cold water, it immediately tries to climb the ladder, driven by natural impulse. Before it can reach the top, however, the others violently attack it. Without knowing why, it learns that “one must not climb.” The rule is transmitted not through direct experience, but through social surveillance and coercion, precisely as Bandura describes in his theory of observational learning.

The process continues: a second monkey is replaced, then a third, until *all* of them have gradually been replaced. In the end, *none* of the five monkeys present has suffered the original punishment, none has witnessed the spray of water, and none knows the

reason for the prohibition. Even so, they all continue attacking any individual who dares approach the ladder. The behavior remains even after its original cause has completely disappeared.

This experiment encapsulates the logic of *unconscious cultural transmission*: patterns that once arose as adaptive responses continue to govern the members of a group even after losing their meaning. This is what happens in families, institutions, religions, and social groups. It also happens within each individual's psychic structure. Freud had already warned that much of our behavior is driven by forces unknown to us, and that compulsive repetition is the mark of unintegrated trauma. Ferenczi and Winnicott expanded this understanding by showing that trauma can be silently transmitted between generations, not only through events, but through the way emotions are experienced, repressed, or ignored.

As Gabor Maté stated:

"Trauma is not what happened to you, it is what happened inside you as a result of what happened to you."

Like the monkeys that never experienced the spray but inherited the fear, human beings internalize pain, guilt, and limitations that did not originally belong to them. They often carry emotional burdens planted by stories that came before their own, forming behaviors that become automatic, defensive, and deeply rooted, and giving rise to many kinds of dysfunctional behavior.

The analogy between the monkey experiment and human trauma reveals how dysfunctional behaviors are often maintained without reflection: inherited beliefs, internalized norms, transmit-

ted fears, and ancestrally carried pain. The subject reacts not to the present, but to the past; not to what is real, but to what was once reality for someone who came before.

The Convergence of Science and Faith

"And these words, which I command you today, shall be in your heart; and you shall teach them to your children..." (Deuteronomy 6:6-7)

This biblical text instructs that teachings be transmitted in everyday life through shared experience and constant example. Learning occurs in the flow of life, mediated by observable attitudes and close relationships. The apostle Paul similarly reinforces this principle when he states, "Be imitators of me, as I also am of Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1), indicating that faith and Christian values are learned above all by observing examples embodied in life.

Both science and Scripture converge in recognizing that social learning through modeling has a decisive influence on the formation of behavior, identity, and character. An example, whether positive or negative, functions as a powerful educational agent capable of perpetuating patterns across generations. Understanding this process is essential for reflecting on education, emotional development, family relationships, and ethical formation, since what is lived and demonstrated often teaches more than what is said.

Modeling and Emotional Trauma

Learning through modeling also plays a central role in understanding emotional trauma because traumatic experiences are frequently mediated by significant relationships and behavioral patterns observed in the primary environment. Children who are repeatedly exposed to parental models marked by neglect, violence, emotional invalidation, or fear tend to internalize those behaviors and emotions as normative references for attachment and survival. Trauma is thus formed not only through isolated events, but through the repetition of dysfunctional models that shape deep beliefs about oneself, others, and the world.

From a psychological perspective, studies of relational trauma indicate that children learn strategies for emotional regulation, or the absence of them, through observation. They reproduce patterns of silence, hypervigilance, or aggression as adaptive responses to the context in which they live. This implicit and often unconscious learning perpetuates suffering throughout development, as individuals repeat in adult life the same models they internalized in childhood.

From a biblical perspective, this process finds an echo in the idea that behaviors and emotions are transmitted across generations, as expressed in texts that point to the influence of parents' actions on their children. Scripture, however, also emphasizes the possibility of breaking these cycles through the renewal of the mind and the experience of new models based on love, truth, and restoration. Learning through modeling therefore not only explains the origin and persistence of emotional trauma, but also offers a path toward overcoming it by highlighting the transformative power of reparative relationships and healthy examples.

Having understood the mechanisms by which we learn and internalize patterns, both constructive and destructive, we are now prepared to delve into the heart of this book: emotional trauma itself. What, after all, is this invisible wound that so profoundly changes the way we live? In the next chapter, we will explore the definitions, theories, and perspectives of the principal authors who have sought to understand this phenomenon, from Freud to Gabor Maté and from Bowlby to Van der Kolk, building a solid conceptual map for the journey of healing that lies ahead.

Chapter 6: Emotional Trauma: Definitions and Theories

Throughout the previous chapters, we explored how childhood shapes identity, how limiting beliefs are formed through influential figures, and how social learning transmits both functional and dysfunctional patterns from one generation to another. All of this has brought us here, to the point where we must look directly at the central concept of this work: *emotional trauma*. In this chapter, we will bring together the principal definitions, theories, and perspectives of authors who have devoted themselves to understanding this phenomenon that cuts across people's souls, bodies, and life stories.

Etymology and the Foundational Concept

The word *trauma* derives from the Greek *trauma*, meaning "wound" or "broken," originally referring to a physical wound. Over time, the term was broadened to describe psychic injuries. According to contemporary definitions, it is an intensely unpleasant emotional experience that can cause psychological disturbances, leaving a lasting mark on the individual's mind.

Trauma is one of the central concepts in understanding human suffering. Throughout history, scholars such as psychoanalysts, psychologists, and philosophers have sought to describe how certain experiences leave deep marks, changing the way a subject perceives themselves, the world, and their relationships. Although the definition is broad and different authors each bring their own language and perspective, they share one point: *trauma exceeds the psyche's capacity to give meaning to an event*, generating a rupture, an excess that could not be symbolized at that moment.

Sigmund Freud was the first to formulate a theoretical account of psychological trauma. According to him, trauma occurs when an event produces a level of excitation or suffering that exceeds the ego's capacity to process, symbolize, or integrate the experience (Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 1920). Trauma, then, is not merely a painful event, but the inability to work through the pain that was experienced. It is a wound that remains open, silent, and underground, yet sooner or later cries out for care, new meaning, and light.

Trauma A and Trauma B

Contemporary study of trauma has revealed profound dimensions of human pain. One highly functional educational classification proposes two types of trauma: *Trauma A* and *Trauma B*.

Trauma A manifests through distressing and significant episodes: situations such as abandonment, physical, emotional, or sexual abuse, as well as prolonged exposure to unsafe environments. These are wounds opened by explicit, direct, and invasive violence.

Trauma B is revealed in what was *missing*: affection, affirmation, emotional warmth, healthy boundaries, emotional nourishment, welcome, and love. It is the absence of what should have happened, the lack of what constitutes healthy emotional development.

Trauma therefore arises not only from what invades, but also from what never arrives; not only from an excess of pain, but also from emptiness and a lack of care. Trauma blocks and distorts an individual's natural maturation, interrupts the healthy developmental process, disfigures the formation of identity, and impedes the balanced growth of emotional faculties. A traumatized psyche tends to operate in a state of alert, creating rigid defense mechanisms, impulsive behaviors, exaggerated reactions, difficulty trusting, and a profound sense of inadequacy. The body speaks what the soul was unable to work through: chronic pain, tension, fatigue, digestive disorders, insomnia, anxiety attacks, and diffuse symptoms.

The Ingrown Toenail Analogy

Emotional trauma resembles an *ingrown toenail* that begins silently, then burrows deeper into the flesh until every step becomes a reminder that something within us is not well. Both begin small, almost imperceptible, but if ignored, they become persistent wounds that shape the way we walk through life.

An ingrown toenail hurts at the slightest touch, throbs with the smallest movement, determines which shoes we choose, alters our posture, and turns the simple act of walking into a careful dance of avoiding pain. Trauma works the same way: it teaches us to

avoid places, words, affection, and even people who might touch the invisible area of our soul where the pain rests, as sensitive as inflamed flesh.

We protect the toenail as we protect the trauma: we cover it, hide it, and squeeze our toes so no one will notice. We build silent strategies to avoid being touched. We pretend everything is normal while dragging our pain into the next day. We begin to live by turning our foot aside, averting our gaze, changing the subject, and deflecting our feelings. It is a life built on calculated steps, with excessive care to ensure that no one presses what is already so sensitive.

Both demand an intimate kind of courage, one we tremble to accept: *we must touch the place that hurts for healing to take place*. An ingrown toenail must be worked on, cleaned, and opened so the pressure can be relieved. Trauma must be treated the same way. The soul must revisit its silent alleys, where the memories we have tried to forget are kept. To heal is to allow ourselves to look at what we avoid, to face the dark corner where pain lies, and to hear the old weeping we muffled for years. It hurts. It hurts like freeing an ingrown toenail. It hurts because whatever is inflamed reacts to the first contact. It hurts because the flesh, like the soul, protests against everything that made it suffer.

But *the pain of confronting something differs from the pain of fleeing it*. The former is the pain of healing; the latter, the pain of remaining. The pain of healing is sharp and intense, but temporary. The pain of remaining is continuous and silent, dragging on forever and preventing the free stride we deserve. The pain of healing invites freedom; the pain of remaining imprisons us in a circle of protection that never truly protects.

When we finally have the courage to touch the wound, the soul breathes. Just as an inflamed toe feels immediate relief after the painful act of removing what is hurting it, the heart also makes peace with its own burden when it faces what it once avoided. Light enters through the opening in the trauma, and fresh air begins to circulate where there was once only fear. The touch that once seemed unbearable becomes possible, then tolerable, then gentle. The wound heals slowly, but it heals. The soul walks firmly again, no longer needing to hide its foot or fear the ground.

Emotional trauma and an ingrown toenail teach us the same lesson: while we overprotect them, they hurt more; while we leave them hidden, they become inflamed; while we avoid them, they grow. But when we face them, even while trembling, crying, and afraid, we open the way to a kind of healing that restores not only our stride, but also our freedom to walk without fear. No one was made to go through life limping in the soul.

Revisiting memories, recognizing what was missing, facing old pain, and admitting vulnerabilities all sting like a cleansing solution poured over exposed skin. The heart contracts, the breath falters, and the soul protests. It is an intimate process that brings courage and fragility together in a single stance: allowing the pain to be seen, touched, and understood. It means removing the residue of experiences that wounded us: abandonment, rejection, injustice, and the silence where needed affection should have been. It means carefully removing the layers of protection that, over time, became armor that prevents touch, closeness, and contact.

An open wound and emotional trauma tell us the same truth: *there is no healing without cleansing, no healing without touch, and no healing without facing what we are afraid to see.* Cleaning hurts, but

allowing an infection to spread hurts much more. Whoever finds the courage to touch their own pain also finds the path to freedom.

Gabor Maté's View: Trauma as Disconnection

For Gabor Maté, trauma is not merely the event itself, but the way the person experiences that event and their emotional response to it. Maté defines trauma as any experience or set of experiences that disrupts an individual's sense of safety and belonging, disturbing their capacity to feel loved and accepted. He emphasizes that trauma is not necessarily caused by extreme events such as physical or emotional abuse. It can also result from emotional neglect or the absence of adequate emotional support, especially during the earliest stages of life.

Early experiences of emotional abandonment, neglect, or rejection can be as traumatic as experiences of physical abuse because they directly affect a child's emotional development and perception of identity. Maté sees trauma as something that affects an individual's capacity to connect with themselves and others, creating profound emotional disconnections.

Trauma in the Body

One of Maté's most relevant contributions is his perspective on trauma's impact on the body. He suggests that trauma is not only a psychological phenomenon, but also a biological and physiological reality. Unresolved trauma becomes inscribed in the body and may manifest in many ways: physical illnesses, emotional disorders, or chronic health conditions. The nervous and immune systems are profoundly affected by traumatic experiences. When peo-

ple cannot adequately process trauma, they may suffer from constant activation of the stress-response system, resulting in chronic inflammation, deterioration of the immune system, and the onset of illnesses such as cancer, autoimmune diseases, cardiovascular disorders, and digestive problems.

Holistic Healing

Maté states that healing trauma requires a holistic approach: emotional healing, connection with oneself, and stronger interpersonal relationships. The first step is *reconnecting with repressed emotions*, allowing individuals to experience their wounds and thereby release the energies associated with the trauma. True healing occurs when a person can free themselves from the automatic responses caused by trauma, such as dysfunctional relationships and destructive behaviors, including addictions and self-sabotage.

He also emphasizes the importance of relational healing. A traumatized person needs to be seen, heard, and accepted by others in an authentic and empathetic way. Safe relationships with genuine emotional support are crucial to rebuilding trust in oneself and in the world.

Trauma and Addiction: Compulsive Behavior as the Language of Unprocessed Pain

For a long time, the concepts of addiction and compulsive behavior were associated almost exclusively with the use and abuse of chemical substances. Illegal drugs, alcohol, and medications occupied the center of clinical, social, and moral debate. Although valid, this view is profoundly limited. It observes the behavior but does not listen to the story; it sees the symptom but ignores the wound that produces it.

Gabor Maté proposes a radical change of lens: the question ceases to be “*Why the addiction?*” and becomes “*Why the pain?*” For him, compulsive behavior does not arise from an excess of pleasure, but from a desperate attempt to relieve preexisting psychic suffering. Addiction, therefore, is not the cause of the problem, but the solution a wounded organism found in order to survive emotionally.

From this perspective, compulsive behavior can be understood as any repetitive, automatic, and rigidly maintained pattern that offers momentary relief but exacts a progressively greater price. The central element is not the object, whether a substance, sex, work, gambling, adrenaline, food, or something else, but the function that object serves: numbing pain, silencing emptiness, and regulating emotions the subject never learned to sustain.

This expands the field of addiction beyond drugs. Emotional codependency, for example, reveals a subject who needs another person in order to exist, who becomes addicted to relationships because solitude activates primitive memories of abandonment.

The workaholic, rewarded by society, conceals a compulsion to perform in an attempt to obtain worth, belonging, and identity. Addiction to adrenaline expresses a nervous system conditioned to chaos, for which emotional silence becomes unbearable. Gambling, compulsive sex, pornography, and repeated masturbation function as artificial regulators of tension, pleasure, and dissociation.

All these behaviors share the same matrix: trauma. Trauma here is not limited to extreme events. It also includes absences, emotional neglect, emotional invalidation, and environments in which a child had to adapt in order not to lose the bond. When

emotional development is interrupted, the subject grows biologically but continues compulsively seeking what was missing: security, welcome, presence, and love.

Compulsive behavior thus functions as a neuroemotional shortcut. It activates reward circuits, releases dopamine, and produces immediate relief. This relief, however, does not integrate, work through, or heal. It merely suspends the pain temporarily. The pain returns with greater force, demanding larger doses of the same behavior. A cycle is created: pain → compulsion → relief → guilt → more pain.

There is also a profound existential dimension: many addictions are attempts to fill an identity void. When the subject cannot be who they are, they begin compulsively doing something in order to feel like someone. Identity ceases to be lived and begins to be performed. The body becomes a battlefield where the psyche unsuccessfully attempts to resolve conflicts that belong to the person's history.

Demystifying compulsive behavior therefore means removing its moral label and restoring its status as a message. It is not a matter of weak character, lack of willpower, or ethical deviation. It is a nervous system shaped by pain, seeking relief with the tools it possesses. As Maté states, no one consciously chooses an addiction; one chooses to survive.

Healing, in this sense, does not begin with abstinence, but with awareness. It does not begin by suppressing the behavior, but by listening to what the behavior is trying to silence. As long as the pain remains invisible, the compulsive behavior will continue to be necessary. When pain is recognized, symbolized, and integrated, the addiction loses its function.

To understand compulsive behavior is therefore to understand the human history of adaptation to suffering. It means recognizing that behind every excess there is something missing; behind every compulsion, an attempt at regulation; and behind every addiction, a child who had to organize themselves far too early in order to endure what they should never have had to face alone.

Freud: Id, Ego, and Superego in the Face of Trauma

In Freud's view, the human personality is divided into three main components, each with a distinct function in the psychic process:

- **Id:** The most primitive part of the mind, focused on the immediate satisfaction of desires and impulses. It operates according to the *pleasure principle*, seeking gratification without considering consequences or reality. Example: when a person feels hungry, the id demands food immediately, without considering the circumstances.
- **Ego:** The rational and realistic part of the mind, which attempts to balance the id's impulses with the limitations of reality. It operates according to the *reality principle*, seeking socially acceptable and practical ways to satisfy the id's desires. Example: when the hungry person decides to wait until a meal is available instead of taking food impulsively.
- **Superego:** It represents internalized moral and ethical standards, often influenced by culture and parents. It operates according to the *morality principle*, repressing unacceptable

desires and promoting moral awareness. Example: when the hungry person feels guilty for wanting to take food without permission because of the superego's imposition.

These three components are in constant interaction, influencing an individual's behaviors and decisions. For Freud, *trauma originates when the ego cannot cope with the intensity of an emotionally disturbing event*. Instead of processing the event and integrating it into the self, the individual tends to repress the memory or the feelings associated with the trauma. This repression does not eliminate the impact. On the contrary, it may manifest through emotional symptoms such as anxiety, depression, and phobias, which are often signs that the trauma has not been fully resolved.

Pierre Janet: Dissociation and Fragmentation

Another author fundamental to understanding emotional trauma was Pierre Janet, a French psychologist and contemporary of Freud. Janet introduced the idea that trauma can result in a *dysfunction in a person's capacity to integrate their experiences*. He believed that when individuals experience a traumatic event, the memory of that event is not adequately processed, which may result in a fragmentation of the subject's identity.

Janet suggested that when trauma is incompletely processed, it leads to the formation of *dissociations*, fragments of memory or experience isolated from consciousness. These dissociations can manifest in complex ways in adult life: people may have difficulty connecting with their emotions or memories, experiencing a sense of distance from themselves and from others. Dissociative identity disorder and other memory-related disorders are examples of how

trauma can appear in adult life. The inability to integrate experiences fully results in a lack of emotional continuity, profoundly affecting the subject's identity and interpersonal relationships.

John Bowlby and Attachment Theory

John Bowlby, a British psychoanalyst, made important contributions to the study of emotional trauma by focusing on the impact of a child's earliest relationships, especially the relationship with their parents, on the formation of personality and emotional health. Bowlby developed *attachment theory*, which highlights the importance of the emotional security a child finds in caregivers. When this security is broken through abandonment, neglect, or abuse, *attachment trauma* takes hold.

According to Bowlby, attachment is a deep emotional bond that connects one human being to another, accompanied by a desire for proximity and security. This bond is essential to a child's survival and emotional well-being because it ensures protection, care, and comfort in times of need. Attachment functions as a biological system that, when activated, motivates the child to seek proximity to the caregiver when feeling unsafe or threatened.

The concept goes beyond simple affectionate interaction. It is essential to emotional and social development and serves as the foundation for future interpersonal relationships. This bond, established in childhood, creates an "*internal working model*," a kind of mental map that guides how the person perceives, feels, and responds to relationships throughout life.

Types of Attachment

Bowlby identified different types of attachment, formed on the basis of caregivers' responses to a child's emotional needs:

Secure attachment: Children feel at ease exploring their environment but always return to the caregiver for comfort and security when they feel threatened. It develops when caregivers respond consistently and sensitively to the child's emotional needs. Example: a child plays happily at the playground but runs into their mother's arms after getting hurt, finding comfort and relief.

Anxious-ambivalent attachment: Children with this attachment type may become extremely distressed during separation from their caregivers and, although they seek proximity when reunited, show resistance and difficulty calming down. It is frequently related to inconsistency in caregivers' responses, loving at some moments and indifferent at others. Example: a child cries uncontrollably when left at school but refuses to be comforted when reunited with their mother, showing a mixture of desire and rejection.

Avoidant attachment: Children with this attachment type tend to show little or no reaction to separation from their caregivers, displaying emotional distance. They learn that their emotional needs will not be met and develop a form of emotional "self-sufficiency," avoiding the search for support. Example: a child left in a new environment does not appear concerned by the caregiver's absence and does not seek comfort when feeling distressed.

Disorganized attachment: This is observed in children who display an inconsistent pattern of behavior, generally due to the presence of abuse or neglect. They alternate between seeking proximity to and feeling afraid of the caregiver. Example: when separated from their mother, a child is afraid to approach her, yet seeks comfort at the same time.

The Impact on Adult Relationships

The internal working models formed during childhood influence expectations and behaviors in interpersonal relationships throughout life. People with secure attachment tend to have healthier, more balanced relationships, with a strong capacity to trust others and open themselves emotionally. Those with anxious or avoidant styles may have difficulty establishing deep bonds, facing challenges such as insecurity in relationships or fear of intimacy.

This theory invites us to reflect on how our earliest relationships shape the way we relate to the world around us. Understanding these patterns can help us manage our own relationships more effectively and provide appropriate support to our children, ensuring that they can grow in a safe, welcoming, and emotionally healthy environment.

Bessel van der Kolk: The Body Keeps the Score

In his book *The Body Keeps the Score*, Bessel van der Kolk proposes one of the most innovative approaches to emotional trauma. He argues that trauma is not merely a psychological phenomenon, but that the *body also “keeps” the marks of trauma*: traumatic experiences are stored physically, changing the way the body responds to stimuli.

According to van der Kolk, trauma can result in a series of physical and psychological disorders, including chronic pain, sleep disorders, and emotional difficulties such as anxiety and depression. Trauma can alter the brain’s functioning, especially in areas related to memory and emotional regulation.

According to the author, the key to healing lies in integrating mind and body, allowing the person to release repressed tensions and emotions. Healing from trauma requires not only a change in thoughts and emotions, but a reconstruction of the individual's relationship with their own body. By doing so, the person can begin to transform their physiological response to trauma, reducing its negative long-term impact.

Peter Levine: Somatic Experiencing

Peter A. Levine, author of *Waking the Tiger: Healing Trauma*, offers a distinct approach focused on releasing emotions stored in the body. Drawing on his theory of the neurobiology of trauma, Levine suggests that trauma results from experiences that were not adequately processed by the body and mind.

In situations of danger or fear, the body reacts automatically, activating survival mechanisms such as fight, flight, or freeze. When these mechanisms cannot be completed, for example, when the person cannot escape a traumatic situation or fight against it, the associated emotions remain “trapped” in the body.

Levine proposes that by feeling and releasing these stored emotions, a person can reverse trauma's impact. He introduced the technique known as *Somatic Experiencing*, which aims to help patients slow down and experience what was blocked, allowing body and mind to integrate those experiences again in a healthy way. Trauma is not simply a matter of reliving the traumatic experience, but of helping the body process it and allowing the body to complete the response cycle that was never finished. Healing involves listening to the body and giving it the opportunity to discharge accumulated emotional energy.

Clarissa Pinkola Estés: Female Trauma and the Wild Woman

In *Women Who Run with the Wolves*, Clarissa Pinkola Estés adopts a more poetic and archetypal approach to trauma, focusing particularly on the female experience. She suggests that throughout history, women have lost their connection with their wild and creative nature, often because of oppressive social, cultural, and family norms.

Estés argues that women's trauma results not only from specific events, but from a *collective loss of identity and voice*. Many women carry profound traumas that are not merely personal, but ancestral, passed from one generation to the next. The author explores the idea that female trauma can be healed by reconnecting with the "wild woman," an instinctive, creative, and intuitive force that resides within every woman.

Estés sees the healing process as a return to one's own nature, a rediscovery of the inner power to heal emotional wounds and break free from the limiting patterns imposed by society. Using myths, stories, and archetypal examples, she illustrates how women can reclaim their emotional power. Healing female trauma involves reclaiming one's own voice and reconnecting with the inner strength silenced for generations. It is a journey of self-discovery and transformation in which women find their own authenticity and freedom.

Andrew Solomon: The Complexity of Trauma and the Reconstruction of Meaning

In *The Noonday Demon*, Andrew Solomon explores the profound impact of psychological trauma, especially in relation to depression. Solomon examines how trauma, in its many forms, can invade every aspect of life, creating a cycle of pain and suffering that seems endless.

He explores trauma's complexity, describing how people who experience it may struggle to connect with their own emotions and with others. For Solomon, trauma is not merely an isolated event, but *an experience that changes one's perception of reality and view of oneself*. Trauma can distort identity and make it difficult for individuals to find themselves in a world that seems devoid of meaning.

According to Solomon, healing is not merely about overcoming trauma, but about *reconstructing the meaning of life* after its devastating impact. His approach emphasizes the importance of social and psychological support for those dealing with the scars of trauma, stressing that recovery is a long and often complex process.

In this chapter, we mapped the principal voices that help us understand emotional trauma in its many psychological, bodily, relational, and existential dimensions. From Freud to Solomon and from Janet to Estés, one shared truth emerges: trauma is not merely what happened to us, but what remained within us without being worked through. With these foundations in place, we are ready to move on to the next chapter,

where we will explore a central tension of human existence in light of faith: life according to the flesh and life according to the Spirit, and how this dynamic relates to trauma and the path of restoration.

Chapter 7: Flesh and Spirit: A Psychoanalytic Reading

Where We Are on This Journey

In the previous chapters, we explored how human identity is formed through relational experiences and how trauma can distort our perception of ourselves and of God. We saw that from childhood onward, human beings carry emotional marks that shape their behaviors and choices. We now move toward one of the most profound distinctions the apostle Paul presents in Scripture: the tension between living according to the flesh and living according to the Spirit, an interpretive key that integrates theology, psychoanalysis, and clinical experience.

Living in the Spirit and Living by the Flesh: A Biblical, Emotional, and Psychological Reading

The way we live, whether functionally or dysfunctionally, in health or in illness, is profoundly influenced by the environments and relationships to which we are exposed. As relational beings,

we internalize values, absorb beliefs, and imitate behaviors. We construct our identity from the interpretations we assign to the experiences around us.

When the apostle Paul speaks of “living according to the Spirit” and “living according to the flesh,” especially in passages such as Romans 8 and Galatians 5, he is not proposing a simplistic opposition between body and soul or a form of behavioral moralism. Paul describes *two modes of internal organization* within the human being, two governing centers of life: one oriented by the flesh and the other led by the Spirit.

What Paul Means by “Flesh” (Sarx)

The Greek term *sarx*, translated as “flesh,” does not refer only to biological impulses. It refers to a human being disconnected from God, governed by wounds, fears, disordered desires, and mechanisms of self-preservation. To live by the flesh is to live from the *wounded self*, which tries to secure safety, worth, and control by its own means.

In the biblical understanding, the “flesh” points to wounded, fragmented, and self-centered human nature. It is the ungoverned self, dominated by impulses that arise from unmet emotional needs, unintegrated traumas, distorted desires, and unhealthy perceptions.

When Paul describes the works of the flesh, he reveals not only outward behaviors, but *inner states* that emerge from a heart disconnected from God and from itself.

The Works of the Flesh

"Now the works of the flesh are evident: prostitution, impurity, debauchery, idolatry, witchcraft, enmities, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, quarrels, dissensions, heresies, envy, murder, drunkenness, and gluttony." (Galatians 5:19-21)

Each of these expressions points to a divided and wounded soul whose emotions cannot find a healthy direction. Impurity is born of emotional hunger; jealousy, of insecurity; anger, of open wounds; dissensions, of an inability to live with others; immoralities, of using the body in an attempt to numb profound unmet needs.

"For the inclination of the flesh is death, but the inclination of the Spirit is life and peace." (Romans 8:6)

The Flesh as Reactive Functioning

From an emotional and psychological perspective, the flesh represents *reactive functioning*, that is, responses shaped by unprocessed trauma, unmet emotional needs, shame, anger, and fear. It is a life guided by impulse, defense, and the need for compensation. The person does not choose freely; they react to an experience they have lived through. The flesh seeks immediate relief, control, or external validation, but it rarely produces lasting peace.

The passage in Romans 7:14-16 reveals this profound inner struggle between the desire to do good and the reality of actions driven by human nature, a battle between a will conditioned by

the flesh and the freedom sought from the bonds of pain. The apostle Paul describes a reality that is not exclusive to his time, but continues to echo today: the human being's inner conflict in the face of impulses and unresolved trauma.

This struggle can be seen as a metaphor for the profound impact emotional trauma has on human behavior. The idea of the “desire of the flesh” is not limited to physical or sensory desires. It also relates to behaviors and choices driven by wounds from the past, as though the “flesh” were the visible expression of untreated emotional pain. Thus, what Paul describes as the flesh, “carnal, brought under the concept of sin,” meaning that which produces separation between humanity and God, may be interpreted as a mind and body dominated by a cycle of pain, trauma, and a desperate search for relief.

Trauma and the Cycle of Behaviors Driven by Pain

In Freudian psychoanalysis and existential theories, the idea that human beings are shaped by past experiences, which are often painful and traumatic, is central to understanding behavior. Trauma is, in essence, an experience that leaves a profound emotional mark, creating patterns of thought and behavior that govern future choices without the individual's full awareness. It is a struggle fought among the wounded ego, the *id* (which governs our uncensored impulses, instincts, and desires), and the *superego* (which attempts to regulate those impulses with the help of reason and internalized norms).

When Paul speaks about the difficulty of doing what is right even when one desires to do so, he describes an experience that modern psychology explains through the dynamics of *unresolved trauma*. The trauma of a painful event, whether a loss, an assault, or abandonment, can create a fissure in the psyche that manifests

in self-destructive behaviors or impulsive choices, generally outside conscious awareness. In a certain sense, these behaviors are an attempt to relieve the pain or fill the void left by the traumatic experience.

For example, a person who experienced emotional or physical abandonment in childhood may unknowingly seek abusive or dysfunctional relationships in adulthood as a way of reliving and trying to “correct” that trauma. In this case, the desire of the “flesh” is driven by an unresolved emotional need: a desperate search for love or acceptance that was never fully met. The flesh thus becomes a reflection of unhealed trauma, governing the person’s choices in a way that keeps them imprisoned by the pain of the past.

The struggle Paul describes is actually a reflection of the human attempt to break free from pain through one’s own choices. The “desire of the flesh” is not merely a physical desire. It is a search for emotional relief, for something to fill a void that originated in trauma. The person wants to do good, but feels driven to act according to the flesh’s demands: immediate comfort and escape from emotional pain.

Understanding the Flesh, Not Merely Repressing It

The secret does not lie in ceasing to do what the flesh desires, but in understanding it: understanding what causes it to manifest such desires and what motivates that manifestation.

This inner struggle is also present in contemporary neuroscience. Researchers have shown that traumatic events can reconfigure the way the brain functions, creating patterns of thought and behavior that become automatic and difficult to control. The limbic system, the region of the brain that regulates emotions, can

become hyperactive in response to stressors, causing a person to make impulsive decisions based on fear or an attempt to relieve suffering. In this context, trauma acts as an “invisible ruler” of behavior, guiding choices without the person having complete control over them.

The journey Paul describes, however, also points toward the possibility of liberation and transformation. In his inner struggle, he longs to align his choices with the “spiritual law,” which can be seen as a search for healing and transformation of the mind. Liberation from the “desires of the flesh” means separating oneself from the trauma that feeds them and beginning to act not from pain, but from love and the emotional freedom that comes from healing. From both psychological and theological perspectives, this transformation involves a process of recognizing pain, accepting vulnerability, and finally choosing to act consciously and from a place of healing.

The Spirit as a Principle of Integration and Maturity

For Paul, living in the Spirit means allowing life to be governed by an agency that transcends the wounded ego. The Spirit does not nullify the body or emotions. He organizes, integrates, and gives them new meaning. This is why Paul associates the Spirit with fruit such as love, self-control, gentleness, and peace (Galatians 5:22-23).

Psychologically, living in the Spirit approaches a state of emotional regulation and expanded awareness. The person ceases to be hostage to their impulses and begins to respond with dis-

cernment. There is space between stimulus and response. Identity is no longer anchored in the wound, but in an inner sense of being a child of God and having worth.

This process of transformation shows that changing the internal center of governance requires awareness, repetition, and time. Emotions are not bad; they become problematic when they assume absolute control over life. The Spirit, in turn, does not eliminate emotion, but keeps it from becoming tyrannical and gives it a new direction.

The Ongoing Struggle Between Flesh and Spirit

To live by the flesh is to be governed by what has not been healed. To live in the Spirit is to allow even pain to be crossed by grace and transformed into maturity. Paul recognizes that living in the Spirit does not automatically eliminate the impulses of the flesh. He describes a real inner conflict:

"For the flesh fights against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh." (Galatians 5:17)

This is not about repression, but about progressive transformation. The flesh loses strength as emotions are named, integrated, and submitted to a new center of meaning. Paul does not propose the denial of desire, but its reorganization under love.

This understanding reinforces the need for the renewal of the mind proposed in Romans 12:2. Transformation is not only spiritual. It is cognitive, emotional, and behavioral. It is an invitation to reconstruct the inner world deformed by trauma, pain, and dis-

torted interpretations, leading us back to our originality: that whole and complete identity which finds meaning in divine purpose.

The Fruit of the Spirit: A Portrait of the Integrated Self

The spiritual virtues are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). If the works of the flesh show a fragmented self, the fruit of the Spirit reveals an integrated self.

- *Love* is the healing of disconnection.
- *Joy* is liberation from emotional weight.
- *Peace* is the rest of a mind no longer fighting against itself.
- *Patience* (long-suffering) is emotional maturity.
- *Kindness* and *goodness* restore the ability to see the other person.
- *Faithfulness* is the healing of emotional instability.
- *Gentleness* is power under control.
- *Self-control* reveals victory over impulses that once ruled the soul.

Just as fruit depends on healthy roots, spiritual character grows from a heart rooted in God. Psychology calls this *self-regulation*; psychoanalysis, *psychic integration*; Paul, *life in the Spirit*. It is a return to the originality that God breathed into human beings.

The Daily Tension: Who We Were Conditioned to Be Versus Who We Were Created to Be

The tension between the flesh and the Spirit therefore becomes a daily struggle, not between good and evil, but between who we were conditioned to be and who we were created to be. The flesh is the memory of trauma, unmet needs, and emotional addictions; the Spirit is the memory of Eden, the reminder of our true identity. The flesh screams for us to react; the Spirit invites us to rest. The flesh constantly seeks relief from its pain in a frantic race to fill emptiness with excess; the Spirit produces healing.

The “pattern of this world” is constantly trying to divert us from our goal and distance us from our essence and true identity.

Sin: Missing the Mark

The original meaning of the word *sin* (*hamartía* in Greek) is “to miss the mark.” Just as sin takes us off the path that leads to our purpose, unacknowledged trauma does the same thing, distancing us from our goals and leaving us increasingly fragmented and emotionally divided. It is like a completely disorganized puzzle in which we need to fit every piece together to complete the fragmented image.

Living by the Spirit means allowing God to reorganize the inner chaos, grace to renew distorted perceptions, and truth to penetrate emotionally numb regions. It means no longer struggling to “control oneself” and instead surrendering in order to be transformed. When this transformation occurs, the once-fragmented soul begins to bloom. Where compulsion and fear once existed, the Spirit produces self-control and gentleness; where anger, lack of affection, hurt, and resentment once reigned, welcome and love emerge.

A Psychoanalytic Approach to the Works of the Flesh

"Now the works of the flesh are evident: prostitution, impurity, lewdness, idolatry, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, heresy, envy, murder, drunkenness, gluttony, and things like these, about which I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the Kingdom of God." (Galatians 5:19-21)

Human nature is marked by a complex array of impulses and behaviors, many of which reflect experiences, trauma, and emotional imbalances. When we observe the works of the flesh listed by Paul, we can see that many of them do not arise from a purely rational place, but often as responses to emotional wounds, past trauma, or attempts to fill existential voids.

Prostitution

Prostitution can be seen as an emotional response to sexual trauma or a profound emotional void. From a psychoanalytic perspective, Freud suggests that traumatic childhood experiences, especially those related to sexuality or abandonment, can lead individuals to seek approval or love through sexual behavior as an attempt to fill an unmet emotional need. In prostitution, a person may be seeking a form of control over their own sexuality or trying to relieve the emotional pain associated with the trauma they experienced. One clinical example would be a person who was sexually abused during childhood entering prostitution not

only for financial gain, but also as a way of reclaiming the body, even if in a distorted form, in an attempt to control a part of their identity that was violated.

Impurity

Impurity, often associated with immoral behaviors or thoughts internalized after traumatic experiences, may be a manifestation of an unresolved Oedipus complex or an absence of boundaries imposed by authority figures. Individuals who grow up in dysfunctional environments where moral boundaries are blurred may internalize patterns of impure behavior, as though impurity were a way of coping with inner chaos and the absence of emotional security.

For example, someone raised in a home marked by abuse or neglect may associate impurity with an attempt to fill the gap in love and security left by trauma, unconsciously seeking behaviors that validate them or make them feel “desired” or “important.”

Lewdness

This term refers to excessive and immoderate behavior or desire related to sex, often characterized by indecency, vulgarity, or impurity. Lewdness can be associated with thoughts, words, or actions that reveal an exaggerated sexual fixation or an explicit and uncontrolled pursuit of sexual pleasure.

Lewdness can be understood as an excessive and uncontrollable pursuit of physical pleasure, particularly sexual pleasure, often in response to emotional trauma. This unrestrained pursuit of pleasure may substitute for unmet emotional needs. Lewdness may therefore express an attempt to make up for a lack of affection or fill an inner void.

One example would be a person who, after suffering abandonment or romantic rejection, begins to seek excessive physical pleasure as a way of numbing the pain of loneliness and loss.

Idolatry

In an emotional and psychological sense, idolatry may be an attempt to replace a spiritual or emotional void with something that promises security or control. Nietzsche observed the human tendency to seek something or someone to worship, whether an idea, a person, or an entity, as a way of escaping existential anguish. Idolatry may arise as a reaction to the existential trauma of feeling powerless or disconnected from the world.

For example, a person who grew up in an environment of emotional abandonment may turn to idolatry as a way of filling their inner emptiness, placing a figure or belief above everything else in a search for meaning and security.

Enmities and Strife

Hatred and strife are often symptoms of unresolved trauma, resulting from emotional frustrations and fear of vulnerability. When a person has been wounded by someone important in their life, a feeling of enmity can become a defense against pain.

For example, someone abused by a family member may transfer their hatred to similar figures, creating constant strife and divisions as a way of avoiding emotional exposure and protecting themselves from new wounds.

Jealousy and Anger

Jealousy and anger are often manifestations of emotional insecurity, frequently rooted in traumatic experiences of rejection or abandonment. Freud described envy as a reflection of lack or the fear of losing something or someone important, and anger as a primitive reaction to frustration. Jealousy may be seen as a mechanism of self-affirmation in a person who does not feel sufficiently valuable or secure.

For example, a person who experienced the trauma of rejection or betrayal may feel jealousy in an attempt to maintain control and avoid the pain of being abandoned again.

Quarrels and Dissensions

Quarrels and dissensions may result from interpersonal trauma or unresolved emotional conflicts. Social psychology suggests that disputes often arise when the ego is threatened or when there is a struggle for power or recognition. Such disputes may be fueled by feelings of insecurity or the fear of being rejected or devalued.

For example, someone who grew up in an environment of excessive competition or constant criticism may become involved in fights and dissensions as a way of defending their identity or ideas, without the ability to handle criticism or confrontation maturely.

Heresy

Heresy, understood as a break with religious orthodoxy or a rejection of established norms, may be seen as a response to spiritual or emotional trauma. Heresy often arises as an attempt to find alternative answers to existential pain or unresolved questions

related to faith or morality. Philosophically, Nietzsche criticizes traditional religion as a form of repression, suggesting that the search for individual freedom may lead to the rejection of established norms. A person who has suffered religious or moral abuse may distance themselves from traditional faith as a way of resisting the pain associated with that belief system.

Envy and Murder

Envy and murder, or the desire to eliminate another person, often have roots in profound trauma related to feelings of inferiority and a desire for revenge. Freud discussed how envy may be a projection of our own feelings of inadequacy or frustration. When someone feels incapable of attaining another person's standards or successes, this can generate a destructive desire, leading to symbolic or literal murder.

For example, a person who grew up in a highly competitive environment or experienced neglect may have a strong desire to destroy or harm those who possess what they want as a way of coping with frustration.

Drunkenness and Gluttony

Drunkenness and gluttony are often forms of self-sabotage or emotional escape. Science suggests that substance abuse and compulsive eating are frequently related to emotional voids and the pursuit of immediate pleasure to relieve psychological suffering. These practices may be a way of distancing oneself from trauma or unresolved pain.

For example, someone who has suffered a significant loss may turn to alcohol or food as a way of numbing themselves, escaping their emotions, or filling an emotional void.

Bridge to the Next Chapter

If every work of the flesh reveals an underlying emotional wound, then we must look at what lies behind all these behaviors: *pain*. Pain is not merely a consequence of trauma. It becomes the very engine that drives the functioning of the flesh. In the next chapter, we will investigate how pain operates as a mechanism and motivation, reorganizing the soul and displacing identity from its original axis. Through a real clinical case, we will see how an apparently simple experience can install emotional barriers that accompany a subject throughout life, and how truth presents itself as the path to liberation.

Chapter 8: Pain as Mechanism and Motivation

Where We Are on This Journey

In the previous chapter, we saw how the works of the flesh are actually manifestations of profound emotional wounds, with each dysfunctional behavior concealing untreated pain. Now we must look directly at that pain. What does it do to us? How does it reorganize the soul? Above all, how can an encounter with truth restore to human beings what pain has taken from them?

Trauma is not merely a painful memory from the past. It is an emotional mark that, when not worked through, continues to act in the present. It shapes perceptions, influences choices, and changes the way people interpret themselves, others, and God. It is an experience that exceeds the psyche's capacity for assimilation at the moment it occurs. When it is not symbolized, it remains active in the unconscious, reappearing in repetitive, impulsive, or self-destructive behaviors. Its internal wounds also affect spiritual and relational life.

Trauma and sin are therefore not identical categories, but they often become intertwined when dysregulated emotions lead to dysfunctional choices. In psychological terms, dysregulated emotions are those that exceed an individual's capacity to reflect

before acting. The person reacts instead of responding. Fear may turn into aggression, rejection may generate excessive control, and shame may produce isolation or defensive arrogance.

When trauma is not worked through, it creates distorted lenses. The person begins to interpret neutral situations as threats, criticism as abandonment, and frustration as confirmation of their supposed inadequacy. The practical consequence is a pattern of behavior that tries to protect the pain but ends up intensifying it.

A simple example can be seen in someone who experienced abandonment in childhood and develops excessive jealousy in relationships. Any delay by the person's partner is interpreted as a sign of imminent rejection. The dysregulated emotion, the fear of being left, activates behaviors of surveillance, accusation, and control. Paradoxically, these attitudes wear down the bond and may bring about the very abandonment that was feared. Trauma then creates the scenario that confirms its own narrative.

Psychoanalysis describes this phenomenon as repetition: the subject relives the unresolved pain of the past in new circumstances. The Bible, on the other hand, would show that when the human heart is dominated by fear, it begins to act outside trust and wisdom.

A clear biblical example of this dynamic appears in 1 Samuel, in the story of King Saul. Initially chosen to lead Israel, Saul begins his reign with humility. As he faces external threats and notices David's rising popularity, however, something becomes disorganized within him. Fear of losing power and constant comparison feed a profound insecurity. His identity becomes dependent on public approval. When the women celebrate David's vic-

tories more enthusiastically than his own, a dysregulated emotion, jealousy mixed with insecurity, turns into paranoia. Saul begins to see David not as an ally, but as a rival.

Psychologically, Saul displays signs of a fragile ego, unable to tolerate frustration or share recognition. Spiritually, his trust ceases to rest in God and becomes fixed on preserving the throne. The result is dysfunctional and destructive behavior: repeated attempts to kill David, impulsive decisions in battle, and a progressive distancing from divine guidance. Unacknowledged fear becomes aggression; untreated insecurity becomes persecution. His story illustrates how dysregulated emotions, when not confronted and integrated, can lead to choices that destroy relationships, leadership, and one's own inner balance.

The mindset, the way of seeing the world, must be transformed, not merely disciplined from the outside. True change does not occur only through suppressing behavior, but through inner renewal. In its own language, psychoanalysis states something similar: what has been repressed must be brought into consciousness, emotions must be named, their origins understood, and new meaning assigned to them.

When pain is recognized, it ceases to command decisions silently. We see this in everyday life when people learn to recognize that an outburst of anger is not caused only by the present situation, but by earlier experiences of humiliation. Once they perceive this, they can choose to respond through dialogue rather than aggression. Awareness creates space between emotion and action. That space is the place of freedom.

The Christian faith adds that in this space, the Spirit of God acts by strengthening the capacity for self-control and reconciliation. In their existential dimension, human beings seek meaning.

When trauma dominates, the personal narrative becomes marked by victimhood or extreme self-protection. When there is psychic integration and spiritual openness, the narrative can be rewritten. This does not mean denying the pain, but preventing it from being the only voice directing one's life.

Dysregulated emotions are not a sign of moral failure, but an indication of wounds that need care. Remaining hostage to them, however, is a choice that produces consequences. The human drama lies not only in the suffering experienced, but in the way it is processed. Between the wound and the choice, there is a space for decision. It is in that space that we determine whether trauma will be perpetuated through dysfunctional behaviors or transformed into maturity.

Saul's story warns of the danger of untreated emotions; psychology confirms the internal mechanisms of this fall; Christian faith announces that even amid the soul's disorders, there is a real possibility of restoration when the heart is willing to be confronted and renewed.

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, through prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:6-7)

The "Original Self" That Precedes Pain

In light of human psychology and biblical revelation, the human being is born as a singular, unique, unrepeatable work, bearing an identity that *precedes pain*. Before any wound, there is an "original

self” developing in the mother’s womb, conceived in the heart of God and endowed with meaning, purpose, and vocation. “Let us make mankind in our image,” Genesis says, not as a mass-produced copy, but as a unique expression of an infinite Creator.

Psychology confirms this principle by stating that identity forms around an essential core of the self, a center of authenticity, spontaneity, and truth. When trauma interrupts this development through rejection, abandonment, violence, or neglect, however, that core becomes obscured. Pain does not merely wound: it reorganizes the soul. What was once free action becomes a defensive reaction. The subject ceases to live from who they are and begins to exist from what happened to them.

Jhon’s Story: The Boy, the Egg, the Oil, and His Mother’s Words

To understand how pain operates at the most concrete level of human experience, let us consider a clinical case that perfectly illustrates this mechanism.

It was a quiet afternoon. Jhon, between eight and ten years old, was in the small house where he lived with his mother, a woman with a strong gaze and hands calloused by work, who always made every effort to ensure that her son had what he needed before she left for work. That day, she had prepared everything: rice, beans with the meat he loved so much, and a fresh salad. The table had been lovingly set, as usual.

But the boy wanted one more thing, something simple that would make the meal perfect: a fried egg.

He searched the kitchen but could not find any oil. So, in a small gesture of trust, he went to the home of his neighbor Bia, a friendly woman who was always willing to help. “Bia, do you have a little oil so I can fry an egg?” Smiling, the neighbor promptly replied, “Of course, my son!” She gave him a small cup with about a finger’s depth of oil. The boy fried the egg, prepared his plate, and after savoring the meal, tidied the house, washed the dishes, and waited for his mother to return.

As the end of the day approached, he knew his mother would soon be home. He usually stayed nearby, always attentive and ready to help her with the bags or anything else she needed. But something about that evening seemed different. When he saw his mother coming down the stairs, he noticed Bia at the window looking in her direction with a bitter smile.

“Hi, Déti, don’t forget the oil, okay?” Bia shouted so that everyone on the street could hear. It was as though the world stopped for a moment. The boy then hurried up the stairs and went to open the gate for his mother, suddenly feeling small and vulnerable. His mother’s expression as she approached was implacable. Those eyes, which had once conveyed love and security, now carried silent disapproval, a latent pain that cut him in half. It was not merely her expression. It was the unspoken message, as clear as day.

Once inside the house, she made him sit on the couch. She sat across from him and stared intensely. Silence settled between them until his mother finally spoke. Her voice was firm, almost icy:

"From this day forward, you will not ask anyone for anything. You may have nothing but gravel at home, but even then, you will suck on gravel and your hunger will pass. You will not ask anyone for anything."

Those words, spoken with such certainty, seemed to create a blockage within him, something he would never fully understand. His mother's look and the severity of her words, delivered like a sentence, planted a seed of fear and shame that he would carry for a long time. That moment and that look were engraved in his memory. Over time, he would realize that an emotional barrier had been installed within him that day, a defense mechanism that would unconsciously prevent him from asking for help for years.

He had never realized the impact of that experience until he came to therapy, where for the first time he was able to revisit that memory and understand why it was so difficult for him to open up to others. The painful moment that had seemed insignificant now made complete sense.

Trauma as a State of Constant Alert

Trauma installs a state of constant alert. The emotional system learns that feeling hurts, and the mind builds strategies to survive. Defense mechanisms then emerge: flight, denial, control, and numbness. One no longer chooses life, but begins reacting to threats. Pleasure is sought not as a celebration of existence, but as an anesthetic for pain. It is the movement toward immediate relief as a means of escaping profound suffering.

This is another example of living according to the desires of the flesh, a life governed by impulses, reactions, and desperate attempts at self-protection. It is not merely a matter of moral sin, but a state of disconnection from God, oneself, and others. The wounded heart begins to confuse survival with identity. We begin to create social personas, generating confusion within the personality itself.

Trauma therefore does not merely steal peace. It kidnaps meaning. The person no longer asks, “Who am I?” but “How do I avoid suffering?” In the process, the original image becomes distorted. The spontaneous child becomes a hypervigilant, distrustful, and insecure adult. The being created to love begins to control. The call to freedom is exchanged for the prison of fear.

The Truth Sets Us Free

Both science and Christianity, however, point toward a path of restoration. Healing does not begin by fleeing pain, but through an encounter with truth. Jesus states:

“You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” (John 8:32)

“I am the way, the truth, and the life.” (John 14:6)

Here, truth is not merely an abstract concept. It is a reunion with God, with one’s own story, and with the original self that survived, even though wounded.

In the therapeutic process, when pain is named and welcomed, the subject ceases to be hostage to trauma. The memory that was once alive and invasive becomes an integrated narrative. It no longer governs; it receives new meaning through a new interpretation.

Identity is therefore restored not by eliminating wounds, but by reconnecting with the source. Human beings begin to live no longer as reactors to pain, but as authors of their own stories. Pleasure ceases to be an escape and becomes fruit. Life ceases to be a defense and becomes expression again.

To be who God created us to be does not mean the absence of scars, but the presence of meaning. It means allowing grace to reach the places where pain tried to write the last word and discovering, at last, that pain was never the end.

The Father of Lies Wants to Distort Your Identity Through Doubt

In the biblical narrative, the spiritual adversary's purpose for humanity does not begin with the scandal of explicit evil, but with something far subtler: rupture. His strategy is not first to destroy the body, but to confuse identity; not to annihilate existence, but to empty the meaning out of being.

Since Eden, his action has been the same: sowing doubt where belonging once existed.

"Did God really say that?"

The question does not seek information, but displacement. The target is not the tree, but consciousness. When human beings begin to distrust God's goodness, they also begin to distrust themselves. When vertical trust is broken, identity itself is broken.

The devil does not create; he distorts. He plants doubt. His objective is to distance humanity from the source so that, once disconnected, people will try to satisfy themselves from "cracked cisterns." Instead of children, he produces emotional orphans; instead of vocation, survival; instead of essence, performance. Humanity begins to live not from who it is, but from what it needs to prove itself to be, seeking affirmation and acceptance because doubt concerning divine fatherhood produces exactly this.

From a psychological perspective, this rupture translates into alienation from the self. Individuals lose contact with their authentic core and begin constructing masks in order to be accepted, desired, or feared. The enemy knows that human beings who do not know who they are can be led by any pain, any pleasure, or any empty promise. Once identity has been confused, behavior becomes easy to manipulate.

As Sun Tzu states in *The Art of War*, victory requires one to *divide and conquer*. This is how the adversary has ravaged the lives of many people.

Biblically, Jesus defines this purpose clearly:

"The thief comes only to steal, kill, and destroy." (John 10:10a)

To steal, not things, but truths. To kill, not only bodies, but hopes. To destroy, not only relationships, but destinies. The ultimate objective is not sin itself, but separation: humanity from God, a person from themselves, and one person from another.

By enticing human beings to live through fear, guilt, or immediate pleasure, the adversary imprisons them in a cycle of reaction. A wounded humanity is easier to control than a healed humanity. A soul that lives fleeing from pain cannot hear the call. A fragmented identity cannot sustain purpose.

There is, however, a limit that evil cannot cross: it has no creative power. Even when wounded, the image of God remains. Even when distorted, truth still calls. This is why the enemy's greatest fear is not confessed sin, but restored identity; not acknowledged weakness, but revealed truth, because it is through truth that we are healed.

"I am the way, the truth, and the life." (John 14:6)

Where the adversary works to confuse, God works to reveal. Where one tries to erase name and identity, Jesus calls each person by name. It is in this silent confrontation between falsehood and truth, rupture and reconciliation, that the drama of humanity unfolds: either to live reacting beneath the shadow of loss, or to return to the light of what humanity was always called to be.

Adam, Eve, and the Serpent: The Cycle of Disobedience and the Origin of Defense Mechanisms

The narrative of Adam and Eve's disobedience in Eden is not merely the inaugural account of sin. It is the first mirror in which the human soul can recognize itself. There, at the heart of the garden created for communion, harmony, and fullness, the drama arose that would shape humanity's entire emotional, spiritual, and existential structure.

Eden represents more than a place. It symbolizes the original condition of the human being: integrated, whole, connected to the Creator and to oneself. It was a state in which there was no fear, shame, anxiety, or rupture. Human beings existed in their purest truth: undivided, unwounded, unfragmented.

The Divine Command as Protection, Not Limitation

The divine command,

"You may freely eat from every tree in the garden, but you shall not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil,"

was intended not to limit, but to protect. It was an invitation to absolute trust, a boundary signaling that human life flourishes fully only when it submits to wisdom that transcends its own perception.

By listening to the serpent's voice, however, humanity is confronted with its first inner tension: trusting God or trusting in its own self-determination.

The Seductive Promise and the Fall

The serpent offers a seductive promise:

"You will be like God."

This was not merely about eating a fruit, but about taking on a self-sufficient existence centered on the self and independent of the Creator. In psychoanalysis, we could say that the desire for omnipotence emerges here; in theology, we call it pride; in biblical anthropology, this is the exact point of the fall. Adam and Eve's disobedience represents the moment when human beings try to live without the source that keeps them alive. It is an ontological rupture, the breaking of the axis that sustained their identity.

The Emotional Cycle of the Fall

Then the inevitable happens: consciousness expands, but not as a promise of freedom. It awakens as a wound. The first consequence is *shame*: "they realized that they were naked." Nakedness, once a symbol of transparency and communion, now becomes a cause of painful self-consciousness. What was once natural becomes a reason to hide. Human beings, who once lived oriented toward God and toward one another, now turn inward, measuring, comparing, and hiding themselves. The first psychological symptom of the fall is born there: *internal fragmentation*.

After shame comes fear. When Adam hears God's voice, he hides. Fear emerges as a product of disconnection. It is the emotion of those who no longer perceive themselves to be in communion with the source of life. Guilt and the transfer of responsibility also arise: Adam blames Eve, and Eve blames the serpent. It is the collapse of emotional maturity, the inability to take responsibility for one's own story.

The fall inaugurates the emotional cycle that runs through humanity:

Shame → fear → guilt → flight → accusation.

All of this is born from that act of disobedience, which was in fact a rejection of God, the One who loved them.

The Disintegration of the Self and the False Self

The spiritual consequences are profound. The perfect union between Creator and creature is wounded. Human beings begin to live at a distance from the fullness of God's presence. Spiritual and physical death become part of human experience. The harmony among body, soul, and spirit falls apart. The earth begins to produce thorns. Motherhood becomes painful. Work, once an expression of purpose, also becomes effort and weariness. Marriage, once a perfect partnership, begins to carry tensions of power. Every human relationship is affected because the primary relationship, between humanity and God, was broken.

From a theological perspective, original sin is born there. From a psychological perspective, the disintegration of the self is born. Eden was the place where human beings lived in alignment with their true identity. The fall inaugurates what Winnicott called the *false self*, the mask created to survive the loss of primary security. Gabor Maté would say that primary trauma begins there, with

disconnection from one's own essence. Theology calls this "spiritual death." Philosophy sees the beginning of existential anguish. The human being loses the axis, the center, and meaning. The emptiness we still try to fill today is born.

Grace Amid Rupture

Even so, amid the rupture, the biblical text preserves a promise and maintains God's love for humanity, for He directs His wrath toward the earth and not toward the creature who disobeyed:

"You shall not eat from it; cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat from it all the days of your life." (Genesis 3:17)

God clothes the couple in skins, a symbol of care and also of sacrifice. Here the first shadow of grace appears: even though fallen, they are not abandoned. Even though expelled from Eden, they are not forgotten. The narrative points to the future: from the woman's offspring would come the One who would crush the serpent. The fall explains our pain, but it also prepares the way for our restoration.

Adam and Eve's disobedience is therefore not only the origin of sin in humanity. It is the origin of our emotional wounds, our fears, our sense of inadequacy, and our eternal search for something that always seems to be missing. The fall is the story of loss, but also the prelude to redemption. While humanity lives under the consequences of a lost Eden, the divine invitation still echoes: return to the Creator, allow grace to restore what was fragmented, and rediscover the identity given to us at the beginning, the identity of children made in the image and likeness of God.

Bridge to the Next Chapter

If pain is the engine that drives the behaviors of the flesh, as we have seen throughout this chapter, we must now look at an even deeper dimension: pain that did not begin with us. Many of the wounds we carry were inherited, transmitted from generation to generation through emotional, cultural, and even biological mechanisms that science and Scripture help us understand. In the next chapter, we will explore generational trauma and epigenetics, revealing how patterns of suffering travel through family lineages and how these cycles can be broken.

Chapter 9: Generational Trauma and Epigenetics

Where We Are on This Journey

In the previous chapters, we explored how trauma forms in childhood, how limiting beliefs take root in the unconscious, and how pain, when left unprocessed, becomes the driving force behind dysfunctional behavior. Now we move into an even deeper dimension: the transmission of trauma across generations. Not all the pain we carry began with us. Many of the most persistent wounds were inherited, passed down from parents to children through emotional, cultural, and even biological mechanisms. In this chapter, we will examine how generational trauma forms, how epigenetics sustains it, and how Scripture illuminates both the problem and the path to freedom.

Generational trauma, also called intergenerational or transgenerational trauma, refers to the transmission of traumatic experiences from one generation to another through psychological, relational, sociocultural, and, more recently, epigenetic pathways. Although each generation lives under its own historical circumstances, the emotional marks left by wars, loss, rejection, violence,

or deprivation do not simply disappear with time. They tend to reorganize themselves into patterns of behavior, beliefs, fears, and ways of relating that span decades, often silently.

For a long time, trauma was believed to be a strictly individual phenomenon, limited to the direct experience of the person who lived through it. Contemporary research, however, has broadened this understanding. Studies conducted by Rachel Yehuda and colleagues in 2014 examined descendants of Holocaust survivors and identified changes in neuroendocrine systems linked to stress regulation, especially the HPA axis. These findings suggest that intensely traumatic experiences can leave biological marks that influence how later generations respond to stress. This is not genetic determinism, but a complex interaction among the emotional environment, the body, and heredity.

Earlier studies using animal models, such as those conducted by Michael Meaney, demonstrated that parental care marked by neglect or stress can alter patterns of gene expression related to fear and anxiety responses. These effects, in turn, can extend to subsequent generations. Biology, therefore, does not operate in isolation. It interacts with the emotional environment. The way parents regulate their emotions influences not only the emotional climate of the home but also their children's physiological development.

The intergenerational transmission of trauma, however, is not limited to biology. It also occurs through narratives, silences, and repeated behaviors. In postwar settings, for example, researchers have observed that descendants of people who lived through armed conflict carry diffuse fears, hypervigilance, or persistent feelings of threat even though they did not experience those

events directly. Something similar occurs in communities marked by slavery, dictatorships, or extreme poverty. Collective suffering leaves traces in the subjectivity of those born afterward.

At this point, the theory of collective memory developed by Maurice Halbwachs offers an important interpretive key. From this perspective, social groups keep the experience of pain alive through stories that are told, preserved rituals, everyday practices, and even meaningful silences. Memory is not merely individual. It is shared and continually reconstructed. Jeffrey Alexander expands this understanding through the concept of cultural trauma, proposing that certain events become part of the identity of entire communities, shaping expectations, fears, and survival strategies. Thus, even those who did not experience an event directly may inherit its emotional consequences.

Within the family, this inheritance is even more subtle. Children are born into an environment already structured by beliefs, tensions, and emotional patterns that existed before they did. Parents who have not been able to give healthy meaning to their own wounds often try to protect their children from pain, yet, driven by unresolved fears, they end up reproducing defensive behaviors. A father who experienced abandonment may become excessively controlling. A mother who grew up in a humiliating environment may become hypersensitive to criticism. Although motivated by a desire to protect, these attitudes can transmit anxiety, insecurity, or rigidity to later generations.

Mark Wolynn explores precisely this unconscious dimension of emotional inheritance. He argues that many patterns of suffering did not begin with us, but with old traumas that remain active in the family story. Seemingly inexplicable anxiety, compulsive behavior, or even certain physical symptoms may be related to unresolved experiences of parents, grandparents, or great-grandpar-

ents. This transmission does not always occur through explicit accounts. It often takes place through the family's emotional climate, automatic reactions to certain situations, and fears that were never put into words.

Repetition then becomes a cycle. What has not been processed returns in new forms. When these dynamics remain unconscious, they tend to perpetuate themselves. Recognizing this process, however, is the first step toward transforming it. Awareness breaks the automatic pattern. By identifying family patterns, a person can stop merely reproducing them and begin to reinterpret them. Wolynn suggests that healing involves allowing the pain of the past to be felt and welcomed rather than repressed. Empathy, forgiveness, and reconciliation with one's own story become instruments of inner reorganization.

Care must be taken, however, to keep an understanding of traumatic inheritance from becoming a justification for personal irresponsibility. Although we do not choose the context into which we are born, throughout life we choose how to respond to it. A pattern may indeed precede us, but we are not condemned to perpetuate it. When we attribute all our behavior to the wounds of our ancestors, we risk absolving ourselves of responsibility for our own decisions. This mechanism gives rise to the adult with a victim mentality, someone who transfers the weight of their choices to others and refuses to take ownership of their own story.

The inheritance of trauma, therefore, should be neither denied nor treated as absolute. It must be understood. We are placed within narratives we did not write, but we have the possibility of rewriting them. Historical and emotional awareness is not meant to feed resentment, but to foster maturity. By recognizing that we carry marks from earlier generations, we deepen our understanding of ourselves. By taking responsibility for our attitudes, we

interrupt cycles of repetition. The intergenerational transmission of trauma thus reveals a complex truth about the human condition: we are both continuity and the possibility of rupture. We inherit stories, but we are not condemned to repeat them. When neglected, emotional scars tend to echo into the future. When recognized and processed, they can become a point of transformation. The challenge is not to deny the past, but to integrate it consciously so that the inheritance we receive becomes not only a memory of pain, but also an opportunity for reconstruction.

A Biblical View of Generational Trauma

The idea that negative experiences can cross generations appears not only in contemporary psychology but also in biblical literature. Although the Bible does not use the term “generational trauma,” it describes in various narratives and teachings the perpetuation of emotional, spiritual, and behavioral patterns along family lines.

The Iniquity of the Fathers Visited upon the Children

One of the texts most often cited in this discussion is Exodus 20:5, in which God speaks of *“visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation.”* This passage is not about automatic punishment or spiritual determinism. Rather, it expresses an ethical and relational principle: human choices generate consequences that extend through family history. This perspective illustrates how patterns of sin, violence, and hardness of heart can have cumulative effects on descendants.

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: The Pattern of Deception

A significant group of narratives illustrates the repetition of conflict and dysfunction across generations. The story of the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, offers fertile ground for analysis. One recurring pattern is deception. Abraham withholds information about Sarah (Genesis 12:10-20), Isaac repeats the behavior regarding Rebekah (Genesis 26:7-11), and it is later reproduced more intensely in the dynamic between Jacob and Esau (Genesis 27). The repetition of these experiences suggests that emotional structures and behaviors are learned, internalized, and replicated.

The Cycle of Favoritism

Another relevant example is the cycle of favoritism. Isaac favors Esau, while Rebekah favors Jacob (Genesis 25:28). Jacob repeats the pattern by favoring Joseph (Genesis 37:3), producing rivalry, rejection, and violence among brothers. In light of contemporary family psychology, these episodes can be analyzed as clear manifestations of *dysfunctional emotional inheritances*.

The “Futile Way of Life” Inherited from the Fathers

The New Testament reinforces personal responsibility while also recognizing the influence of family context. In 1 Peter 1:18, we read of the “*futile way of life handed down to you from your fathers*,” indicating that patterns of life not only repeat themselves but must also be brought to awareness and transformed. Here, once again, it is worth recalling the theme that forms the backbone of this work: “*Do not conform to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind*” (Romans 12:2). This may be interpreted as a call to consciously break with inherited patterns.

A New Creation: Reconfiguring Identity

Paul's concept of a "*new creation*" in 2 Corinthians 5:17 can be understood as the possibility of reconfiguring identity. Although it does not erase the marks of the past, it points toward a continuing process of reinterpretation and maturation. These texts do not deny the existence of generational effects, but affirm that spiritual transformation creates ways to deal with them in a healthy manner. Scripture establishes a balanced tension between influence and responsibility. Ezekiel 18:20 declares that "*the son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son,*" preventing any deterministic interpretation of family inheritances. The central message is that although patterns repeat, each individual is called to take responsibility for their own story, reinterpret it, and build new paths.

The key to healing lies in breaking cycles of repetition and understanding that we are not passive victims of our ancestors' pain, but have the power to create new stories for our lives. True freedom comes when we face inherited trauma and transform it into an opportunity for healing and growth.

When we understand that trauma can cross generations through emotional, cultural, or epigenetic mechanisms, we realize that much of the pain we feel did not begin with us. The good news, however, is that just as patterns can be transmitted, they can also be interrupted. In the next chapter, we will examine the behavioral consequences of these emotional wounds, mapping how trauma translates into visible patterns that perpetuate suffering and how recognizing them is the first step toward breaking them.

Chapter 10: Behavioral Consequences of Emotional Wounds

Throughout the previous chapters, we explored how trauma forms in childhood, how limiting beliefs take root in the unconscious, and how dysfunctional patterns are transmitted across generations. We have now reached the point at which these wounds cease to be merely internal marks and begin to manifest concretely in everyday life. This chapter presents the main behavioral consequences of emotional trauma: the ways childhood pain translates into patterns of relationships, work, self-perception, and social interaction in adult life.

Dissociation: When the Mind Divides Itself to Survive

The consequences of emotional trauma are as varied as they are profound. A child who has experienced fear, abandonment, rejection, or violence feels an emotional acceleration in the body that will later be recognized as anxiety, insecurity, hypervigilance, or a constant sense of threat. In order to survive, the mind disconnects from parts of itself, producing what is known as internal

fragmentation, which Pierre Janet called *dissociation*. This phenomenon may manifest as forgetfulness, emotional numbness, difficulty feeling pleasure, or a kind of half-lived life in which everything is registered from a distance.

Janet understood dissociation not as an obscure mystery of the mind, but as a profoundly human response to excessive pain. In his view, when an experience exceeds the psyche's capacity for integration, consciousness does not break. It reorganizes itself in order to survive. Trauma does not take hold solely because of a violent event, but because of the subject's inability to keep their psychic functions united in the face of that event. Emotions, memories, bodily sensations, and thoughts stop communicating with one another. Whatever cannot be sustained by the primary consciousness is separated and begins to exist at the margins, as an unintegrated fragment of experience.

What was experienced as a whole becomes fragmented. Trauma does not disappear. It hides in deep layers and reappears as symptoms, memory lapses, inexplicable bodily sensations, or sudden emotional states. Unlike repression, which pushes content into the unconscious, dissociation keeps it active but disconnected. These experiences continue to exist, but outside the field of personal narrative. This is why, for Janet, traumatized people do not "remember" the trauma. They relive it without knowing that they are reliving it.

Dissociation, therefore, is not weakness, but an extreme solution in the face of the unbearable. When reality threatens to destroy the continuity of the self, the mind chooses to divide the experience in order to preserve psychic life.

A Practical Example

Imagine a child growing up in a home where yelling and humiliation are frequent. During one such episode, the adult shouts, the voice rises, and the environment becomes threatening. The child's body feels fear, but there is nowhere to run. The child cannot defend themselves or fully understand what is happening. Then something silent happens inside.

While the body remains there, sitting and staring at the floor, the mind moves away. The child begins to stare at a fixed point, sounds grow distant, and time seems to slow down. Later, when asked what happened, the child replies, "I don't really remember," or "It felt like a dream."

The event occurred and the body was present, but the experience was not integrated into consciousness. Emotion, memory, and perception separated in order to protect the psyche from an excess of pain.

In adult life, this same person may emotionally "shut down" during conflict, feel their body go numb in stressful situations, notice memory lapses during moments of intense emotion, or hear someone speaking and suddenly fail to register what was said. This is not distraction. It is the same old mechanism being activated.

Dissociation does not erase trauma. It puts it on hold. It is an automatic pause when feeling threatens to hurt too much. It was an effective solution in childhood, when there was no choice. In adult life, however, it can become an obstacle to presence and intimacy until the pain finally finds a safe place in which it can be felt and integrated.

Patterns the Wounded Child Carries into Adult Life

When this child becomes an adult, they carry crystallized emotional patterns that manifest in relationships, in the way they work and love, in the way they deal with conflict, and in how they perceive their own worth. Trust, the foundation of every healthy bond, becomes an almost existential challenge. Relationships that should offer refuge become threatening territory. Affection is interpreted cautiously, love fearfully, and closeness suspiciously. Traumatized adults want to be close, but they are afraid. They need affection, but protect themselves from it. They love deeply, but fear rejection.

The Five Emotional Wounds and Their Manifestations

The Wound of Injustice

Injustice experienced in childhood can give rise to a profound feeling of inadequacy or suppressed anger. The child who suffers injustice believes that the world is unsafe and that their needs do not matter. In adult life, this person may become an escapist, someone who prefers silence, anonymity, and invisibility. This adult avoids responsibilities not out of laziness, but because the world still feels threatening, laden with risks and expectations that seem impossible to bear. They flee conflict, avoid the spotlight, and withdraw at the slightest sign of tension. Their mask is absence: disappearing is the way they have found to protect themselves.

The Wound of Abandonment

The wound of abandonment manifests in equally striking ways. A child who felt left behind, whether through actual abandonment or an emotional interpretation of absence, grows up with a hole in their chest and a feeling that at any moment they will be left again. In adult life, this translates into emotional dependence, an intense fear of loss, excessive attachment, jealousy, and a constant need for validation and approval. Even when loved, the abandoned adult fears being left. Even when safe, they feel insecure. Even when welcomed, they feel cold. Their search for love is actually a search to repair the original pain.

The Wound of Rejection

Of all emotional wounds, rejection is one of the most devastating because it silently erodes identity and infantilizes the emotions, keeping the individual trapped in emotional states characteristic of childhood. When someone is rejected during their most vulnerable stage, they learn to believe that they are unworthy of love, that they are inadequate, and that something within them must be reshaped in order to fit into the world. From this painful belief, they begin to adopt emotional and behavioral measures that function as protection strategies. To avoid reliving the primary pain of being left, diminished, or ignored, the person begins to bargain away their principles, adapt beyond what is healthy, sacrifice their essence, and distance themselves from their own inner truth. In the name of being accepted, they are willing to pay the price the world demands, even if that price is far too high: giving up who they are.

Over time, this continual renunciation of one's own identity exacts an even deeper cost. An existential crisis emerges, a silent emptiness that sets in when the person no longer knows who they are. Throughout life, they have shaped so many versions of themselves in order to be accepted that they have lost touch with their own voice. They no longer know their purpose, recognize their desires, or understand their needs. This disconnection from their own essence can evolve into a depressive state marked by diffuse sadness, discouragement, apathy, and difficulty finding meaning in life. What began as an emotional wound that was never faced becomes an avalanche: a growing accumulation of pain that, when neglected, multiplies in intensity and depth.

Rejection is often accompanied by fear and guilt. These feelings manifest in toxic relationships, abusive bonds, cold and distant relationships, or even the complete absence of relationships. They also appear in a constant need for approval, a compulsive effort to please, and difficulty setting boundaries, saying no, and taking a stand in the world.

The Wound of Humiliation

The wound of humiliation devastates self-esteem. Humiliated children grow up believing that they have no value at all. In adult life, they may develop self-deprecating behavior, difficulty taking a stand, fear of speaking, fear of making mistakes, chronic submission, and a constant sense of shame. Their masks are generally invisibility or aggressive self-defense, so that no one will notice their vulnerability. Humiliation creates people who hide from themselves. Unconsciously, a person who was humiliated in childhood tends to become a rigid and perfectionistic adult, constantly striving to perform, achieve, and deliver with the utmost perfection in order to be accepted, seen, or recognized.

The Wound of Betrayal

Betrayal leads an adult to establish competitive relationships in which their love language is expressed through acts of service. This individual is always doing things and serving others in search of a sense of usefulness, giving excessively for the other person's well-being. A child who was betrayed, whether through broken promises or trusted figures who failed them, learns that the world is unpredictable, that people do not do what they say, and that trust is risky. In adult life, this can translate into a need for control, jealousy, difficulty delegating, and a need always to be in charge. Their mask is that of the controller. They try to hold the world together so that they will not relive the pain of being left helpless.

Low Self-Esteem: The Wound That Comes from Within

Low self-esteem is essentially the inability to love oneself unconditionally. A child who feels rejected or abandoned internalizes the belief that the problem lies within them, as though they were unworthy of love or belonging. The child mistakenly concludes that their lack of worth caused the abandonment. This is how the false belief of *not deserving* is born, and it becomes the foundation of many future behaviors.

It is important to understand that low self-esteem comes from the inside out, not from the outside in, as many people think. It is related to the pain of rejection a person has suffered, not to their outward appearance. Today we see a recurring pursuit of cosmetic

procedures in an effort to gain acceptance from an emotionally unhealthy society that believes self-esteem depends on the acceptance of a physical appearance standardized by culture.

Difficulty Concentrating and Hypervigilance

Difficulty concentrating, which is very common among traumatized children, contributes to poor school performance. The state of hypervigilance, caused by a nervous system accustomed to detecting threats, constantly activates fight-or-flight mode. This drains cognitive resources essential to learning, impairing reasoning, memory, and the ability to stay focused. The consequences spread like ripples: poor academic performance, a feeling of incapacity, a belief in one's inferiority, and, later, professional and relational effects.

The person always feels that they fall short, that they are inadequate, that they are below expectations. They carry a constant sense that they must prove their worth and that they are never good enough. This drives them to seek approval compulsively, as if every compliment were a breath and every criticism were suffocation.

Comparison and the Inability to Recognize One's Own Qualities

Constantly comparing oneself with others, always negatively, becomes a painful routine. The person sees in others what they believe is missing in themselves. They feel envy not because they want what someone else has, but because they despair at being unable to become what they imagine they should be.

Recognizing their own qualities becomes an enormous challenge. Even real, tangible achievements are minimized, emptied of meaning, and disqualified. Fear of being rejected again creates a continual state of alert and produces intense anxiety. The person worries excessively about what others think, imagines expectations that do not exist, interprets neutral looks as disapproval, and lives in anticipation of rejections that have not even occurred. A simple criticism, even a constructive one, is felt as a personal attack, not because of moral weakness, but because of the emotional hypersensitivity structured by the primary pain of rejection.

Hypersensitivity and Intolerance of Frustration

This hypersensitivity makes frustration extremely difficult to manage. The slightest setback activates old fears. Any difference of opinion sounds like a threat. Someone else's "no" echoes as abandonment. Frustration becomes almost unbearable because it is not merely the discomfort of the present. It is the echo of every rejection experienced in childhood.

Impostor Syndrome: The Conflict Between Identity and Recognition

A feeling of inadequacy is another constant companion of the wounded adult. Rejected people live in fear that others will discover their "hidden flaws," those aspects of themselves they believe are unacceptable. They feel ashamed of who they are, of their story, the paths they have taken, and the choices they have made, as though they always owed an explanation and were always fail-

ing in some invisible way. Shame about who they are becomes a persistent shadow, shaping their posture, speech, and relationships.

Impostor syndrome is not a lack of competence, but a silent conflict between identity and recognition. It arises when a person achieves, advances, and receives validation but remains internally unable to give themselves permission to occupy the place they have earned.

The Dissociation Between Doing and Being

Within this psychological dynamic, the subject may see the results but does not integrate them into a sense of deserving. Success does not become part of identity. It remains provisional, fragile, and almost accidental. A persistent feeling then arises: “They are overestimating me,” or “At some point they will find out that I am not all that.”

Many people grew up in environments where worth was conditioned on performance, perfection, or approval. Love came only after they got things right. Error came to signify not merely failure, but the threat of rejection. The subject learns to do a great deal, but to be very little. The person recognizes that they are efficient, dedicated, and competent at what they do, but does not perceive themselves as valuable for who they are. Merit is attributed to luck, excessive effort, or external factors, never to their own ability.

Impostor syndrome also operates as a protective mechanism. By feeling like a “fraud,” the individual tries to guard against a future fall. If failure comes, it confirms the old belief. If success comes, it only increases the pressure. The person lives in a constant state of vigilance in which resting seems dangerous.

Emotionally, this produces chronic anxiety, fear of exposure, and exhaustion. The person works harder than necessary, studies more than required, and rarely celebrates achievements. External recognition brings no relief, only the feeling that there is now more to lose.

The Wounded Child Behind the Mask

Behind all of this is a wounded child desperately trying not to be hurt again. A child who learned to make themselves smaller in order to fit. Who learned to remain silent so as not to bother anyone. Who learned to please so as not to be left. Rejection does not merely mark the soul. It distorts reality. It does not merely wound. It fragments. The rejected adult often lives in reaction to pain that is no longer current, but remains alive within their emotional memory.

Insecurity: The Direct Child of Rejection

Insecurity is a profound emotional deficiency rooted in the process of traumatization. It does not arise from nowhere or establish itself suddenly. It is a direct child of rejection, fed by emotional deprivation and the absence of sustained emotional care. When children do not feel wanted, welcomed, or important during their most vulnerable stage, they grow up with the persistent feeling that they are always on the margins, always falling short, and always on the verge of losing their connection with another person. An inner state of alert thus forms, as though the bond were never fully secure.

In this sense, insecurity is not a simple passing fear, but a psychic scar. It silently records that love was unstable, presence was uncertain, and affection could not be trusted. Every emotional

absence and every answer that never came teaches the subject that existing as they are may not be enough to ensure that someone stays. Built slowly over the course of experience, insecurity becomes consolidated when the individual implicitly learns that it is unsafe to be who they are.

Psychologically, it manifests when confidence in one's own worth is weakened and the axis of identity shifts outward. The person then becomes excessively dependent on external validation in order to feel real, accepted, and included. Insecurity therefore defines not only how someone feels, but how they live, guiding choices, relationships, and behavior. It is not a weakness of character, but an emotional memory: the attempt to protect oneself in a world where, at some point, loving and being loved seemed far too uncertain.

The Wound of Sexual Abuse

The experience of sexual abuse leaves a deep, silent, and persistent mark on the human psyche. This kind of violence does not operate merely as an isolated event in time, but as a structural rupture in how the subject comes to feel, think, and relate to themselves and to the world.

From a psychic perspective, sexual abuse invades a territory that should be protected: bodily and emotional intimacy. This invasion usually occurs at a time of vulnerability, often during childhood or adolescence, when the psychic structure is still being formed. As a result, the trauma is not merely remembered. It is incorporated. The body begins to carry a memory that predates language, and thought organizes itself around the constant attempt to prevent the pain from recurring. A person who has suffered abuse

tends to develop a fragmented perception of themselves. Frequently, a diffuse sense of guilt or shame has no logical cause but takes root as an inner truth.

This occurs because, in the face of trauma, the mind seeks an explanation that will make the unbearable at least minimally understandable. The unconscious conclusion is often, "There is something wrong with me." This belief begins to structure thought, influencing choices, expectations, and how the subject positions themselves in relationships.

In practice, this structure may manifest in several ways. For example, an abused child who receives no support may learn to silence their emotions as a way of surviving. In adult life, this inner silence translates into difficulty expressing needs, fear of conflict, or a constant sense of invisibility. Another person may develop hypervigilance. The world is perceived as dangerous and any emotional closeness is felt as a threat. Thought then organizes itself around the need to control the environment, another person, or one's own body in order to prevent new intrusions.

In behavior, there is often an oscillation between two poles: avoidance and repetition. Some individuals avoid intimate bonds and maintain superficial or distant relationships because closeness reactivates emotional memories of the trauma. Others, paradoxically, may repeatedly become involved in abusive or unequal relationships. This is not a conscious choice, but an unconscious attempt to give a different ending to an experience that was never psychically processed.

The consequences become even more evident within relational bonds. Trust, a fundamental element in every human relationship, was broken at its origin. Another person may therefore be seen simultaneously as an object of desire and a source of danger. This

creates relationships marked by ambivalence: an intense need for affection accompanied by fear of abandonment, excessive jealousy, emotional dependence, or, at the opposite extreme, emotional coldness and isolation. The body often becomes a stage for conflict as well, and dissociation or difficulties experiencing sexuality may arise.

From a humanistic perspective, it is essential to recognize that these manifestations do not define the person. They reveal strategies of psychic survival. Suffering is not a sign of weakness, but of adaptation to a reality that exceeded the emotional resources available at that point in life. When there is space for listening, acceptance, and symbolic processing, trauma can be integrated into the subject's story without continuing to govern their existence.

Understanding the consequences of sexual abuse in the human psyche therefore requires looking beyond the traumatic event and considering how it reorganizes the inner world. Thoughts, emotions, and behaviors begin to revolve around protection from the original pain. The possibility of transformation arises when the subject, in a safe environment, can give new meaning to their experience, rebuild their self-esteem, and relearn how to establish bonds in which respect and dignity replace violence. In this process, the pain is not erased, but ceases to be the silent center that determines who the person believes themselves to be.

The Search for Immediate Gratification

Those who carry this emotional emptiness from childhood often seek to satisfy it immediately, instinctively, and unconsciously. They frequently take questionable paths: repetitive relationships and fragile or superficial bonds. They move in and out of romantic

relationships as though seeking in another person what they lacked from an early age: affection, healthy touch, attention, respect, acceptance, validation, and recognition. Insecure people expect another person to fulfill the emotional role their caregivers failed to fulfill. By placing so much weight on the relationship, they create dependence, anxiety, fear, and fragility.

A lack of affection is one of the most devastating factors in the formation of insecurity. Dysfunctional environments without love, protection, or validation shape children who grow up believing that they are unimportant. The absence of a loving gaze, a comforting touch, and words that affirm the child's worth produces an emotionally infantilized adult burdened by feelings of inadequacy.

A child conceived in an unwanted pregnancy absorbs, even without words, the feeling of not having been expected. Children rejected because they were not born the sex their parents wanted carry within themselves the belief that they disappointed their parents even before they fully came into existence. Unplanned children may grow up feeling that they were a burden.

Parents who are excessively busy or focused only on their own interests, even when they do not intend to cause harm, create homes in which children learn that their emotions do not matter. Authoritarian or overly demanding parents stifle spontaneity and substitute severity for affection. Severe hostility after a mistake produces profound shame. A lack of comfort in moments of frustration teaches children that the world cannot bear their pain. All of these are silent forms of emotional abandonment.

Self-Destructive Behaviors

Self-destructive behaviors are closely associated with the feeling of rejection caused by trauma. Substance addictions, self-harm, physical self-punishment, and other forms of violence against oneself are often desperate attempts to relieve emotional pain that has become more unbearable than physical pain. Physical pain then functions as a diversion, an alternative focus that momentarily silences psychic suffering. This is a rudimentary yet powerful defense mechanism: a momentary escape from what the mind still cannot name, process, or endure.

Aggressiveness: The Cry of the Soul

Aggressiveness acts as an emotional shield that protects, although dysfunctionally, the most vulnerable part of the subject. Anger, so often present, does not always have a conscious explanation. It emerges as a cry from the body trying to communicate what the soul was never able to express. At a certain point, it is no longer clear whether the individual screams because they are angry or provokes anger so that they may finally have the right to scream. This scream is actually a silent attempt to say, “I exist. Look at me.”

Infantilized Behavior: The Adult Who Still Reacts Like a Child

The insecure adult is not weak, but wounded. They are not distrustful by choice. They are distrustful for survival. Their emotions are fragmented, oscillating between an intense search for

affection and an equally intense fear of losing that affection. They relate dysfunctionally not because they want to make things complicated, but because they never learned healthy models.

At work, insecurity makes them doubt their own worth, fear criticism, and live under constant internal pressure. Within the family, they fear that they are not good enough. In marriage, they fear being abandoned, betrayed, or replaced. In every context, insecurity is always present as an unconscious whisper.

This adult often acts like someone who still needs protection. They may avoid conflict not because they are naturally peaceful, but because they learned early that disagreement brings loss. At other times, they react to minor situations with disproportionate intensity because the body recognizes danger where the adult mind sees only an annoyance.

In relationships, they may oscillate between the fear of abandonment and the fear of getting too close. They draw near in search of safety but pull away to avoid being hurt. They love cautiously, test affection, and need constant reassurance. Deep down, they carry the childhood questions and pleas that were never answered: “Will I be chosen? I want to be seen. I want to be accepted,” among other concerns.

In stressful situations, it is common for them to shut down emotionally or feel an emptiness that is difficult to explain. Sometimes the body is present but the mind moves away, as it did in childhood when there was no way out. At other times, sadness or anger arises without warning, like echoes of something old that has not yet found words.

These behaviors do not reveal weakness, but adaptation. They were strategies created when the child needed to survive in an environment that did not offer enough security. The problem is not

that they were learned, but that the person continues to live by them when they are no longer necessary. Everything learned in order to survive can be transformed in order to live.

The Two Extremes: Excessive Attachment and Absolute Defenses

In childhood, the absence of love, acceptance, affection, protection, and emotional validation shapes a highly dysfunctional adult. Children who were not seen grow up trying to be noticed. Those who were not valued grow up seeking acceptance. Those who were not protected grow up with a constant fear of losing any bond that offers them a sense of belonging.

At the first extreme is *excessive attachment*: a consuming neediness, an emotional dependence that turns the other person into a kind of emotional savior. The person demands constant attention, sees their partner as the only possible source of validation, and smothers the relationship with an insatiable need to be loved. When expectations are not met, as in most cases they will not be fully met, the cycle of rejection repeats itself: despair, fear, pain, abandonment. It is like reliving childhood again and again, even within an adult body.

At the second extreme is *absolute defense*: the inability to establish deep connections. A lack of trust prevents any emotional surrender. Relationships become shallow, brief, and temporary. The person lives in hypervigilance, always expecting the worst and always ready to flee at the slightest sign of closeness. They avoid bonds for fear of pain, the same pain they once felt when they did not yet have the maturity to bear it.

Despite everything, trauma does not define destiny. It shapes, influences, and traces the contours, but does not determine the end of the story. When people begin to recognize their wounds, understand their masks, and name their pain, something profoundly transformative begins to happen. Awareness illuminates what was in shadow. Words rescue what was silent. Understanding welcomes what was forgotten. Little by little, people begin to rewrite their own inner narrative, no longer guided by trauma, but by the possibility of healing.

It is this possibility of healing that leads us into the next chapter: the path of reconnection with the self, the transformation of habits, and the courageous confrontation of the pain that governed life in silence for so long.

Chapter 11: Reconnection, Habits, and Confrontation

In the previous chapters, we traced the map of emotional wounds and their behavioral consequences. We saw how trauma takes hold, how it disguises itself as patterns, and how it governs adult life through memories beyond the reach of consciousness. Now we have reached a decisive point in the journey: the moment when people stop merely understanding their pain and actively begin to reconnect with themselves, transform their habits, and confront what has remained in the shadows for so long.

The Importance of the Here and Now

The present moment is the ground on which human experience is registered and acquires meaning. It is today, in the here and now, that the brain and soul determine whether what passes through our existence will be integrated as memory or crystallized as trauma. Neuroscience indicates that trauma is defined not by the event itself, but by how it is experienced, interpreted, and emotionally regulated at the moment it occurs. When individuals have the internal and relational resources to process pain in the present, the experience acquires contours, a place in time, and a narrative

shaped by less harmful interpretations. When these resources fail, however, the experience remains open and unresolved, becoming a psychic wound.

The present, therefore, is not only a point in time, but a space of choice, awareness, and presence. It is where pain can be named, limits can be recognized, and suffering can be accompanied rather than silenced. Trauma is born when the present becomes unbearable and must be frozen, set apart from healthy memory. Every present moment in life thus carries a silent dichotomy within it: it will either become a scar that tells a story of survival or an open wound that insists on bleeding outside of time, shaping today's behavior.

Caring for the present therefore becomes a profoundly therapeutic and spiritual act. It is today that repetitions are interrupted, narratives restored, and a tomorrow less governed by fear is built. The present does not erase the past, but determines how it will be remembered. Here pain finds words, wounds find care, and suffering finds the possibility of not becoming destiny.

The *present moment* has an often underestimated transformative power when it comes to healing emotional trauma and the wounds we carry from the past. Our natural tendency is to seek answers for our anguish and pain in what has already happened, constantly recalling what hurt us or shaped our view of the world. Yet just as a crumpled sheet of paper finds its smoothness again when unfolded, the present is the key to unfolding the marks left by the emotional scars of the past.

Imagine that our emotional wounds are like a river that has suffered erosion and interruptions over time, forming blockages and turbulence. These obstacles represent unresolved traumas, fears from the past, and distorted memories that insist on return-

ing throughout our journey. The present can therefore be compared to a new current that, over time, removes the obstacles, smooths the stones, and creates flow and clarity.

Although past experiences shape our identity, they do not have to define our destiny. Therapeutic work seeks to give new meaning to the past by helping individuals become aware of their emotional wounds while finding ways to live more healthily and with greater balance in the present. What truly heals is the ability to recognize pain without allowing oneself to be imprisoned by it, enabling a person to reinvent themselves and look toward the future from a new perspective.

Emotional healing in the present does not occur through denial or ignorance of past experiences, but through their mature and conscious *acceptance and processing*. When we confront our traumas, we can understand that we are no longer in the moment when the pain occurred. For example, when revisiting a childhood trauma, we can recognize that *we are adults now*, capable of making decisions and *protecting ourselves emotionally*, something that was not possible at the time of the event.

Literature often teaches us about the power of the present in healing. In many stories, characters pass through journeys of suffering, but it is in the present moment, when they confront their fears or reconcile themselves with what was lost, that they find true transformation. These accounts serve as mirrors for our own lives, reminding us that it is in the *here and now* that we can choose how to respond to the pain imposed on us.

In simpler terms, think of the present as the *fertile ground* in which the seed of healing can be planted. The pain of the past may be a shadow that accompanies us, but by sowing *mindfulness, self-care, and self-compassion* in the present, we can cultivate a healthier

emotional future. Every day is a new opportunity to decide not to be governed by what happened, but instead to *rebuild our emotional responses* and *give new meaning to our wounds*, transforming them into learning and growth.

The past has already passed, but the power of transformation is in our hands, in the present.

Thought as a Starting Point

"For as he thinks in his heart, so is he." (Proverbs 23:7)

When we relate this proverb to the concept of the here and now, we can understand the importance of thoughts and the way human behavior is constructed from what a person thinks. The chain is clear and powerful:

Thought generates feeling, which generates action, which generates habit, which generates character, which generates destiny.

Stephen Covey, Frank Outlaw, and various modern thinkers summarized this formative process in a logical chain:

- **Thought generates Feeling, which generates Action:** Our thoughts shape our emotions, and those emotions determine how we act.
- **Action generates Habit:** Repeated actions form habits.
- **Habit generates Character:** Consistent habits shape character.

- **Character generates Destiny:** Consistent choices and the resulting character define the course of life.

These authors did not create something new. They merely organized in modern language what the biblical text had taught for centuries.

At the cognitive level, thoughts function as interpretations of reality. The way an event is perceived activates specific emotional responses because the brain reacts less to the fact itself than to the meaning assigned to it. These feelings, in turn, directly influence behavioral choices. Unregulated emotions tend to lead to automatic actions, while understood emotions favor conscious responses. When certain behaviors are repeated, they become consolidated as habits, creating neural pathways that are increasingly accessible and automatic.

Over time, habits cease to be merely recurring actions and come to constitute character, understood as the set of inner dispositions that guide decisions, reactions, and values. Destiny, therefore, does not arise through chance or fate, but as the cumulative consequence of choices that seem small yet remain consistent.

This understanding shifts responsibility for the future into the present and emphasizes the importance of cultivating conscious thoughts aligned with truth, for they are the starting point of the entire chain. Transforming the way we think interrupts dysfunctional emotional and behavioral cycles, opening space for new habits and, consequently, for the formation of a healthier character and a destiny less governed by the automatic repetition of the past.

Reconnection with the Self

Recovering the Original Identity

Recovering identity does not begin with an attempt to become someone new, but with the courage to return to who one is. Before the falls, losses, and pain accumulated along the way, there is an essence that was neither created by trauma nor shaped by fear. This original identity often remains silent, waiting to be recognized. Restoration is therefore a movement back, a reunion between the truth of one's being and the story that wounded it.

Psychological Fragmentation

From a psychological perspective, identity becomes fragmented when pain finds no space in which to be processed. Repressed emotions become unconscious patterns, and unintegrated experiences become limiting beliefs. Emotional restoration requires a fundamental decision: to stop reacting automatically to the past and take conscious responsibility for the present. This does not mean denying suffering, but confronting it truthfully and allowing it to be named, understood, and given new meaning.

Replacing Internalized Lies with Truth

As this work has proposed in the light of Scripture, transformation occurs through the renewal of the mind, a profound change in perception, values, and points of reference. Recovering identity means replacing internalized lies, such as "I am not enough," "I am unworthy," and "I am condemned to repeat this," with the truth that precedes pain: that of being a child, created with

purpose and called to freedom. This exchange does not occur through momentary emotion, but through daily and intentional choices.

This fragmented mental pattern imprisons us and distances us from the fullness God proposes. When we submit our minds to renewal, that is, when we give new meaning to our thoughts, our emotions and behavior are transformed. This transformation, however, requires abandoning old mechanisms and beliefs that we once considered ideal. Personal deconstruction is necessary, as is detachment from habits that keep us distant from God's will. Only then do we experience true transformation, one that reaches our thoughts, emotions, feelings, and, consequently, behavior.

The Indispensable Paths

Certain paths become indispensable along this journey:

1. **Honest self-knowledge:** Looking at one's own story without romanticizing or condemning it.
2. **Confronting the wounds:** Allowing them to cease being centers of decision. Psychologically, this means moving from the position of a passive victim to that of an active subject. Spiritually, it means surrendering to God not only what hurts, but control over who one is.
3. **Building new bonds and points of reference:** Identity does not heal in isolation. Safe relationships, healthy environments, and consistent therapeutic and spiritual processes provide more faithful mirrors than those formed in pain. Where there was once rejection, belonging is learned. Where there was silence, listening is learned. Where there was abandonment, permanence is learned.

4. **Continual decisions:** Deciding to interrupt self-destructive patterns, choose truth instead of emotional anesthesia, and choose maturity instead of escape. Each decision aligns the present with one's essence, restoring authorship of one's own story.

Effective restoration does not erase the past, but repositions it. Wounds cease to be identity and become testimony. What once imprisoned begins to teach. Little by little, human beings relearn how to live, not on the basis of what happened to them, but on the basis of who they were called to be: whole, conscious, and free.

Renewing the mind brings us closer to God and to our essence. It brings us closer to our spiritual originality. Being close to Him leads us to wholeness, just as it was in Eden, where that close, intimate, and personal relationship existed.

Habits, Places, and People

The Nature of Habit and the Process of Change

A habit is a routine or behavior repeated almost automatically, and it may be either positive or negative. Psychologically, habits form through consistent repetition, creating neural connections that make it easier to perform tasks without requiring conscious effort. These patterns of behavior become “automatic” as the brain conserves energy by responding to stimuli habitually.

Changing habits is a challenging process because it involves reconfiguring these neural connections and replacing old patterns with new ones. To modify a habit, one must interrupt the cycle of repetition that feeds the unwanted behavior and replace it with a new action that generates similar rewards.

The process of change involves three main stages, known as the *habit loop*:

1. **Cue:** The stimulus that triggers the habit, such as stress or boredom.
2. **Action:** The automatic behavior.
3. **Reward:** The satisfaction obtained at the end of the action, such as relief or pleasure.

To change a habit, one must alter any of these components and create new associations that sustain the change. Resistance to change is often associated with fear of the unknown or anxiety about the required effort. Patience is essential because adaptation occurs gradually. Some scholars maintain that establishing a new habit requires a period of 21 to 66 days of continual practice, depending on the complexity of the behavior.

True transformation occurs when the new habit becomes part of life's automatic flow, replacing the old one without conscious effort.

Changing Habits

Habits are the gears that move our daily lives, often automatically. When we are trapped in negative or limiting habits, these repetitions shape our lives and keep us in cycles that distance us from our true potential. Changing habits is essential because it allows us to replace harmful behaviors with new patterns that promote growth, mental health, and well-being.

Change begins with awareness: recognizing that the current behavior is not taking us where we want to go. Psychologically, the brain adapts to new routines as repetition creates new neural connections. Over time, new habits become automatic and we begin to live according to our intentions rather than by impulse.

Changing Places

The environment in which we live exerts a major influence on our behavior, thoughts, and feelings. We often remain in places or situations that reinforce old patterns, making change even more difficult. Some say that it is almost impossible to heal in the same environment that made us ill. Changing places, whether physically, mentally, or spiritually, is a powerful strategy for promoting personal transformation.

Changing places may mean leaving behind negative, stressful, or limiting environments and seeking new contexts that inspire growth. It may involve moving to another city or home, or even changing internal spaces such as one's way of thinking. When we leave a toxic work environment or a social network that causes us distress, we create space for new influences that are healthier and better aligned with our values.

Changing People

The people around us have a profound impact on our choices and behavior. We often remain in social circles that reinforce our limitations or even our insecurities. These influences may be unconscious, but they shape our beliefs and actions in significant ways.

This does not mean abandoning friends or family, but recognizing that certain relationships may be harmful to our growth. Sometimes it is necessary to distance ourselves from people who

discourage us, criticize us constantly, or keep us trapped in destructive patterns. On the other hand, seeking people who share similar values, encourage us to grow, and maintain positive attitudes can accelerate the process of transformation. Living alongside people who inspire and challenge us to become better inevitably leads us toward a stronger and more confident version of ourselves.

By changing the habits that limit us, creating environments that favor us, and establishing relationships that strengthen us, we allow ourselves to move toward a future better aligned with who we truly are. This process empowers us because, as we make conscious decisions about the habits, environments, and relationships we cultivate, we begin to live more intentionally and less reactively.

The Biblical Foundation of Transformation

"You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness." (Ephesians 4:22-24)

A new mindset creates the need to adjust our worldview, values, and beliefs. When God calls us to something new, He asks us to think differently, leaving behind the limitations and prejudices of the past. This requires a paradigm shift. The beliefs we cultivate throughout life shape how we react to and see the world. Changing our mindset requires a conscious effort to reprogram this perspective, often breaking through internal resistance and limiting beliefs that arose as a result of past experiences.

Constant prayer, in turn, is not only an act of devotion, but a practice of inner transformation. Prayer connects us directly with God, allowing us to align our will with His. Psychologically, prayer may be seen as a meditative practice in which the mind is brought into the present moment, reducing anxiety and promoting a state of inner peace. Constant prayer also helps us strengthen our faith and seek divine discernment in dealing with life's challenges.

The transformation needed to reach the new place God has for us is neither simple nor automatic. It requires effort, discipline, resolve, and consistency: the renewal of our habits, a profound change in our mindset, and continual surrender in prayer. Each of these elements is a fundamental part of the growth process, and they operate not only on a spiritual level, but also emotionally and psychologically.

Walking with God involves overcoming fears, just as Peter walked on the water and overcame his fear. Walking with Jesus requires keeping our focus on Him rather than on difficulties, overcoming fear through the transformation of the mind. It means having a willing heart and allowing oneself to be transformed.

The transformation implicit in Romans 12:2 is an inner reconstruction, a return to our originality and to the purpose for which we were created, recovering our true essence. God assures us that His will is "good, pleasing, and perfect," revealing that our own patterns are often distorted, misaligned, and even dysfunctional when compared with what He designed for us.

Confrontation: Change Begins When We Face the Truth

The Role of Therapy and the Unconscious

Various therapeutic approaches can offer relief and psychic restructuring to help people understand and give new meaning to traumatic experiences. In psychoanalytic work, the unconscious is invited to speak. What was repressed or dissociated acquires form, words, and the possibility of being processed. What was once only silent emotional pain comes to be represented symbolically, allowing the patient to reorganize their inner narrative, understand the origin of their behavior, and restore fragmented parts of their own identity. Therapy does not erase the past, because nothing erases an event that was experienced emotionally, but it offers a new interpretation, a new meaning capable of reducing the emotional weight of trauma.

Through the process of speech, listening, and *insight*, traditionally called catharsis, people learn to look at their pain without being crushed by it. The memory remains, but the wound loses its power to dictate behavior and emotion unconsciously. What was once a trigger becomes understanding. What was once a prison becomes the possibility of choice.

The False Self and the Search for Authenticity

Throughout life, many of us carry the unhealed wounds of childhood into adulthood. Along the way, we end up constructing what Donald Winnicott called the *false self*, a kind of defensive persona created not by choice, but by the need to survive environments that did not welcome our vulnerability. Winnicott's concept

helps us understand that this mask is not a moral failing, but a survival strategy. The child who was not welcomed created an acceptable “self” to secure some form of bond.

Because of the traumatic experiences we have lived, we begin to interpret the world not as it is, but as we learned it could hurt us. Our actions become automatic responses to old episodes of pain. Out of fear of reliving unwanted experiences, we develop behavior intended to prevent new wounds, even when this means abandoning authenticity. Unconsciously, we adopt habits that make us appear accepted, valued, and “good enough” in the eyes of others. We disconnect from who we truly are and, in the name of acceptance, erect survival mechanisms: social masks, compulsive agreeableness, emotional submission, and avoidance of conflict.

When we do not receive basic emotional nourishment in childhood, including affection, tenderness, protection, validation, and acceptance, we learn to believe that love must be earned. We deny principles, minimize our needs, and annul our boundaries. Over time, this self-erasure begins to be confused with our own values, normalizing behavior that is actually born of pain rather than awareness.

“As he thinks in his soul, so shall he be.” (Proverbs 23:7)

Even if we were victims of abuse and traumatic experiences during childhood, however, we are not condemned to remain in that place. We cannot change the past or control what happened to us, but we can choose what to do with what was done to us. Awareness breaks the cycle of repetition. It opens space for us to

give new meaning to our pain and recover the parts of ourselves we abandoned in the attempt to survive. Healing does not erase history, but restores to the subject the authorship of their own life.

The Courage to Face What Happened

"Not everything that is faced can be healed, but nothing that is not faced can be healed." (James Baldwin)

This statement unfolds as a call to inner courage, that silent movement toward the truth of one's own being. Baldwin reminds us that healing is not guaranteed, but can arise only when we abandon denial and approach the shadows we have tried to avoid. What is not confronted returns in indirect and painful forms. As psychoanalysis describes, the repressed returns. What we avoid feeling manifests through symptoms, repetitions, emotional compulsions, and behavior that seems to escape our control. The unresolved past does not disappear. It merely changes form.

Fear as a Self-Destructive Prophecy

"For the thing I greatly feared has come upon me, and what I dreaded has happened to me." (Job 3:25)

This declaration by Job in the midst of his pain expresses that what he feared most, loss, suffering, and ruin, had finally happened. The sentence carries an ancient and profound emotional force. It expresses the moment when the worst fear, silently nour-

ished, finally becomes reality. It touches on a universal truth: fear is often not merely an anticipation of the future, but a painful interpretation of one's own story.

When something we feared happens, the weight comes not only from the event itself, but from the collapse of hope and the clash between what we desire and what reality gives us.

The Bible recognized this dynamic even before Freud named the unconscious. When the psalmist declares, *"When I kept silent about my sins, my bones grew old"* (Psalm 32:3), he describes the logic of repression with precision: what is silenced makes us ill from within. Healing begins when subjects break their silence and name what they feel, reflecting a truth that is also psychoanalytic: words have the power to reorganize inner chaos. *"The tongue has the power of life and death"* (Proverbs 18:21).

Jacob at the Jabbok: The Confrontation That Transforms

During his night of struggle at the ford of the Jabbok, Jacob is forced to face his shadow, his story, his pain, and his lies. Only after this confrontation does he receive a new name and a new destiny (Genesis 32:22-28). Transformation occurred only because there was confrontation. The blessing came only after he acknowledged his own truth.

Israel in the Wilderness: Liberated but Still Imprisoned

Trauma is a persistent pain that paralyzes, placing the subject in a repetitive cycle of reliving, even if unconsciously, the same frozen emotion. This perspective aligns with what we see in Scripture when the people of Israel, burdened by traumatic memories of slavery, walk through the wilderness as though they still carry inner chains even after being freed. External liberation is not

enough when the prison still lives in the heart. As the saying goes, “Better a familiar hell than an unfamiliar paradise.” The brain prefers the predictability of a familiar situation, even an uncomfortable one, to a change into the unknown, prioritizing safety and survival.

Christ’s Invitation: Naming the Pain

Baldwin’s statement finds an echo both in psychoanalytic practice and in spiritual tradition: “Without recognition there is no possibility of healing.” Christ frequently asked the sick, “*What do you want Me to do for you?*” (Mark 10:51). He did not ask because He did not know, but because the act of naming one’s own pain opens space for transformation. The miracle begins in awareness. Here the Gospel and psychoanalysis touch: bringing what was hidden into consciousness is the beginning of restoration.

No healing, therefore, is complete until there has first been a loving confrontation with the truth. What is not faced dominates. What is faced can finally begin to dissolve. Between the analyst’s words, the psalmist’s cry, and Christ’s invitation, we learn that the soul is not healed in the silence of denial, but in the light that is born when we dare to see what we once feared to touch.

Trauma takes the form of an inner narrative that imprisons, a repetition that exhausts, an emotional echo that distorts the way a person sees themselves, the world, and relationships. Although it is the mark of a painful past, it is possible to rebuild life, reorganize identity, and restore wounds when pain finds a name, acceptance, understanding, and a safe path through which it can be traversed. Trauma is not the final sentence. It is the starting point of a journey of healing that honors the truth, acknowledges the pain, and rediscovers lost dignity.

It is this rediscovered dignity that leads us into the final chapter of this book: the certainty that there is hope, that restoration is possible, and that healing is not merely a concept, but a reality available to everyone who dares to face it.

Chapter 12: There Is Hope: Restoration and Healing

We have reached the end of this journey. Throughout the previous chapters, we traveled through the terrain of pain. We came to understand how trauma forms in childhood, how limiting beliefs take root, how dysfunctional patterns are transmitted across generations, how wounds manifest in concrete behavior, and how courageous confrontation opens the way to transformation. Now we have reached the most important point of this entire journey: hope. Despite everything that has been said, despite the depth of the wounds and the complexity of the patterns, there is a path to restoration. It begins here.

The Final Call of the Old Testament

“And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a curse.” (Malachi 4:6)

This verse is one of the strongest in Scripture when we speak of relationships, generations, and healing. It concludes the Old Testament, as though God were bringing the entire biblical story up to

that point to a close with an urgent call for family restoration. It is no coincidence that the final theme of the old covenant is the wounded heart within the home, because the greatest traumas are born within the home, and it is within the home that healing must begin.

Becoming Like a Child: The Invitation to Sincerity

Jesus states that whoever does not become like a child will not enter the Kingdom of God (Matthew 18:3). This declaration invites us to reflect deeply on the difference between adult nature and a child's nature. Children are pure, sincere, and truthful beings. Their intentions are not corrupted, and their souls have not yet been marked by malice or by the defense mechanisms built over time.

The word “sincere” itself has a revealing origin. It comes from the Latin *sincerus*, meaning pure, whole, clean, without mixture or adulteration. A historical tradition says that in the Middle Ages, when artisans carved pieces for sale, some broke during transport. To hide the imperfections, they filled the cracks with wax, masking the defects and adulterating the work. Many buyers, however, demanded products “without wax,” authentic and original works that were not disguised.

In human and psychological terms, being sincere means living without masks and allowing what one is inside to correspond to what one shows on the outside. It is the courage to exist without defensive layers, without wax to hide the cracks. Sincerity is therefore deeply connected to integrity, truth, and inner freedom.

Turning Hearts: Relational Transformation

The expression “turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers,” cited in Malachi 4:6 and again in Luke 1:17, does not refer to a change in religious belief, but to a relational transformation. It speaks of reconnection, understanding, healing, and unity. It concerns parents becoming true guides, role models, and welcoming figures, and children connecting with, honoring, and understanding the history and values of their parents. It is an affective, emotional, and spiritual conversion.

I believe that one of the greatest miracles God can bring about in humanity is precisely this turning between parents and children. Many of us reach adulthood wounded by our parents’ lack of understanding. We arrive broken by people who were also broken. In maturity, we are therefore compelled to repair deep wounds inflicted in childhood: dysfunctional behaviors, accumulated pain, losses, addictions, fears, procrastination, apathy, passivity, and marks that span decades and, in many cases, reach the grave.

In a desperate attempt to get things right, our parents often ended up replicating the very pattern they had received. They tried to give us “the best” according to their limited perspectives but, without realizing it, also transmitted their unresolved traumas.

Parents as Our First Point of Reference

Parents are the first point of reference on the path of our existence. Directly or indirectly, they introduce us to the world and teach us to walk, speak, and understand right and wrong. The weight of this role is great, however, and love and expectations, mixed with limitations and mistakes, often leave deep marks on our souls. Every word, every gesture, and every silence can shape the course of our lives in ways we sometimes do not even perceive. In their humanity, parents bring both light and shadow to our emotional development.

Taking Responsibility Despite the Wounds

It is essential to understand that although most emotional dysfunction can be traced back to childhood and the relationship with one's parents, this does not exempt us from the responsibility to move forward. We must look at our story with the humility of someone who understands that a wound often comes not from a deliberate act of hatred, but from the echo of generations, from unhealed wounds transmitted without anyone realizing it.

We cannot spend our entire lives looking back and feeding the pain of what was done to us. This does not mean that the suffering of a child exposed to a chaotic upbringing should be ignored. It means that true healing begins by accepting that although our parents wounded us, they also gave us the greatest gift: life.

Gratitude as the First Step

Gratitude for this gift, no matter how difficult it may be to swallow, is the first step toward transformation. The gift of life is far greater than any wound. By accepting the gift of life, however distorted the path to this point may have been, we can free ourselves from the invisible chains that bind us to the suffering of the past. The life we were given, with all its challenges and hardships, is ours to live. It is our duty, not our parents' and not anyone else's, to rebuild who we are and who we want to be. The healing process begins within us, with the understanding that what we were given is not a burden, but an opportunity for growth, development, and, above all, freedom, not only for us but also for our descendants.

The Wounds Do Not Define Who We Are

Childhood does indeed leave many deep wounds, and many of them bring pain that echoes throughout life. Memories of the looks that failed to understand us, the words that hurt us, and the gestures that denied us the affection we needed become invisible tattoos on our emotional skin. Over time, however, it is possible to learn that these marks do not define who we are. They may have shaped us, but they are not our essence. True identity is born through the process of freeing ourselves from these bonds, transforming pain into strength, and understanding that no matter how chaotic our upbringing may have been, we have the ability to choose our destiny and redefine our path.

Seeing Parents as Human Beings

When we look back, then, we must be capable of seeing our parents not only as the agents of our pain, but as human beings with their own limitations and their own often unresolved pain, which is reflected in our lives. With courage and compassion, we must see their pain, which was often the cause of the chaos they created in our lives. This does not exempt us from moving forward. True freedom comes when we stop carrying the baggage of the past and understand that, through our own strength, we can break the cycle and create a new story for ourselves, our families, and the world around us.

Forgiveness as a Gift to Oneself

Transforming pain into wisdom is not easy, but it is possible. Forgiving is not simple. Saying “I am grateful” is not simple when the wound is deep, but it is the first step toward true healing. In this context, forgiveness is not about other people. It is about ourselves. It is a gift we give ourselves in order to be freed from the emotional slavery imposed on us by resentment and anger. Gratitude, however difficult it may be, is the key that opens the door to freedom.

When we view our parents with this understanding, we are not condoning the mistakes they made. We are recognizing that life is a journey that goes beyond human limitations, that wounds can be healed, and that no matter how painful the process may be, the most important thing is to move forward.

We are the architects of our own happiness and our own identity. By understanding this, we can look at the past, our parents' mistakes, and the scars of childhood from a different perspective, one that is more generous and more compassionate. Perhaps one day we will also learn to be grateful not only for what we were given, but for what we were able to overcome, transform, and finally release.

Final Word: The Renewal That Transforms

Throughout this entire work, one verse has served as its backbone:

"Do not conform to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God." (Romans 12:2)

This is not merely a spiritual exhortation. It is a summons to life. A summons to the courage to look within, name the wounds, confront the patterns, and choose truth instead of anesthesia every day.

The renewal of the mind does not erase the past, but repositions it. It does not eliminate scars, but gives them new meaning. It does not turn us into people without pain, but into people no longer governed by it. It is within this movement, between the psychology that illuminates and the faith that sustains, between the awareness that liberates and the grace that restores, that human beings rediscover their original identity: that of a child created in the image and likeness of God and called to live in fullness.

Trauma is not the end of the story. It is the point from which the story can finally be rewritten. This rewriting begins now, in the present, in the here and now, with the decision no longer to conform to what pain tried to define, but to be transformed through the renewal of all that one is.

There is hope. There is healing. There is a way. It begins with a single step: facing the truth and allowing it to set us free.