

CHAPTER 4

What is keeping you from being all you can be and all you would like to be? Once you've identified them, face them. Talk about them. Seek advice. Find others who have had the same or similar fears and have overcome them, people who have found that moving forward in faith resulted in the realization that fear is often more imagined than real.

The little creacha, as a result of facing his fears, not only got his old life back but he also gained a new friend. Don't keep running. Faith will win out over fear every time.

The Cat in the Hat Comes Back

When you stretch out your hands,
I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers,
I will not listen;
your hands are full of blood. Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean;
remove the evil of your doings
from before my eyes; cease to do evil,
learn to do good;
seek justice,
rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan,
plead for the widow. Come now, let us argue it out,
says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet,
they shall be like snow; though they are red like crimson,
they shall become like wool. If you are willing and obedient,
you shall eat the good of the land;

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but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword;
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken. (Isaiah 1:15-20)

This was no time for play. This was no time for fun. This was no time for games. There was work to be done. All that deep, Deep, deep snow, All that snow had to go.... We were working like that. And then who should come up But the CAT IN THE HAT!

proverbial rose, leaving nothing behind except the stress created by whatever mess they made. People who are too good to put in jail, but bad enough that you don't want to be walking the streets with them.

We also can identify with the messy situations that the mischievous Cat in the Hat creates. In *The Cat in the Hat Comes Back*, the Cat invites himself into the house of a couple of small children whose parents are not home. He decides to take a bath, and he ends up leaving behind a horrendous-looking pink bath tub ring. The ring comes off the tub okay-right onto the mother's new white dress, and then onto the wall, the rug, and so on. They finally at least get it out of the house. But then there are pink spots all over the snow.

The Cat needs help. And he gets it from twenty-six other, smaller cats (Cars A through Z), who seem only to make the problem worse or, at best, merely transfer it from one place to another. The pink snow situation seems hopeless to the two little children, who no doubt wish that the Cat in the Hat simply would have minded his own business that day.

Most of us can identify with the pink snow situation, because we have our own messes with which to contend. Well-intentioned people create problems. And sometimes we are the well intentioned people who are creating the problems. We ask for help, but sometimes the helpers seem only to make things worse. Our faith, in particular the theology of the fall, includes the affirmation that the world is a messy place:

As with some other Dr. Seuss characters, the Cat in the Hat is hard to pin down, hard to figure. He makes a very good first impression-seems innocent enough. But clearly he has a penchant for making messes, for getting himself into trouble and, more importantly, getting others into trouble. Is he ultimately a force for good? Or is he a force for not-so-good? It's hard to consider him "evil," because he seems only to want to have a fun time. On the other hand, he seems to press on with his plan without regard for what other people think or feel. Yet ultimately, he always saves the day by cleaning up whatever mess he has created.

We probably all have people in our lives, maybe even some friends or family members, who remind us of the Cat in the Hat. People we don't like but can't hate. People who make us nervous because they won't consider, let alone heed, sound advice. People who always seem to come out of any situation smelling like the

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth.... So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and

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multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it...." God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. (Genesis 1:1,27 28,31)

The whole creation—birds and bees, flowers and trees, and people—was, in the beginning, very good. But as folks went about life in this good creation, trash began to appear: an apple core, a torn fig leaf, a slain brother. Fast-forward to the twenty first century, and we have all kinds of messes. Pink snow looks good compared to polluted rivers and skies and hazardous-waste sites. Like children on Christmas morning, human beings have, to a large degree, grabbed the gifts of creation and left piles and piles of trash behind.

But the messes of our world are not just physical messes. We have collectively created messes of a far more painful sort. Around the world, those in power have placed pride ahead of people, resulting in a mass of organized violence with no end in sight. In our homes, children and spouses are being abused. Homeless persons wander our streets like discarded fast-food bags. All this goes on despite Jesus' teaching that when we tram ple on or ignore the "least of these," we are doing so to him too. In fact, Jesus sternly warns those who would call a brother or sister a fool. It's like killing them, he says, for those who do so have failed to recognize in others the gift of life. Dire conse quences await those who regard other people merely as things to be used for selfish ends.

History is rife with accounts of humankind's inhumanity. Through the ages, we have "trashed" God's world and God's people. Much of this trashing we direct toward ourselves. Despite efforts to raise awareness about the dangers of drugs, our young people, and some who are not so young, still engage in self-destructive behavior, behavior that belies the fact that life is a gift and that each person is to be treasured.

Many of our young people have learned such behavior from adults who don't value themselves, who abuse both illegal and legal drugs, alcohol, and tranquilizers. More and more people of all ages, especially youth it seems, after making messes in their lives that they feel cannot be cleaned up, decide to trash them selves by taking a gun to their head or by overdosing on drugs. Others do not take their lives, but respond less dramatically by withdrawing into a world of isolation and defeat. They resign from true living, choosing instead merely to exist. Having given up on all their hopes and dreams, they just hang on until life ends. For some, the messes that we have created or inherited overwhelm all hope of ever being cleaned up.

The good news is that it doesn't have to be this way. Isaiah spoke to a people surrounded by destruction in a world crum bling from without and within. He spoke words of hope that no matter how scarlet, how severe their sin appeared, God could take it away, and they could start over again. Or, they could reject the new path, and thus be destroyed.

The Cat in the Hat Comes Back has a happy ending. The smallest cat of the whole

bunch (Cat Z) finally brings the solution to the problem. He has the power to clean up the mess once and for all. Cat Z has what Dr. Seuss calls a “Voom.” This Voom, though small, has the power to put the whole house in order—to clean up the snow and restore everything to the way it is meant to be.

For Christians, this Voom is the restoring power that came in Jesus Christ. Jesus brings glad tidings of great joy. He is our Savior, our God, who came into the world we trashed to collect all the garbage, all the sin that clutters our world and makes our lives so full of messes. Christ soaked up the tears, the blood we

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have spilled. And carrying these, he climbed to a dumping ground for humans who were considered to have no worth. On a cross, on a hill called Calvary, he disposed of the trash, all the sins of the world.

Hear the good news: Even though human beings tried to dispose of Jesus, and evil hearts sought to bury him away, never to be heard from again, God raised him from the dead and gave him the power of everlasting life.

We find in the book of Revelation a vision of a new order, of a redeemed creation:

No matter where our messes came from or how unconquerable they seem, we worship a God for whom no mess is too messy. For all who trust in God, life can begin again today. God can take your sin and mine and erase it today. God can take our brokenness and make us whole. All can begin life anew in Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul knew about this fresh start in Jesus Christ: “So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: every thing old has passed away; see, everything has become new!”
(2 Corinthians 5:17).

In small towns and suburbs across the nation, people put out their garbage on the curb if they want it hauled away. Christ invites us to do this very thing with the garbage that has found its way into our lives. We can place it on the curb, knowing that the Lord will soon pass by to take it away so that we can be reshaped to become the persons God intends us to be.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,

“See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes.

Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first

things have passed away.”

And the one who was seated on the throne said, "See, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true." (Revelation 21:1-5)

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