

## Letting Go of Things that Hide True Beauty | Sue Z. McGray

At 16, my family experienced a shattering event that forever changed our lives: the day my youngest sister was run over by our school bus. My mother lost her joy that day and never laughed again. I made a commitment that day that I would never be hurt like that again. I withdrew inside myself, overcome with anger, grief and resentment, symbolically burying my heart and feelings in a hole. If I no longer felt, I reasoned, I would never experience such pain.

When describing a devastating loss, people often remark, "You never get over it." I think that is true—you never do get over the death of a loved one. You just eventually learn to get through it, but you'll never be the same because the scars go with us forever. After my sister's funeral, my family and I began the journey of "getting through it" as best we could.

For many years I felt invisible to people around me because I believed the lie that I was insignificant. I didn't think I deserved God's love, success or anything else. It also was a way of dealing with grief because being "visible" around people was just too painful. I constantly compared myself with other women and always came up short.

I became a Mary Kay independent beauty consultant with the goal of earning a hundred dollars a week to help make ends meet. At the time, I didn't even know how to wear makeup, I didn't own a car, had no professional clothes and no money for extras. I got weak in the knees and red in the face when talking with anyone. My initial makeup parties were disasters, but through those failures—and many others—I learned the importance of getting up one more time than I fell down.

At a crisis point in my life, a Christian friend led me to place my faith in Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. Even though I had grown up in a Christian home and my father was a pastor, I had never until that day made faith in God personal.

What a great joy it was to discover that Jesus loves and accepts me unconditionally, despite my shortcomings and failures! The Lord redirected my life and helped me learn to become "visible" by overcoming fear, insecurity, low self-esteem, regret and co-dependency. In my darkest and most discouraging adult moments, He demonstrated His love to me and gave me a peace that was beyond understanding.

For 37 years, I've worked with thousands of women across the nation, often observing hurt in their eyes and seeing some of the same fears that caused me to lock down my feelings and squash my dreams. In my experience, a lot of women sabotage themselves because they don't think they deserve anything better. They put themselves in a personal prison (or someone else may have put them there) and draw bad things to themselves because they have an "I don't count" victim mentality.

To get out of this rut -- or to help someone else get out of it -- we first have to understand that God loves and values us just as we are. No matter how we feel or how much hurt we've experienced, staying hidden in an emotional hole is not the answer, nor is it the place God wants us to be. He has so much more for us.

A person who internalizes emotional conflict can suffer from unnecessary guilt, anxiety, sickness and even self-rejection. Our bodies and souls are not designed to internalize sorrow, but to express it and to walk with one another through difficulties.

Today, God has me on a mission to help women step out of their personal prisons and let go of the things that hide their true beauty. My prayer is that each day I will be able to glorify God by encouraging and motivating women to become more than they ever thought they could.

We never really know the battles someone is dealing with, so I urge giving others the benefit of the doubt. Then, step out in kindness with a few words of hope and encouragement. Those few words may be the one thing that helps someone take the next step. We can't change or fix people, but we can reflect the light of God's grace by being an encourager to those the Lord puts in our path each day.