

THE WALKING WOUNDED

Peter Hoewisch



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Publishing serviced provided by Fitting Words—www.fittingwords.net

Printed by Believer's Book Services

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data: [[TC]]

ISBN: [[TC]] (HC)

ISBN: [[TC]] (TP)

ISBN: [[TC]] (ePub)

ISBN: [[TC]] (MOBI)

ISBN: [[TC]] (Audiobook)

Printed in the United States of America

Dedicated to
my eternally faithful and loving Father
—and my relational Savior,
Lord, and Friend.

*With man this is impossible,
but with God all things are possible.*

—Matthew 19:26

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PROLOGUE

We all have wounds. We have all been hit. And whether through overt malice or the unintentional fallout of our personal brokenness, we're assuredly responsible for wounding someone else. War wounds aren't rare—the ability to get up despite them is.

It took me a long time to realize this. I struggled with internalized lies about my own worthlessness all through my youth.

Because I superimposed value onto these lies rather than the truth (for example, thinking things like, *Oh, it's only out of pity they want me to join them in playing soccer*), I couldn't see the love that was mine for the taking. And that's precisely the Adversary's strategy: boldly lying to our faces, saying we're unloved. Like an unseen undercurrent, I didn't recognize the danger of feeding those falsehoods. But they were subtly sweeping me away to a death of separation.

So, I built walls. Walls so high no one could conquer them, dismissing truth as a lie whereby the lies eventually became truth defined.

Perhaps in grade school you were, like me, called disparaging names. Or the hurts might have been a bit more disguised, veiled by jest or inference. Maybe there's been failure to be correct or accomplish something with the perfection we or others had expected—these can invoke *strong* notions of worthlessness.

Wounds color how we interpret and respond to the world. How we handle them determines their effect on our lives and the lives of those around us. Navigating them appropriately foremost requires individual honesty. This is not merely the admittance of the wound; it is the concession nothing of this world can perfectly rectify the wound. Honesty acknowledges what the greatest of praise or attainment never quite resolves. One who is broken cannot mend another. Only our Creator can accurately piece together and heal our wounds.

I am convinced we are all fighting in the same war, merely at differing points of battle. The personal wounds I share in this book may not perfectly align with yours. But fundamental commonalities between all our painful life testimonies stand out from my specific context. We each have entertained the lies, believed them until we've owned them, and then licked our external and self-inflicted wounds in vain attempts for redemption. Within those aspects, I am confident you will fully identify with my story of woundedness.

Here is the spectacular news: Being wounded isn't your final chapter. It is merely the jumping off point to liberty and the gift of the greatest capacity for love.

My world was revolutionized when I learned I am *intimately known* by my Rescuer. My identity and purpose has an unshakeable root. No longer am I critically dependent on anyone or anything else to provide

those desperate needs for love, value, and worth—*not when I already possess them in droves!*

The pain of brokenness prevents this love from being bridged. And the notion you are broken insults the pride. I get it. But hiding where you cannot be approached, believing you have it together, prevents healing love from finding you. However, there is a choice: remain insulted, never to heal, or admit the glaring reality we are *all* broken, hurting; then taste the freedom advancing forth from seeing yourself through your Creator's eyes for those willing to take hold of Abba's unsurpassed love.

Difficulties, pain, and brokenness are inevitable. But why resign to trudging along? Why settle for masking pain when an option exists to heal the injury instigating the pain? Where the insult is absent there is no longer need for pain relief.

You must always remember there is no shame or hiding necessary amid brokenness—nor in its mishandling. I, too, would not have known of redemption had I never taken steps to share and release my pain. Through surrender I uncovered the rubber of faith that effectively meets the road of this life—a strength to rise in my wounds, and victory is entirely possible for you as well. Success does not arrive through mere intellectual ascent to truth because that route is susceptible to flawed human nature. It comes through believing, then acting on Truth. The same Truth I discovered for myself. The Truth I will share with you in these pages.

The core of redemption is like a horse and its rider. Do we acquiesce to permitting the horse to take us, the rider, to frightfully dark places with no escape? Or, as the rider, do we command the horse to go to dwellings mutually beneficial? The battle between the Spirit and flesh function the same. To achieve a life abounding with unshakable promise, meaningful purpose, lasting peace, and a thoroughly

enjoyable adventure along the way, the Spirit must be in command of the flesh. Eventually our flesh comprehends the security beholden in the loving hands of the One who is leading us. And once we're dwelling in the satisfaction of belonging, we'll find that we have been uniquely entrusted to fulfill our life's greatest purpose.

It's my deepest hope that you'll discover the security of satisfaction to be unassailable. That hearing my story will help you to stop believing the lies and surrender—not to the darkness of defeat but to the Light of victory.

We have been empowered to *walk wounded*. Now, together, let us march forward into VICTORY!



CHAPTER ONE

The Unity within War

My heart is pounding, my core wrenched by the unknowns. I'm shaking. I have absolutely no idea if I will still be alive in ten minutes.

Tuesday, 6 June 1944. D-day.

The early morning assault on the beaches of Normandy has commenced.

The channel is thrashing us this morning. We're dripping from hours of exposure to the storm and pulverizing waves. The soldier next to me just lost the battle against the turbid waters and his mind, adding to the putridness. It's worsening my own queasiness, crammed inside this tiny, deep-welled LCVP "Higgins Boat." Many necks are straining in hopes of

leveling constitutions. Occasionally I, too, catch a glimpse over the front, gather my bearings, and see the coming action.

The shells are whizzing over our heads, thuds reverberating split seconds later as the battleships to our rear bombard the German-occupied coast. As if to usher some comfort of survival, we duck low each time we hear the rounds piercing the air. Were this reality not so deadly, it'd be comical.

Through the morning haze I begin to see the looming seawall towering about four hundred yards inland from the shoreline. Most of these sandy bluffs are steep with intermingling narrow crags. On other parts of the beach these berms are split in two by an intermediate sandy plateau jutting toward the water. It's the perfect high ground for the German defenses to unleash their wrath downward. We knew what these earthen obstacles would demand of us. However, eyeing them firsthand makes our assault seem all but possible.

Closer, I see the billowing smoke, dust, and mist ahead. It's an impressive sight. But the droning rumble from the engines of this armada-filled sea is tempting me with insanity. Combined with all the return fire, I can barely interpret my thoughts.

Months of honing our skills prior to this military barrage fell short in readying me for the magnitude of this experience. But I'm thankful to be standing in the company of courageous men. These are my brothers in the 1st Infantry Division.

This is especially true of First Sergeant Philip Constance, stalwartly perched between me and the bow door, and First Lieutenant Hank Spears, who's trying to peer over my shoulders. We've learned everything about one another since we joined Bravo Company and the 1st Platoon. We've formed a

bond stronger than friends. I suppose finishing one another's jokes scuttles the punch lines, but we get laughs out of 'em anyway.

I'm just glad I'm not alone. Philip, Hank, and I are closer to one another than our own brothers. We trust one another implicitly. We're in this fight as one. I only hope we get through the ugliness we know is coming and can go home—maybe not in one piece, but at least alive and together.

Philip is trying to dispense one of his corny jokes again. He's struggling this time. I attempt to help.

"Hey, Lieutenant . . ." Head cocked in a feeble attempt to overpower the noise, "Sarge said—"

The Coast Guard coxswain's barking at us to get ready to disembark.

Man! The pinging on our steel hull has become relentless. Is this real? How are we supposed to survive this?

"Whoa!"

Our small boat is lurching, battered by a massive concussion. We wipe the salty spray from our faces after the sudden inundation and glance right.

That artillery round nearly ended our fight before we ever pulled the trigger! Come on, come on . . . open the stinkin' door before we all die.

I snap. "Come on!"

"Hang in there, Private." Gripping my shoulder, Hank lifts himself toward my ear. "You'll be all right. You got this. You good? You . . . good?" he repeats, uncertain he's stirring my resolve. "Are you ready?"

"Yes, sir!" My courage strengthened, I slap his still-present hand.



CHAPTER TWO

The Ultimate War

I have had the immense honor of visiting many of the sites highlighting the events of World War II. Each time the hellish and redemptive past has become tangible reality.

More recently I had the privilege of putting my feet on the sands of Omaha Beach at my grandfather's identical point of arrival. I shed tears as I stood in the expansive American cemetery situated adjacent to the beach and bluffs these brave men assaulted with their blood. So many had merely begun their lives.

I have set foot in the now mangled fortresses, these pillboxes overlooking the beaches. I found myself overwhelmed, transported back in history to ponder the Germans who once fired their weapons from

the concrete slits through which I peered—the garrisons that became their tombs. I have laid eyes on the other militarily significant beaches, points of bombardment, and remote French towns of Normandy. Speechless, I stepped into the foxholes secretly nestled near the trees in the outskirts of Bastogne.

I have been to Pearl Harbor, where I watched the USS Arizona's still-seeping oil ooze its way to the surface. I got emotionally choked as I reflected on the over 1,100 men who, in an instant, lost their lives on that battleship. I have seen the bullet holes in the hangar on the airfield where so many others perished. I stepped aboard the USS Missouri where the Japanese government and Allied forces signed the Instrument of Surrender.

I have visited the memorials in Washington, DC, and at Arlington Cemetery, and I've been to the National D-day Museum in New Orleans (now renamed the National WWII Museum) and no less than a handful of other historically significant ships and towns. Seared into my memory are the horrific images of the millions of casualties of World War II. I've beheld them at the Holocaust museums in Jerusalem, Washington, DC, Chicago, and at three other museums in and near Amsterdam. They underscore the worthiness of the courageous heroism displayed by the Allied forces and selflessness of so many nationals.

The toll of sacrifice has found its residence deep within my soul on each occasion. Looking at these moments frozen in time, I've considered the bravery—rooted in noble purpose—of every soldier, sailor, and airman, individually and collectively. I've stepped back in history and am standing alongside them, longing, inexplicably craving, to join them on the battlefield. I fear the thought of experiencing such

excruciating death, but I yearn all the more to share in the superior brotherhood only found in the severity of war.

There is, however, a battlefield engagement more brutal than anything humanity has witnessed. It's ongoing in our midst. It's the unseen spiritual fight involving every single one of us. Satan is the real and present Enemy, and he is the commander of his forces. His strategies are well planned. They are not designed for the mere tactical gain from immobilizing us, to prevent us from ascending that sea bluff. No. They are dead set on obliterating us long before the landing craft door opens. We are his targeted foe before we're even born.

There have been, are, and will be many human battles worth undertaking. In no way are the bloody sacrifices of one for the benefit of another any less valiant. But the costs are greatest here, in the spiritual war. The bloodshed and holistic toll in casualties is guaranteed. This makes it the most worthy of all conflicts seen or unseen.

The redeeming news is we have armor and strong countermeasures to fight back. A key piece of information assures success on our side of the warfront. The Adversary is fighting at a disadvantage. He knows he cannot kill us once we have come under the divine protection of God's family. This provides us an endless supply of firepower, though this isn't strictly about ammunition. The knowledge that we can be riddled with bullets, severely wounded, and yet retain the sure hope of victory is our absolute strength.

For those whose battlefield commander is Christ, we already know the outcome of the war. I did not begin to fully appreciate this until further along in the mature walk with my Savior. Nevertheless, we must lock down the significance of this reality: the only way we will ultimately win is by tapping our identities into His eternal life and functioning under the truly lethal strategies of His plan of attack.



CHAPTER THREE

Insecurity

I can't erase the fears of that morning. It's like the skipping record on an unattended phonograph. They ceaselessly replay as Sarge and I press further into France . . .

My thoughts are racing as the men of Bravo Company transfer from the larger, converted ships to the LCVs. We've been told Omaha Beach will be the most difficult of all the assaults this morning. But we've been trained for this day.

We've been briefed on the German artillery, their numbers, and the terrain upon which they reside. Surely the overnight insertion of the 101st Airborne Division has greatly weakened their foothold and curtailed their supply chains. Even if not,

we know we'll have an aerial and battleship bombardment prior to our beach landing.

However, the journey in our wave-thrashed craft has begun to dispel my confidence. It's taking too long, copiously long. My surroundings are leading me to disparaging thoughts. I already hear men screaming for help. Their LCVP was inundated and sunk to the bottom of the rough channel. Our landing craft has taken on a couple splashing swells too. Who is to say we won't suffer the same fate?

Now close to shore and over two hours since we set foot in this tiny metal shoebox, I observe the ongoing effects of the Germans' deafening artillery, innumerable mortars, and rain of bullets boiling the sea. Plumes of water shoot tens of feet into the air, rounds barely missing their intended target. Larger landing craft are ablaze, having not fared such favor. Another of our armored support companions—these floating Shermans—has slipped into the surly depths below, not from enemy prowess but from the turbid seas, which have been dead set on impeding our attack.

A few of my soaked pals are shivering. Will they be able to steady their aim? Will any of us? Will we be able to clearly focus once we reach shore? Then, what are the odds we'll make it across the expanse of beach at low tide? What if our intelligence reports weren't correct?

The nervous tension is palpable. Maybe none of us will make it out of this in one piece. We are facing incalculably negative probabilities.



The men of the 1st and 29th Infantry Divisions were given very little hope of survival on the dawn of June 6, 1944. Things did not go as planned. Intelligence was incorrect. The infantry arrived offset from their intended point of landing. The tempestuous channel had afflicted them in more than one way.

In light of such insurmountable odds, unknown at first but later legitimized, what soldier could have felt completely secure in his own skilled might—much less certain he would see tomorrow? Without any warning, in a split second, he could take his last inhale. A zeroed-in German artillery round could splinter his body. The landing craft could capsize, drowning all the men under the weight of their gear. A bullet could pierce through a helmet like a stone through papier-mâché.

I cannot even come close to imagining the untenable sense of vulnerability coursing through every single soldier, sailor, and airman on D-day. Talk about lumps in your throat. They must have been suffocating. Your life was not only out of your hands but also not a fraction more secure in the hands of the buddy next to you. Everything about these men's surroundings reinforced a reality of death before they ever reached the beach.

Isn't this akin to the sense of personal insecurities we each encounter throughout life, particularly in our youth? More times than I can recount, I felt immensely vulnerable. In the company of my peers, my spirit was often caught in my throat, desperately wondering if my self-confidence would come through intact.

What is uncertainty of outcome if it isn't insecurity?

As was the case for the infantrymen, our self-doubts have power to paralyze us. They possess an inherent ability to destroy us psychologically.

Ultimately, they harbor the capability of killing us, even though circumstances or other people may not be directly assailing us.

We must understand our insecurities are the Adversary's precursor to his main assaults. They are the lies he tells us. Granted, they may be cloaked in fragments of truth. But that's his tactical strategy. If the deception can convince us to believe in his extrapolation of the truth and persuade us toward a conclusion that is invalid or *not* foregone, then he can easily lead us to follow through with a choice that will nurture—if not seal—that conclusion in reality.

I have normally found my self-doubts arising out of mere feelings, subtle suggestions leading to internalized perceptions, which are at best rooted in half-truths. A harmless event, an innocent word said by someone I love, can resurrect a falsehood I've already come to believe about myself. Then the lie gets promoted to truth.

My insecurities are all undeserved, existing foremost because I am the target of a cunning Enemy. Some I inherited from someone else's former response to insecurity, one choice that led to an irreversibly corrupted nature. In any case, they are sufficient to scuttle my human existence. Outside the redemptive healing that comes from Christ, in time they will prove deadly.

The Father cares most about the condition of my heart, the relationship I possess with Him, and my walk with His Son. This is true. But He says He wants me to love Him with all my heart, soul, strength, and mind. How can I do so when I'm in a state of insecurity? How's this possible when my strength, courage, and character—aspects of my identity as a man—are demoralized?

While no one is invincible to the lies of life, some can take the individual battering better than others. I did not.