

# **SOUL CRUSHERS**

**HOW TO RELEASE THE BURDENS  
YOU WERE NEVER MEANT TO CARRY**

**JESSE BARNETT**



**FLIGHTWORDSPRESS**

*Soulcrushers: How to Release the Burdens You Were Never Meant to Carry*

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**I DEDICATE THIS BOOK  
TO THOSE WHOSE BACKS ARE BENT,  
WHOSE COUNTENANCE IS WEARY,  
AND WHOSE HOPE IS FRAGILE.  
MAY YOU SOON FIND A LIGHT AT THE END  
OF THE TUNNEL AND THE ROAD  
AHEAD TO BE EASY.**



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## FOREWORD

### **2020. What a year.**

I've got to be honest. I thought it would go a little differently. I used to joke that all the best stuff in my life happened in the even years. I graduated college (twice!) in even years; I got married in an even year; my kids were born in even years. In general, even years just seem to work out better for me.

And then 2020 hit.

I would imagine you can relate. Nothing went according to plan. Thanks to the global pandemic of COVID19, we became used to shortages of toilet paper and antibacterial everything, wearing masks in public, social distancing, lack of travel, remote working, kids doing school online, and a general unease about everything.

It felt like everything was out of control, and yet when January 2021 came into sight, we felt like we were about to turn a corner.

A new year was on the way, and with it, a chance to become better.

We can't control what's going on in the world, but that's not really what this book's about.

The message of this book is that there are certain things that shape you that take place on the inside.

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They don't care where you live, if you are cooped up inside your home, if you wear a mask or not. These *Soulcrushers* are with you every single day, and only you can determine whether or not you want to pick them up and bear their weight.

Today, I want to challenge you to take a look at what you're carrying into your future. Most of us need to lighten our load a bit or we're not going to make it. Or we'll make it but we won't make it as far as we should.

Although this book deals with some deep issues, I've tried to keep the tone encouraging and light. I don't take myself too seriously, but I am serious about becoming a better version of myself—the version that God designed me to be.

This means I must continually work on my soul and remove the things that weigh it down, replacing them with something better. It's work, but it's good work, and the benefits far outweigh the costs.

I hope you'll join me on this journey and it makes this year the best year of your life.

Even if it's not an even one.

Thanks for joining me on the journey.

*Jesse*



## SHAKEDOWN

### **I know we just met, but I want you to humor me for a moment.**

If you are in a chair I want you to lean back against the backrest. If you are in a bed or on a couch I want you to let your head sink into the pillows or cushion. Now close your eyes and take a deep breath—a good old “in through the nose, out through the mouth” type of a deep breath.

Now do it again.

I want you to pay close attention to the muscles around your eyes and forehead and your shoulders and neck. How are they feeling? Unless you are reading this on a warm, sunny beach somewhere, there’s probably a little bit of tension there.

Try tensing those muscles for a moment like you are trying to squint your eyes or shrug your shoulders. Then let out that tension. Did your muscles relax, or are they still tight?

If you are like most people, you carry that tightness and anxiety with you all the time.

It’s a constant reminder that you have a hundred things on your mind all at once and you have no idea how to handle them. What’s worse, they never seem to go away and new problems get added every day.

Sound familiar? You're not alone.

Add in a global pandemic that doesn't seem to want to go away and it's no wonder we're tense.

This book isn't going to cure all your worries and fears and doubts and anxieties. No book can. We live in a world that is a tough place. For each innovation that makes our life easier, there are ten more things that make it more difficult.

So don't expect me to be able to solve all your problems. I can't. What I can do is help you think about them in a different way and hopefully give you the means to work through some common burdens that most of us carry.

### **The Myth of the Overpacker**

I live outside of Atlanta, Georgia. It's about an hour and a half drive away from the start of the Appalachian Trail. The AT, as it's often referred to by hikers, is a trail 2,200 miles long that starts in Springer Mountain, GA and terminates at Mount Katahdin, ME. For many people, trekking the AT is a lifetime pursuit. While some diehards will trek the entire trail at one time, most people do sections at a time, a process called "section-hiking."

At the start of the Appalachian Trail hikers start out full of energy and brimming with confidence in their fortitude and abilities. They spend months researching the supplies they'll need and collecting

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their boots, clothes, food, and packs. Like any traveler, a hiker on the AT has to know what is vital and what is unnecessary.

In Neels Gap, Georgia there's a little store called Mountain Crossings. It's the only place on the over 2,100 miles of the Appalachian Trail where the trail passes through a building. This store is 30.7 miles north of where the trail starts. This stacked stone building was built by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930s, nearly torn down in the 1970s, and reimaged as a store in 1983.

Now it has become a rite of passage for hikers of the AT where the Mountain Crossings staff is famous for one thing: the Shakedown. Most new hikers make the same mistake—they buy a big backpack and stuff it to the gills with everything they think they'll need for the journey. Then they include a few extras that they don't really need but would love to have to make their hike more enjoyable. This includes things like favorite ceramic coffee mugs, hardback books for reading, and extra footwear.

As you can imagine, after thirty miles of hiking over hilly terrain the extra weight adds up. You feel it in your legs, shoulders, back, and those little muscles you didn't even realize you had when you started. Even the most comfortable pack can become a burden when it's overloaded and shouldered for eight to twelve hours a day. By the time these overly optimistic hikers get

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to Mountain Crossings, they are starting to doubt their stamina.

This is when the friendly staff jumps in and performs a Shakedown.

This process takes anywhere from one to four hours (depending on the overall ambitiousness of the hiker). As they rest their weary feet, the Shakedown begins with a purge of all non-essential items. These items can either be shipped home or left at the store.

After their load is lightened to just what they need for the trek, they can continue up the trail and onto their adventure. Without a good Shakedown, many of these hikers will give up and quit, never reaching their goal and forever wondering what might have been.

### **Soulcrushers**

In the journey of life, you could probably use a good Shakedown from time to time.

Doing life is a lot like taking a hike on a mountain trail. We pack everything we think we need at the start of our journey. This includes things like our vision for the world we want to create, our educational goals, our perfect spouse, our ideal job, our dream house, our maxed out 401k, and our lofty dreams of retirement.

We then add things like a spouse, who like us is imperfect. And kids who bring us equal parts of joy, stress, and worry about their future. We build on that

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with a house payment that stretches our finances and additional education to help us get ahead with our more challenging, but higher paying job, and all the stress that comes along with it.

Then we have a bad habit of picking up some heavy burdens that *really* weigh us down. These are things like fear, doubt, anger, bitterness, worry, unforgiveness, jealousy, selfishness, pride, disappointment, and hopelessness.

You probably don't want to hear it, but I'm sure you struggle with more than one of these. You may even have something in your pack that isn't on my list. These burdens affect us all and are a byproduct of living in a fallen and broken world.

These burdens are what I call *Soulcrushers*.

Here's the ironic part. The worst thing about Soulcrushers is they are burdens you were *never meant to carry*, yet every day you pick up your pack, shoulder the load, and struggle through life—many times not even knowing what is weighing you down.

### **It's Time for a Shakedown**

My goal for this book is simple—I want to help you by giving you a shakedown. I want to give you the tools you need to be good at life, and part of that process is getting rid of the burdens that weigh you down.

Here are the most common and the ones we'll deal with in this book:

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- **FEAR** — robs you of your confidence and causes you to live life timidly.
- **DOUBT** — takes away your courage and assurances you know to be true.
- **ANGER** — festers until it consumes you and cripples you for life.
- **BITTERNESS** — becomes a byproduct of anger that captures your joy.
- **WORRY** — takes away your focus on today and turns it into anxiety over tomorrow.
- **UNFORGIVENESS** — makes you hang on to past wounds and relive them over and over.
- **JEALOUSY** — becomes a constant comparison where you can't be happy for others.
- **SELFISHNESS** — causes you to overlook others and only focus on yourself.
- **PRIDE** — convinces you that you are better than others and deserve more.
- **DISAPPOINTMENT** — causes you to look at the world in a negative light.
- **HOPELESSNESS** — causes you to want to give up.

It's important to remember that shakedowns hurt at first. I'm sure those hikers don't want to give up their "World's Best Dad" coffee mug or their "Guide to

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Plants and Bugs that Will Kill You on the Appalachian Trail” reference guide.

Even looking at this list you may feel daunted and discouraged. Please don't. Push through that feeling and have confidence you can come through better on the other side. One of my gifts is the ability to tackle tough subjects like this with heart, humor, and hope. That's what we'll do together.

If you want to become the best version of yourself, to live with a soul that is light, airy, and hopeful then you have to make a choice. You can continue to pick up your overloaded backpack, drag all these things that you think you need and can't live without, or lighten your load and finish the journey.

You've likely carried some of your burdens for *years*. Maybe it's something a friend said in anger that you can't forget. You pull those words out of your pack and replay them over and over in your mind. Perhaps it's a familiar worry over making ends meet that keeps you from falling asleep at night as you review your finances and think about the bills. Maybe it's a root of bitterness because of a person who didn't live up to your expectations (expectations, by the way, that they probably didn't know existed) that poisons your outlook on relationships. It could be a lingering doubt that robs you of your ability to trust others and live a full life.

Whatever Soulcrushers are weighing you down, now is the time to unstrap your pack and let your

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burden crash to the ground. At first, you may miss it, but once you learn to live without it, you'll never look back.

So, are you ready to lighten that load, and live the good life you've been missing out on?

I hope so. Let's get started now.







1



# FRAGMENT fear

HERE IS THE WORLD.

BEAUTIFUL AND TERRIBLE

THINGS WILL HAPPEN.

DON'T BE AFRAID.

Frederick Buechner

**T**hink about the kind of person you are right now in this moment of your life.

I'm not talking about the you you show the world when you are in public. Chances are *that* you isn't the real you anyway. Like an airbrushed picture fails to capture the essence of the subject, *that* you probably does not show its insecurities and doubts, anxieties and burdens, and worries and fears. *That* you has it all together—not a hair out of place, gut sucked in, ready smile, and a ready answer for any question.

But if you are being honest, that you is probably a little bit phony.

The real you is probably self-conscious, timid, unpolished, filled with doubt, wanting to be accepted and loved, and scared of what people really think about you. This is the you that stays hidden most of the time.

Now think about the person you *want* to be. The real you. The authentic you. The *you* God made you to be. The *you* you'd show the world if you weren't afraid. What is this you like?

More importantly, what are the differences between those two yous?

Far too many people let the fear of what others think stop them from being authentic and true to themselves. As author John Eldredge puts it, they create a "fig leaf" just like Adam and Eve did to hide themselves away and cover up their rough edges.

Unfortunately, you can't hide from who you are.

And life is a burden as long as you keep who you are hidden.

### **Go Along to Get Along?**

I recently saw a guy wearing a T-shirt that said, "*Sorry I'm late. I don't really want to be here.*" It's funny, but it's also refreshingly honest. How many times do you do something you have no desire to do simply because it's the right thing to do? Someone expects

it of you, so you go along, too afraid to do or say what you really want because it might put you in an uncomfortable position.

In the same way, we have an idea of what the world expects us to be. You know what you are supposed to say (or not). You know how you are supposed to behave (or not). You know these things because they are drilled into you from an early age. In fact, fear as a motivator is often used in education, manners, and work.

*Don't do this, or bad things will happen.*

It's effective, but that fear of not performing or living up to the expectations of others gets ingrained in your subconscious and becomes a sort of self-imposed prison. You cease to be real, because being real is wrong. It might offend. It might upset. It might make you different. So you color inside the lines; you work nine to five at a job that is unfulfilling, and you don't live the life you want to live—the life you *were created* to live—because you are afraid.

This is so far from the life God wants for you that it breaks my heart.

### **The One and Only You**

There is only one you. Let that sink in for a minute.

What makes the Mona Lisa, the Statue of Liberty, the Sistine Chapel, the Grand Canyon, the North Star, Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, and that freckle on your left arm unique?

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Give up?

The answer is there's only one of them in all the world.

Are there other paintings besides the Mona Lisa? Of course, but there's only one with that mischievous smile that art critics and amateurs alike have spent centuries trying to understand. There are also replicas of the Statue of Liberty, but there is only one that welcomed weary immigrants to the Land of Opportunity after leaving the only home they'd ever known and sailing across an uncertain sea in a crowded ship to a future that wasn't mapped out.

Likewise the Grand Canyon, the North Star, Beethoven's Fifth. Each one is unique. Similar to its contemporaries to be sure, but unique nonetheless.

So it is with you. The one and only you. You may have a doppelgänger somewhere, but there's only one you with all your hopes and dreams and quirks and eccentricities. You are uniquely wired, handmade, knit together by the inspiration and the imagination of God himself.

Wow. Let that sink in.

The God that *made* you to *be* you expects you to do just that: Be You.

He doesn't want you to be anyone else, so why are you living in fear?



## **THE DOWNSIDE OF FEAR**

Fear is a thief and a liar. It steals your joy and robs you of your dreams. It's also a bully. Like the big kid in your high school that terrorized the nerds, fear waits in the corner until it sees something it can't have and then pounces.

But what you need to know is that fear can also be a tool. It can drive you to do heroic things. It can push you to the crucible moment you need that heats you to a boiling point and pushes you to say, "Enough!" and make a move that changes your life.

But before you can defeat your enemy, you must *understand* your enemy. Rosa Parks said, "I have learned over the years that when one's mind is made up, this diminishes fear; knowing what must be done does away with fear." When you understand your fears, they are diminished, and this gives you the courage to overcome them and remove them from your life forever.

Here are some truths about fear that you need to understand:

### **Fear is a Lack of Faith**

Where do you place your faith? Is it in your strengths, talents, and abilities? Is it in your family, your work, or your hobbies? Is it in God and his purpose and plan for you?

Fear forms when you shift your faith from God and put it in something you are afraid of. In essence, you

are saying that what you fear is bigger than God and stronger than you are. It may be stronger than you, but it can never be bigger than God.

The first thing to understand about fear is that it stems from your faith. You have faith in something or someone. Everyone does. Where you put that faith will determine your ability to overcome and defeat your fear. If you have faith that your fear is bigger than you, it will run wild and control your life. If you have faith that God is bigger than your fear, you can begin to work through it and let go of this burden you are carrying.

### **Fear Focuses on a Future that Rarely Happens**

Have you ever noticed how in the movies when something scary is about to happen the music changes and becomes more intense? You watch the character on the screen, and you're screaming, "Don't go through that door! That's where the bad guy is!"

Wouldn't it be nice if life had a warning soundtrack too?

One of the tricks that fear plays on you is that it convinces you that the worst is yet to come. It plays with your mind and manipulates you into constantly waiting for the other shoe to drop. So you live with one eye always on an uncertain future, and that type of living takes your eyes off of your present.

The lie is that what you most fear rarely happens. It's not that it couldn't happen; it's just that fear

magnifies the little things into big things and stops you from embracing life.

### **Fear Focuses Your Attention on Factors Outside of Your Control**

A quick Google search will reveal a lot of crazy ways that people have died: falling out of an “unbreakable” skyscraper window, getting attacked by monkeys, or driving your Segway scooter off a cliff.

I’m fairly certain that you didn’t wake up worrying about any of these things happening to you today. Could they happen? Of course. Are they likely? Not very. Especially now that I’ve warned you that they could.

But fear has an uncanny knack for shifting your attention to circumstances far beyond your control. It somehow causes all the truth and logic to fly out the window and replaces it with what-ifs, maybes, and worse case scenarios.

But when you learn to recognize that thinking for what it is, you can halt your fears and put a stop to it. My friend Chet is a counselor, and he says that your thoughts are like a spiral. If you aren’t careful those thoughts can spiral down, like water swirling around a drain. When you see your thoughts spiraling down you have to make a choice to halt that kind of thinking and focus on what you can control.

You can’t control everything. No one can. But when you focus on the things you can control and do

your best at those things, you limit the effect of fear and rob it of its power over you.

### **Fear Divides and Conquers**

If I asked you to list your greatest strengths and assets right now, what would you say?

Even if you have self-esteem that is tattered and shredded, if you are honest, you'll be able to point to some of your strengths. You may be kind, joyful, forthright, a champion for the underdog, loyal, optimistic, an encourager, a hard worker. The list goes on and on, but fear tries to convince you otherwise. It gives too much credit to itself and discounts all of your strengths that make you you.

My wife loves Winnie the Pooh, and one of her favorite quotes from author A.A. Milne's book is, *"You are braver than you believe, stronger than you seem, smarter than you think, and loved more than you know."*

So it is with you—but fear doesn't want you to think about that. It convinces you that you are a coward, that you are weak, that you are dumb, and that you are unlovable. Don't listen to the lies! Don't let fear divide you from what you know to be true: God made the one and only you, and he doesn't make mistakes.

## **CRUSHING FEAR**

Fear isn't all bad. Fear keeps you from doing stupid things that are detrimental to your life and health. Used properly, fear can become a tool that doesn't weigh you down, but actually makes you better at life.

### **Fear Can Be an Incredible Motivator**

I want to be a great husband, a great father, a talented and thriving writer, a loyal friend, a good son and brother, an honorable man, and a faithful follower of Christ.

But I know the selfishness and sin that is in my own heart, and frankly, it scares me.

What if I fail as a husband, dad, writer, friend, son, brother, man, and Christian? What will the world say? What will those who love me say? What will I say?

That fear of not measuring up is a powerful motivator to do the right things. It makes me want to fight and work on my marriage. It makes me strive to do everything possible to be the dad my kids love and respect. It drives me to keep writing words that inspire and encourage. It reminds me to pursue uplifting friendships and check in on my brother and sister and mom. It pushes me to consider my legacy, and, most importantly, it makes me constantly evaluate my walk with Jesus and my lifelong journey of growing more like him every day.

Your fear can be an incredible motivator. Think about the life you want to live and the legacy you want to leave. Then use your fears to push you to make better decisions and choices that drive you towards that outcome.

### **Fear Can Push You to Do More Than You Thought Possible**

I read somewhere that you should do something that scares you every day. It's an interesting thought. How many times do you take the safe road that's unchallenging?

If you are a guy and you grew up when I did, you remember the terror of calling a girl's house to talk to her or ask her on a date. Back in the olden days, when phones were something you hung on a wall or sat on the kitchen counter, you never knew who would pick it up when you called.

Murphy's Law says that it would be the girl's dad, and that was a terrifying prospect. My dad would answer the phone with a gruff, "Barnett." That's it. No "hello", no "This is Mr. Barnett speaking." Just one-word that said, "You're calling me at my house; what do you want?" I can only imagine the terror my sister's boyfriends must have felt.

But that rite of passage of calling a girl, surviving her father, and getting the date made us realize that we were stronger and braver than we thought.

Overcoming fear is like that. It's like getting on a roller coaster for the first time and being terrified of the click-click-click of the cars on the track during the initial climb. It's powerful at first, but once you finish the ride you feel stronger, better, and tougher than you did before.

**Fear Can Be the Crucible that  
Drives you to Greatness**

At the end of your life, what do you want to be said of you?

Perhaps even more important, what do you want to be *thought* of you?

No one starts their life's journey wanting to be mediocre. Whatever you choose for your career, your hobbies, and your family, you don't want adequate—you want outstanding. At the end of my life, I want to be known as a person of integrity and character who did the right thing more often than not. I want to be known as a kind person who encouraged others every chance I got. I want people to think I'm funny and humble and not afraid to put myself out there for the world to see.

Do you know what brings each of those things to life?

Crucible moments.

Opportunities to fail and fall and make mistakes. The things that I fear have the power to shape me.

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The things that you fear have the power to shape you. Never waste an opportunity to grow. It's those tough moments that drive us to greatness.

### **A Choice to Make**

The question is, what will you do with your fears?

Will they be a heavy burden that you shoulder each day? Will they be one more *Soulcrusher* that keeps you from being the you you were meant to be? Or will you let these words give you a shakedown that changes your perspective of your fears and robs them of some of their power?

I hope you choose that. It's liberating to your soul and provides you with a way to live life as you should. Authentically you.



**REPLACING FEAR**

WITH

**SOMETHING BETTER**

This exercise below will help you move from fear to confidence. Think about the fears you are struggling with and use the five steps below to release the weight your fears are pressing on your soul.

**Acknowledge:**

*I struggle with fear. Each day I pick up my fears of \_\_\_\_\_. This is a choice that I make in the morning. No one forces it on me; it is my choice.*

**Decide:**

*I will face moments today when I will struggle with the fear of \_\_\_\_\_. When this happens, I will have to decide what to do. I can either give in to that fear and allow it to control me, or I can refuse to allow that fear to have any power over me.*

**Deflect/Defer:**

*Instead of choosing to be or feel afraid, I will choose to be confident. I will remember that God has redeemed me and called me by name. His hand guides my steps and His power guards over me. His promises are mine. He has given me talents, skills, and abilities that are unique to me. I may go through difficult times, but I won't go through them alone.*

**Reflect:**

*Today, I struggled with \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_. In spite of my struggle, I survived. I was able to do what I needed to do. Tomorrow, I will be prepared for this same struggle. I won't let it control me, and I won't let it have as much power as it did today.*

**Anticipate:**

*Tomorrow, I will likely struggle with \_\_\_\_\_*

*again. I accept this and reaffirm that it is my choice as to how I react to this struggle. I can pick up that burden again, or I can cast it off and relieve it of its power over me. I will not give it that power; it has no place in my life. I will call upon the mighty power of God to protect me and deliver me through whatever tomorrow brings.*

## ACTION STEPS

- 1. RATE** your level of fear on a scale of 1 to 10. How often does it affect you?
- 2. THINK** about the authentic you. How does fear keep you from being who God made you to be? What might happen if you had the courage to simply be yourself?
- 3. WRITE** down a list of the fears that constantly bother you. Out to the side of each item on your list, write what you can control and what you can't. Spend some time working on controlling what you can and letting go of what you can't.
- 4. THINK** about your strengths and gifts. Write down a statement that describes you in light of your gifts. For example, I might write that *I have been lovingly created by God for just this moment in history. He's given me the ability to see the best in others, encourage them with my words, and help them live their best story. I am a loving husband, a gentle father, a hard worker, and a loyal friend.* Use your statement to shout truth to your fears and refine your authenticity.
- 5. COMPLETE** the affirmations above.

**QUOTES**

*To Help You Fragment Fear*

*“Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.”*

**ISAIAH 43:1**

*“Inaction breeds doubt and fear. Action breeds confidence and courage. If you want to conquer fear, do not sit home and think about it. Go out and get busy.”*

**DALE CARNEGIE**

*“I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear.”*

**NELSON MANDELA**

*“He who has overcome his fears will truly be free.”*

**ARISTOTLE**

*“Keep your fears to yourself, but share your courage with others.”*

**ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON**