

**Rescue,
Rebuild,
Restore**

Compassion That
Works

Suzanne Burns

Rescue, Rebuild, Restore: Compassion That Works

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ASBN: On file with Amazon

Design and cover art by Ashley Neer.

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Dedication

This book is dedicated, first, to my family. You have all sacrificed so much as I have chased after the Lord in founding a maternity home. Thank you!

To the staff, board, donors, and volunteers of Foundation House Ministries, without whom none of this would be possible. I am so very proud of you!

Quote

No Good Deed Goes Unpunished.

~Oscar Wilde~

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Introduction

Dear reader,

As followers of Christ, we are called to love the least of these with compassion, wisdom, and unwavering faith—meeting their deepest needs amidst poverty, trauma, addiction, and mental health challenges. *Rescue, Rebuild, Restore: Compassion That Works* is your companion on this sacred journey, rooted in the RRR framework, which emphasizes individualized care, trust in the Holy Spirit, and practical action.

This book emerges from my experiences at Foundation House, where we've learned to navigate the complexities of serving mothers and families in crisis, guided by God's love. Through the Rescue, Rebuild, Restore Framework, we'll explore how to rescue those drowning in despair, rebuild their lives with self-efficacy and trust, and restore hope for lasting transformation. Each chapter builds on biblical wisdom—such as Matthew 25:40, “Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me”—and practical insights, addressing the unique stories shaped by poverty mindsets, trauma responses, addiction struggles, and mental health needs.

You have your own specific assignment from the Lord, a group of people you are called to serve. It

may be your own neighborhood, or a housing complex full of wild, funny, dirty, hungry, resilient children. Or maybe you feel drawn to the homeless you see walking up and down your streets, sometimes arguing with the wind, sometimes carting their worldly possessions in a buggy they stole from Walmart.

Maybe you, like me, long to see young families find hope and healing in Jesus rather than drugs. You may pray for opportunities to help young men understand what it means to be husbands and fathers, battling against the rampant, destructive fatherlessness that permeates our culture.

Chances are, if you've been working with people in need for very long, you've seen a variety of harmful behaviors, attitudes, and responses toward your efforts, which have left you frustrated, disappointed, and confused.

For some, these hurtful attitudes toward your best efforts have caused you to pull back, either from specific people or from helping in general.

I want to help you understand why people think and behave the way that they do. With this knowledge, you'll be better equipped to serve them in wisdom—meeting their needs in love without feeling manipulated, abused, or taken advantage of.

When you're working with people in chronic need, there are a few underlying characteristics which transcend age, race, ethnicity, or low socio-

economic status. Once you understand the principles, you will be empowered to battle the enemy of our souls, on behalf of those you've been called to serve.

Whether you're a church member, volunteer, or ministry leader, you'll find tools to serve wisely, avoiding pitfalls like judgment, control, or burnout. We'll uncover the cost of unconditional love (Chapter 4), the myths that trap us (Chapter 5), and the emotional cycles of change (Chapter 8), equipping you to partner with God and each receiver for eternal impact.

As you read, reflect on the people you serve or hope to serve—looking for similarities, nuances, and areas for growth. Hold everything loosely, trusting the Lord to guide you, as no two journeys are alike. This book isn't a manual for perfection but a call to love as Jesus does, with patience, grace, and rugged individualism. Let us pray for the courage to anchor in His love, stabilize in His wisdom, and reach out with hope, transforming lives one heart at a time.

My heart's desire, as you read these pages, is for you to fall passionately in love with a group of people, so passionately that you are willing to lay down your self-interests, your false beliefs, and your ego in order to serve them as Jesus did. I want you to join me in rescuing, rebuilding, and restoring even more people—moms, dads, kids, families. Souls who need your help to discover the fullness of the

promises of God, on this earth as well as in the Life to come.

And also, I want you to feel confident that you are equipped for what that servant ministry will actually require of you.

Within the pages of this book, you will learn:

- Why they act the way they do.
- Why they are worth your willing self-sacrifice.
- How badly the odds have been stacked against them.
- How deeply the Lord loves them and how terribly they've been deceived by the enemy of our souls.
- What you can do to help—in large and small ways.

One of those ways that you can help the people you are called to serve is through hiring my team and me to train and equip you in the Rescue, Rebuild, Restore Framework, and I will tell you much more about that throughout this book.

Within these pages, I'll be sharing stories—my own, my staff, my clients, my friends.

All of these stories I have permission to use; however, there are a few where I've changed names and a few specific details, for her privacy. When that happens, you'll see an * by her name.

And a note: Even if you live near our maternity home in southeastern Tennessee and you meet one of

the moms mentioned in this book, I ask that you not bring up these stories directly to her.

Knowing her story and hearing it spoken back to her are two very different things. I'm sure you wouldn't intend to speak in a way that would hurt her, yet nevertheless, the enemy is always seeking ways to kill, steal, and destroy. You never know what he is whispering in her ear at that moment. Pray for her and encourage her, but please don't dredge up her past unless she brings it up herself.

You can learn more about my ministry at <https://foundationhouseministries.org>

And if you'd like to go ahead and schedule a call with me to discuss what training for your team could look like, please do! I'd love to talk with you.

Here's a link to schedule a call with me:

<https://calendly.com/suzanne-bcw/call-from-book>

I'm looking forward to hearing from you!

With love,

Suzanne Burns

Part 1: The Times, They Are A- Changing

Pure and undefiled religion is this: to look after
the widows and orphans in their distress.

James 1:27

Chapter 1: A New Reality

When I first started the maternity home I still lead today, I thought the women I would serve would be a lot like myself. I had my own story of single-mom struggles, then dating-mom struggles, and then I discovered how to navigate the unique challenges of life in a blended family. I had some college, some job skills, and a mostly-healthy family support system who loved me and my little ones. And still, those were very difficult years.

I knew I had the experience and the wisdom to help other girls who found themselves in the same situation I had once been in. I trusted that I could meet their needs. By the time we launched our residential ministry in 2014, I thought we were ready for our first client. We had a bed for her. We had a curriculum. We had a plan. I love plans...

But it turned out that I had no idea what the needs of these girls *really* were. I didn't understand why our very first client didn't see the value in the job-training and GED prep classes we sought out for her. Shay* didn't care about any of it. She was homeless with her two-week-old son when she arrived—the very first client Foundation House Ministries ever housed (though we had already worked with a handful of others, staying in the homeless shelter or

motel rooms). And yet, her attitude, from the beginning, frustrated me.

Not only was she not grateful for anything we did, she made it clear, in not so subtle ways, that what we were doing wasn't good enough. We provided all her transportation, anywhere she needed to go. We housed and fed her and helped her get the things she needed for her son. We watched little D* while she worked, until we found childcare. We provided for 100% of her needs so she could save her money and prepare to build a stable life. That was the goal.

However, she also didn't appreciate me asking to see her bank statements. She didn't understand why I should see something so private. So personal.

When she left our home a few months later, it took two SUV-loads to haul her and her infant son's things from our home. Turns out, the reason she wouldn't share her bank info was that she hadn't saved a single penny. She'd spent everything she'd earned and had nothing but *stuff* to show for it.

From our home, she moved back into low-income government housing with her mom, the exact place where she had been kicked out just a few months prior, the reason she had entered our fledgling program to begin with.

She hadn't saved a penny.

- She was back in the same toxic home environment.
- Her life had not changed one bit.

She was back in the exact same situation as before she arrived.

Not merely a similar one.

Exactly. The. Same. Place.

Our little fledgling ministry had benefited her exactly zero.

I felt like a failure. I had tried so hard to teach her what I knew she needed to know. And I watched, firsthand, as it all went in one ear and right out the other.

I had not benefited her in any real, tangible way. Devastated, I nearly closed the ministry.

But the Lord challenged me to keep going, to learn and grow. I persevered and soon He brought me a book called *Toxic Charity*, which taught me about the toxic relationship that can develop between people in poverty and those trying to help them.

I learned that we helpers can develop a savior mentality, an assumption that we are right, that we know everything. We can become so caught up in *doing for* those who are in need that those we are “helping” actually get trained to just sit back and let us do all the work. They don’t learn how to do things for themselves because we’re too busy doing it for them. And then, we helpers get frustrated and disheartened when nothing seems to change in the lives of the people we serve. Completely unaware that we caused that exact response by our own actions.

That prompted some *deep* soul searching.

Then I read *When Helping Hurts*, another fantastic book by my friends at The Chalmers Center. (Turns out, they live less than an hour from me and we've become good friends over the years!)

This is where I began to open my eyes to the unhealthy relationships I had built with my clients. I had seen this pattern in the actions of other clients I worked with before Shay arrived, such as a mother and pregnant daughter duo I met. They were sweet, precious people, but their mindset was that it was easier to locate \$40 a night to stay in a hotel room than it was to get jobs and earn a stable income.

Through these and other interactions, I fell into the trap of attributing the problems I observed to the people I was helping, certainly not the way in which I had built my ministry...

Turns out, *it was me*. Not them.

Well, it was also definitely them; let's not swing the pendulum too far in the opposite direction. I was not responsible for the situations they found themselves in or their responses. What I *was* responsible for was inadvertently developing a system of support which played into their trained behaviors, which they had learned by working with other organizations. I just set myself up for a repeat of everything they'd experienced in the past. And so I received back a repetition of behaviors and attitudes

that were both unhelpful and also made perfect sense, from the perspective of my client's survival.

Reading these two books, so early in my ministry, radically transformed the kind of relationships we would build with our clients.

We learned how to do it differently.

It has not been easy, these last 10 years, building a new paradigm. A new way to serve our homeless, pregnant or parenting, mamas. A new way to build life transformation and personal accountability into their daily lives. Many of our early clients moved into our home and then moved right back out, within days or weeks.

It was a lot of trial and error, at first. And then, in 2017, the Lord brought me another book, this time on the lasting physical effects of trauma.

Within the pages of *The Body Keeps the Score*, by Bessel van der Kolk, I finally discovered the crucial linchpin issue, which **fed** the other major pieces: poverty mindset, addiction, abuse, and mental health struggles.

I finally understood what was really happening inside the bodies and minds of each of our clients. The traumatic situations they had endured had left behind the ravages of toxic stress, which continues to affect body, mind, and spirit, until healing takes place.

And it was from this new knowledge that the Lord birthed the solutions we developed, again, very much

through trial and error (ours, not His) until we began to understand how to help these women at their deepest core, attacking the root structure of all that had harmed them throughout their young lives.

I'll share all of that with you later in the book. In Part 2, to be exact.

And the most beautiful part is that this applies not just to the mamas that my team and I serve, but to everyone you meet with a history of trauma, addiction, and abuse. Whether your mission is moms in crisis or low income families or homeless vets, or even just friends or family members, you'll find understanding, knowledge, and experience within these pages.

And then, in Part 3, I'll give you some tips, tools, and strategies that you can immediately begin using as you love the "least of these" in your community. But first, I want to help you understand a bit more about the struggles of the people you serve—why they do the things they do, how they get into these terrible situations in the first place.

Over the past decade, we've housed over 150 moms and their children and worked with more than 900 other families, mostly single moms but also a handful of married couples and single dads as well, through our nonresidential support services.

When I say we've learned from every client, every situation, we absolutely have. We've seen a lot of success. In fact, we boast a 97% success rate of those

who graduate our program maintaining their level of personal stability for at least a year after they graduate. And 85% are still maintaining their stability five years later.

But that's not to say that every client who arrives will also graduate. We've also seen plenty of women return to their old lifestyles of drugs, domestic violence, loss of custody of their children, and even loss of life to overdose or violence.

It's a challenging place to work, but it's a beautiful place, too. Beautiful chaos. But so very worth it.

This is absolutely not a "sunshine and roses" type of book, but rather one that (I hope) encourages you to run with me in this race to rescue a generation, to love them into the arms of Jesus, the only place where they'll find true freedom, true fulfillment, true joy. True love.

Before we dive too deeply into everything I want to share with you, I first want to introduce you to a couple of my dear friends. Graduates of our ministry, these three ladies are now also on permanent staff with us. They are remarkable. They've persevered. It has definitely not been easy, but they are three of the biggest successes we've seen and I love them dearly.

Ashley: Ashley arrived eight months pregnant, fresh out of six months in jail. I'll never forget the huge purple dreads in this little white girl's hair. She was bitter over being wrongfully accused, yet she knew the slippery slope she'd been walking along.

Now she's happily married and serves as our Assistant Director of Client Services.

Morgan: I'll never forget the day she threw a toddler-style temper tantrum in the thrift shop, at the shoulda-known-better age of 27. She needed to be brought to her lowest point, forced to fight or give up her daughter forever. Morgan found a core of strength and commitment that she couldn't have discovered another way. Today, Morgan works in our case management department, ministering to other girls daily.

Brooke: Bless her heart, she's lived a lifetime of addiction, mental health challenges, cognitive delays, and abandonment. Today, she is living her best life as a shift supervisor in our job-training program, training new girls in our systems and celebrating four years of sobriety. She'll probably still be living with us when Jesus comes back.

Now that you've seen a bit about how our Rescue, Rebuild, Restore approach can radically transform the lives of the people you serve, I want to shift gears in Chapter 2.

Let's talk next about what *you* will need in order to pull off these kinds of transformational stories.