

DIDN'T SEE IT COMING



Overcoming the 7 Greatest Challenges
That No One Expects
and Everyone Experiences



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CAREY NIEUWHOF

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To my wife, Toni

I knew there was something amazing in you from the first time I laid eyes on you. I just had no idea it could be this deep, this rich, or this profound for this long. Not to mention this much fun. And to think we're just getting started.

And to my parents, Marten and Marja

Your constant encouragement, support, faith, and love never cease to encourage me and inspire me. You always point the way toward hope and toward Jesus.

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Introduction

SURPRISE!

No one in his or her twenties sets out to end up feeling empty or cynical. At least I didn't. I don't know of any college graduates who want to become irrelevant and morally compromised before their fortieth birthday. I can't imagine men and women at any age who want their personal relationships to collapse under the weight of pride or the lack of basic emotional intelligence.

Yet each of those things happens every day to people we know. People we care about. People we love. Actually, it might be happening to you right now, though you remain completely unaware. Because that's exactly how it happens.

The implosions often come as a surprise. That's what happened to me. And I've seen the unexpected issues we deal with in this book flatten many good people.

They simply didn't see it coming.

They didn't see the edge of burnout before they hit it.

They didn't see their marriage becoming distant and desperately disconnected.

They didn't see the compromise they made at work coming until they knew they had crossed a line of no return.

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They didn't see that their once cutting-edge style and insight had become insufferably stale.

They didn't imagine the emptiness they would feel after all their dreams came true.

They just didn't see it coming. Few of us do.

The question I want to tackle in this book is, Could they have seen it coming? Can you?

SHOW ME A SIGN

Let's ask a difficult and personal set of questions: Are there signs? Do you have to be blindsided again and again? Are there clues along the way you can detect to save yourself from heartache, loss, and pain?

If you're heading into a challenging season, is there any way to know you're moving in that direction before it's too late? Are there signs you can watch for that will help you avoid the problems so many well-meaning people stumble into? Could you know if you're the top candidate for Most Cynical Person on the Planet? Are there clues that you're going to become the forty-five-year-old leader no one listens to anymore? Are there signs that you're en route to becoming incredibly successful and desperately empty at the same time?

The way most people get into these unintended places is simple: They miss the warning signs. They don't see it coming. The good news is that you *can* see it coming. This book is for people who want to see the signs that there's a major life challenge ahead before it's too late.

When I first started sharing at conferences some of the ideas that became this book, I thought I was addressing people forty and over. The first time I gave a talk on cynicism and burnout in front of a thousand leaders in Atlanta, I told the audience that anyone in their twenties and thirties would

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just need to squirrel this away for another day. Needless to say, I was shocked (and saddened) when, after my talk, a very long line of twentysomethings, many with tears in their eyes, said this was already their story. It broke my heart and made me realize that so many of the things that have now made their way into this book have become the epidemics of our age.

So I began to rethink the essence of my message. I now believe the signs we explore in this book exist for all of us, whatever stage of the journey we might be on. These warning signs, if recognized and heeded, are gifts from God to spare us from the self-inflicted sadness and heartbreak that mark too many lives these days.

Some chapters might sound like they're narrating your life. Scary as that might be, I pray they feel like hope to you. I want to be like a friend who comes into your living room and shines a light into the darkness, who points you in a direction that leads to fulfillment and meaning, who helps you anticipate storms ahead and provides strategies to weather them. Even if the crisis is not in full swing yet, the steps outlined here will save you significant heartache and trouble.

WHAT IF YOU'RE NOT THE RELIGIOUS TYPE?

It won't take you long to figure out this book was written from a Christian perspective. There's a good reason for that: I am a pastor, and more important, I try my best to live according to Jesus's teachings. Through many ups and downs in my own life, I have become convinced that he provides the fullest answer to our deepest longings and that he's the hope for this world. You might agree or disagree, but hear me out. There is more help here than you think, regardless of where you stand on matters of spirituality.

Before I became a pastor, I worked as a lawyer (more on that to come), so it's not exactly like I've lived in a religious bubble my whole life. If you

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don't consider yourself a religious person, I'm glad you're reading this. If you consider yourself *spiritual* but not specifically Christian, I'm glad you're reading this. What I saw in my brief time in law gave me a permanent affection for people who aren't that into church or Christianity, even for those who consider themselves atheists.

In fact, as a pastor I've spent more than two decades trying to build a church that people who don't go to church love to attend. I've been privileged over the years to see thousands of people who never thought they would end up in church end up in church. And to their utter surprise, many of them liked it. Many of them even discovered a relationship with Jesus.

I hope this book is an extension of that spirit. Maybe a friend gave you the book as a gift, or you heard a friend talk about it and you grabbed a copy. All I can say is welcome. I'm so glad you're here.

I believe you'll find that we all struggle with the same issues because, well, we're human. Christians can grow cynical. So can people who don't consider themselves Christians.

I've tried to strike a tone in this book that works for those who are skeptical of Christianity and for those who passionately follow Jesus. As a result, this book may end up not feeling Christian enough for those who are Christians and too Christian for those who aren't. If that's the case, I may have hit the mark.

I hope what you discover is a resource that is thoroughly biblical in its teachings without being preachy, thoroughly Christian in its framework while still being immensely practical and true to life. That's what authentic Christianity is anyway. So you'll encounter some chapters that have a bit of Bible. Others will have less. Either way, I hope what you read will help you dive into the meaning of life at its most profound level. Rather than pushing you away from a dialogue with God, I hope it moves you into one.

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SOME HOPE

However you end up navigating this book, I pray it leaves you in the place where you realize you have a God and some friends who haven't given up on you. I hope you will be assured that you have people who believe in you, even if you've given up on them. Because that's what often happens when you find yourself in the places described in this book. You stop believing. And you need to recognize that there are people who know the kind of person you really are yet still decide to stay. Yep, they know you, and they love you anyway.

If any of that happens, just know it points to a bigger reality: there is a God who believes in you and sent his Son not just to die but also to live so that you might experience real life. That's what I hope this book does: points you toward the life that eludes so many. The Scriptures narrate a way of wisdom, a path God has set for us, that I have missed as often as I have hit. But if you take good notes and pay attention, both to how God works and to how life works, you can find a better path.

Cynicism, compromise, disconnection, irrelevance, pride, burnout, emptiness—none of these need to be your final story. You can see them coming. You can identify them when they arrive. And when you name them, when you see them, they lose some of their allure as well as their power.

If you do see the seven greatest challenges coming, you may end up living the life you've always hoped to live, which is the life that eludes too many.

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PART I



CYNICISM

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FIND ME A HAPPY LAWYER

How Cynicism Snuffs Out Hope

You never thought you'd be a cynic, did you? It's not like in your sophomore year of high school beside your yearbook photo you wrote, "I hope to grow cynical and distrustful of humanity by the time I hit forty. I'm also hoping my cynicism will damage my family and make me impossible to work with. *Go Ravens!*"

Had you written that in high school, somebody would have insisted you go to counseling . . . immediately. But that wasn't your headspace. You were optimistic, even hopeful. And by the time you hit your early twenties and shed the yoke of your parents, you were downright *idealistic*. You knew how to make the world a better place, and you were intent on doing it.

That's my story too. As a young law student working in downtown Toronto, I oozed optimism about setting the world right. I wanted to practice constitutional law and argue my first case before the Supreme Court of Canada prior to my thirtieth birthday. I even discovered that someone with a positive attitude and a healthy work ethic could make a difference in a downtown firm. I was a newlywed, and halfway through

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my first year at the law firm, I became a new dad. I wanted to be successful yet *not* work the slavishly long hours young lawyers were famous for, working every night and most weekends. Some firms in the downtown core even had cots in the office and hired in-house chefs so their employees didn't have to go home or leave the office. I didn't want that to be me.

So I hustled hard. I arrived at the office at seven o'clock, worked through lunch, and by five o'clock managed to sneak out of the office when no one was looking so I could get home to my wife, Toni, and our newborn son. Throughout the day, I focused on being massively productive and getting outcomes our clients (and my bosses) would love.

Strangely enough, I managed to succeed. My idealism smashed through some barriers quickly. Not only did I avoid working the impossible hours lawyers typically put in, but I also actually earned the firm money—something students weren't expected to do. The partners even offered me a job after my year of apprenticeship was over.

But I found my idealism as a budding lawyer challenged by something I noticed all around me: I was surrounded by lawyers who weren't happy. In fact, many who hadn't even hit age forty had become downright miserable. I remember one particular Friday when a lawyer in his thirties came into the firm waving a lottery ticket. "See this ticket?" he said. "If I win this thing, you'll never see my face again."

The strange part is that he owned the firm (and made a big income every year, may I add). It's never a good sign when the owner of a thriving firm buys a lottery ticket, hoping to cash out and leave it all behind.

I used to tell my fellow law school graduates, "If you can find a happy lawyer in this city, I'll pay you a million dollars." I knew it was a safe bet since none of us could find a happy lawyer.

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A GNAWING NEGATIVITY

How do people who seemingly have everything end up jaded and disillusioned so quickly? The juxtaposition of sleek office towers, luxury cars, tailored suits, and expensive lunches coupled with chronic dissatisfaction still surprises me. But it shouldn't.

Jesus told us it was very possible, even *probable*, that we could gain the world and lose our soul.¹ I get that. But in the trenches of success, I saw more than a happiness deficit in the people around me. I saw a much deeper and more pervasive condition: cynicism. I often wondered, *How do you go from idealistic to cynical in just a few short years?*

It's a troubling question, and over the years I've asked it again and again. Chances are you've seen it happen around you too . . .

- Your friend who has had her heart broken many times now thinks no man can be trusted.
- Your optimistic college roommate who went into investment banking is convinced all his colleagues are simply in it for themselves, which is exactly why he is now too.
- Your brother-in-law cop has seen too much too many times to believe the best about anybody anymore.
- Even your teammate at work shoots down every idea you bring to the table, instantly listing the many reasons your strategy is doomed to fail.

The people around you can be depressing. But almost as disturbing as what we see *around* us is what we feel *within* us. Cynicism isn't just something other people experience; it's something you sense growing within you. While the time line may vary given your life experience, here's what many people discover: the optimism of your teens and twenties gives way to the

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realism of your thirties. By the time you hit thirty, many of your once-in-love friends have split up, many of your once-enthusiastic coworkers hate their jobs, and many once-solid friendships have dissolved.

So where does the realism of your thirties lead? That depends. Unchecked, it could lead you into the sinkhole of cynicism.

SINKHOLE AHEAD

I remember the first time I saw cynicism begin to grow within me. I was in my early thirties. Paradoxically, it was in pastoral ministry and not the practice of law that I felt cynicism begin to take root in my heart. Halfway through law school, I sensed God calling me into full-time ministry of some kind. I had grown up in a Christian home, and after drifting in my late teen years, I recommitted my life to Christ in my early twenties. Despite my renewed Christianity, though, law was my main focus. I never imagined leaving law to pursue preaching or congregational ministry. But that's the amazing thing about feeling called to something: we're taken in a new direction on an unexpected adventure.

After sensing God calling me into ministry, I took a few years to figure out exactly what that meant. In the meantime, I finished law school and completed the grueling bar admissions course. After passing the bar exam and earning my license to practice law, I shocked everyone (including myself) by heading off to seminary, purely out of obedience.

Confused about what to do next, I decided to dip my toe into congregational ministry for the first time when I was halfway through seminary. I moved with my wife and young son an hour north of Toronto to a rural community, Oro-Medonte, to begin ministry in the community in which I still live today. My assignment was to serve three small churches that hadn't hired a full-time pastor or grown at all in more than forty years. They

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called me their “student pastor.” That didn’t mean I served students; it meant I served the churches as the senior pastor while still a student. It also meant the pay was half what they would pay a “real” minister. But it sounded like a call to me.

The churches were tiny. One had an average attendance of six on Sunday mornings. That included slow-moving vehicles and low-flying aircraft. When my wife, son, and I arrived, we grew the church by 50 percent overnight. It was sensational. The second of the three churches had fourteen people in church most Sundays. And the “megachurch” among the three congregations had an average attendance of twenty-three.

Naturally, when you’re in congregations that small, ministry is inherently relational. You visit people and invest in them, all the while trying to unite them around a bigger vision and better strategy that will move the mission forward. Even as our churches grew into the hundreds, I did my best to stay relationally connected. In the first decade of ministry, I was in people’s homes almost every day. It was tremendously exciting as more and more new people began to show up. I still remember the first time a couple I’ll call Roger and Mary walked in the door one Sunday morning.

It didn’t take long to figure out that Roger and Mary had very real needs. They didn’t have much money. Their subcompact car constantly broke down. They seemed to go from crisis to crisis in every area of their lives: financial, relational, emotional, and spiritual.

Despite being busy now leading hundreds of people, I decided I would help in every way I could. Even though the church they attended had a small budget, we managed to buy Roger and Mary groceries and gift cards. We gave them gas money and made sure their car stayed on the road. I went to their apartment in the south end of town (a twenty-minute drive each way) to regularly pray with them, encourage them, and help them as much as I could.

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Roger and Mary kept asking for more assistance. Their phone calls became more frequent, and I often headed over in the evenings to help them navigate whatever crisis they were facing. I poured my heart and soul into praying for their family and trying to assist them in any way possible. It's not an exaggeration to say I spent more time with their family than I spent with any other family in my first ten years of leadership.

Meanwhile, the little churches grew quickly. More and more people began showing up, and that meant I couldn't visit people as often as I had previously. There were just too many people. Even as the churches grew, Roger and Mary demanded my personal attention. They were poor, and I knew of God's particular emphasis on caring for the poor. In the midst of it all, I noticed a growing ingratitude and increasing neediness from this couple. At times, helping them felt like trying to empty the ocean with a spoon, but I was determined to serve and demonstrate God's grace.

Before long, Roger and Mary started to bring their two-year-old niece to church with them. She was a great kid, but discipline wasn't a strong skill in the family. Their niece spent time one Sunday running up and down the aisles during church, angering some older members.

The issue came up at one of our elder board meetings. Some members insisted we had to do something about this child who was disrupting the service. I stood up for Roger and Mary's family, telling the board I'd rather have a church full of unruly kids than a church full of well-behaved senior citizens. Fortunately for everyone, that settled the matter. And I told Roger and Mary that it wouldn't be a problem anymore.

Even with that controversy put to rest, this couple seemed to become less and less comfortable as the church continued to grow. Finally one Sunday morning, Roger grabbed his niece and ran out of the church, announcing, "This place isn't for us anymore. You don't care about us! We're leaving!"

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I was stunned. Naturally, I followed up with him and asked what on earth had happened.

“You haven’t done enough for us,” he said.

I had no idea what to say. *Seriously? We haven’t done enough? Are you kidding me?*

His comments cut directly and deeply into my small but growing pastoral heart.

“Roger,” I mustered, “that breaks my heart. It’s not an exaggeration to say that in my time in leadership, I have never spent more one-on-one time with anyone than you and your family. And it’s not just me. This community has sacrificed to be here for you again and again.”

My words made zero difference. He kept insisting our efforts weren’t enough and that we didn’t—that *I* didn’t—really care about them. He said our church had let him down, that we’d abandoned his family at their lowest point.

I didn’t know how to make the situation better. They didn’t want to make it better. Then they left the church for good.

THE SLIDE INTO CYNICISM BEGINS

I was shocked. And angry. And heartbroken. I honestly didn’t have a category for what happened.

It was in that moment that I felt cynicism welling up inside me. It’s like a voice inside me was saying, *Useless. Everything you invested was a total waste of time and energy. And you know what? If he did that to you, others will too. So don’t care like you used to. Don’t invest in people like you used to. Don’t give of yourself like you used to. People will just use you and reject you in the end anyway. There’s no point.*

At the time, I hadn’t even heard of writers like John Townsend or Henry

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Cloud, who have helped scores of people understand what boundaries are. Nor was I good at spotting potential mental health issues. I genuinely tried to help, and in the end I got genuinely burned.

That's how cynicism starts.

Cynicism begins not because you *don't* care but because you *do* care.

It starts because you poured your heart into something and got little in return. Or maybe you got something in return, but it was the opposite of what you desired. You fell in love, only to have that relationship dissolve. You threw your heart into your job, only to be told you were being let go. You were completely there for your mom, only to have her tell you you're such a disappointment.

And you can't help but think to yourself, *What gives?*

Most cynics are former optimists. You'd never know it now, but there was a time when they were hopeful, enthusiastic, and even cheerful. There's something inside the human spirit that wants to hope, wants to think things will get better. Nearly everyone starts life with a positive outlook.

So what happens? How do you go from being so positive to so negative? At least three things happen to the human heart as it grows cynical.

1. You Know Too Much

You would think knowledge is always a good thing. But strangely, knowledge will often sadden you. Solomon, whom we'll meet again later, was world renowned for his wisdom. He put it this way: "The greater my wisdom, the greater my grief. To increase knowledge only increases sorrow."² Not exactly the most inspirational thing you've ever read. It's like Eeyore wrote that part of the Bible. While that verse may make for a terrible social media post, the insight itself is quite helpful.

In some ways, ignorance is bliss. Had I never known that some people,

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like Roger and Mary, would end up being disappointed even after a massive investment by a community of people, it would have been easy—even automatic—to keep investing in people. But having been burned, I found that over the months and years that followed, I began to view needy people more suspiciously. Would they treat me the same way? Would they simply walk away too?

Chances are you've had a Roger and Mary in your life. Or four. Or six. So trust becomes harder because you know too much. If your heart hadn't been broken a dozen times by different people, you would have found it easy to keep dating. If your business partner hadn't sold you out and gutted the company, you might still be an entrepreneur. If your neighbors hadn't been so difficult, you might never have wanted to build a fence.

But now you know too much. You've experienced the heartbreak, betrayals, and backstabbing. You understand that people let you down. You've seen that some people can't be trusted. You know love hurts. You realize that people are fickle and selfish. You recognize that not everyone succeeds, despite good intentions and best efforts. The longer you live, the more you know. Which is why cynicism and age are frequent companions.

Why would Solomon link more knowledge with more grief? Because that's the way life works. Knowledge often brings sorrow because the more you know, the more you see life for what it *really* is.

I don't intend to depress you, but let's be honest: life isn't easy; it's a struggle, filled with disappointments and setbacks. Look around long enough and you'll see heartbreak everywhere. You'll see fallibility and frailty. You'll see scheming and manipulation. You'll recognize the power plays and the selfish pursuits that make up so much of human existence.

In fact, the more successful you become, the more pain you're likely to experience. Just ask the lawyers in Toronto or most people who are

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successful. Just ask Solomon. Ecclesiastes is a cynic's guide to the universe. There's a gnawing hollowness that comes with success. And there's a desperate brokenness that comes from doing life with flawed people.

Don't worry. Hope is coming. But just linger here a little longer to understand why so many cynics struggle with life. Knowledge does bring sorrow. You see life for what it truly is, and it's . . . lacking.

2. You Project Past Failures onto New Situations

Cynicism grows beyond its infancy when you start to protect yourself from future hurt. Having been burned once or twice, you tell yourself only fools get burned three times. So you start to guard your heart. You shelter your soul.

But what starts as self-preservation soon morphs into something more insidious. You become a bit jaded. You're a little wiser, you tell yourself, but look closer and you'll see a different reality. What you have is not wisdom as much as hurt and fear forming calluses around your heart.

In fact, sharp as you are, you begin to look for patterns. And to your surprise, you spot them. Many people are untrustworthy. Maybe the answer isn't joining another company, because no one seems happy at that place either. And you realize the pain of disappointment runs through many of your friends' marriages as deeply as it runs through yours.

With age and experience, you become skilled at seeing patterns. You start to do what cynics do by instinct: you project past failures onto new situations. You meet a new couple and suspect they'll take advantage of you like Roger and Mary did. Better not get too close. You get a new boss and assume she's probably as unfair and arrogant as your old boss. A guy transfers to your team at work, and you're sure it's just a matter of time until he screws up. Your cousin gets married, and you wonder how long it will be before the newlyweds run into serious problems.

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You no longer see people for who they are. You no longer see situations for what they could be. You just see potential hurt. Past pain will become future hurt if you let it. So you don't let it.

That became my reality. Because it wasn't just Roger and Mary who caused me pain. There were others, including friends. In fact, what gave birth to my most cynical phase of life (in my thirties) was a series of events that came within a few years of one another.

Roger and Mary weren't the only ones who left. As we implemented a radical set of changes at the churches, more people left. Men and women I thought were on board with us for life, in fact, weren't. Even though our churches were adding people faster than we were losing them, it didn't make up for the disappointment I felt.

Within the first few years of our ministry, a set of close friendships also imploded on us. These were the kind of friends you do life with: concerts, dinners, holidays. I was their pastor and they attended our church, but we were still incredible friends. But for some strange reason, within the span of a year, these friends stopped going to our church, and before long, they weren't our friends anymore.

It hurt. Deeply. And I'm still a little confused as to how it all went down. Attempts to make things right didn't work. I know I had a role in the painful situation, but it's all a bit mysterious and murky. And it led me to decide (for a season) to go down the road every cynic travels.

I'm pretty sure you can relate because something similar has happened to you. Eventually, the wariness makes you weary. Your guardedness and suspicion evolve into anger and bitterness.

3. You Decide to Stop Trusting, Hoping, and Believing

After those friendships dissolved, I told Toni, "I don't need friends. Really. Friends were a bad idea. I'm fine on my own." Dumb, I know. But that was

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my pain speaking. And at the time, it made perfect sense. In fact, it was far safer than the risks new friendships would involve. It's rarely the first round of anguish that breaks your heart permanently. For me, a few previous friendships had also faded over the years, and eventually I questioned whether people were worth the bother. At times I even wondered if I had some fatal flaw embedded in my personality that doomed friendship.

The problem with generalizing—applying one particular situation to *all* situations—is that the death of trust, hope, and belief is like a virus, infecting everything. You think you're protecting yourself from the future when, in reality, your new stance infects your present. The people you care about most in the here and now suffer. That's because as a cynic, you project your newfound suspicion on everyone and everything. Your current relationships stall out or dial back a few notches. The withdrawal isn't just from the future; you retreat from the present as well.

So you become numb to the people you claim to love most, even your spouse and kids. You find yourself predicting cynical endings to moments that used to fill you with joy. You might also find yourself becoming jaded at work. You don't really want to get to know the new guy because, well, you already know what he's like. And the projects and goals that used to motivate and excite you? They just don't anymore.

Perhaps most disturbingly, cynicism begins to infect your relationship with God. When you close your heart to people, you close your heart to God. That shouldn't surprise us, but it does. It only makes sense that the very act of hardening your heart to people simply hardens your heart. And that's the danger—when you close yourself off to people, you close yourself off to God. You find yourself trusting less and doubting more. When you read through Scripture, you want to put an asterisk beside all the promises you read, convincing yourself they don't apply to you. Even your prayer life

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becomes stunted. What's the point of it anyway? You feel like you're praying for things that won't happen, so why bother?

It's a stifling progression: from knowing too much, to projecting the past onto the future, to snuffing out trust, hope, and belief. But when this process occurs, you have the unmistakable ingredients for cynicism. And whether you're twenty-three or sixty-three, it's a sad—and unnecessary—way to live.

WHY DOES ANY OF THIS MATTER?

Have you ever noticed there are very few “balanced” elderly people? You know how when you're in your twenties or thirties, you still have good days and bad days? You have your ups and downs, but things tend to even out over the long haul. Well, I've noticed that this pattern seems to go away when people reach a certain age.

Most of the older people I know have landed on one side or the other of the balance line. They have grown to be either happy and grateful or bitter and crotchety. It's like you reach an age when a magnet pulls you off the centerline and lands you on the happiness side or the misery side of life. The “I'm having a bad day” feeling we sometimes experience early in life morphs into an “I'm having a bad life” feeling by age seventy. Why is that?

My theory goes like this: As you grow older, you become more of who you already are. Just like your body stiffens a bit, your personality becomes less flexible. It's like there's this war inside you that's battling for hope—and cynicism will win, or it will lose. But you won't just be a little cynical or a little hopeful. The die is cast, and the concrete hardens.

I felt this dynamic intensely throughout my forties. It was like a battle for my soul was going on. I finally began to understand how people grow

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cynical, jaded, and coldhearted. I had all of that lodged within me. Hope hadn't died, but cynicism was threatening to snuff it out. I realized it would be easy to let despair win. Actually, I realized that left unchecked, cynicism *would* win.

What I needed to understand is what you need to understand: cynicism is actually a choice. Cynics aren't born; they're made. Life doesn't make you a cynic; *you* make you a cynic.

Cynicism is not always a *conscious* decision, but it's a decision nonetheless. It's the decision you make to stop hoping, trusting, and believing. But think about what's at stake. You realize, don't you, that cynics never change the world? They just tell you why the world can't change. Ask them; they know all about it. And that's where I knew I would end up unless I changed course.

If you've grown cynical, please understand that cynicism happens not because your heart is closed but because it was once open. It happens because the idealist in you was idealistic. And then life happened. All the hurt happened. Now you're left with a choice. So what do you do?

Of course, the cynic might say there's nothing to be done. This is just a natural state of affairs after having been burned in life. It's not difficult to agree with the philosophers who conclude that life is nasty, brutish, and short³ and with others who insist that hell is other people.⁴

Sadly, that's where too many people leave the conversation. Cynicism is not inevitable. And even once you become a cynic, you don't have to stay a cynic. There is a path back. It's a path for those who are brave and those who long to hope again. Cynicism has an antidote. Are you willing to embrace it?

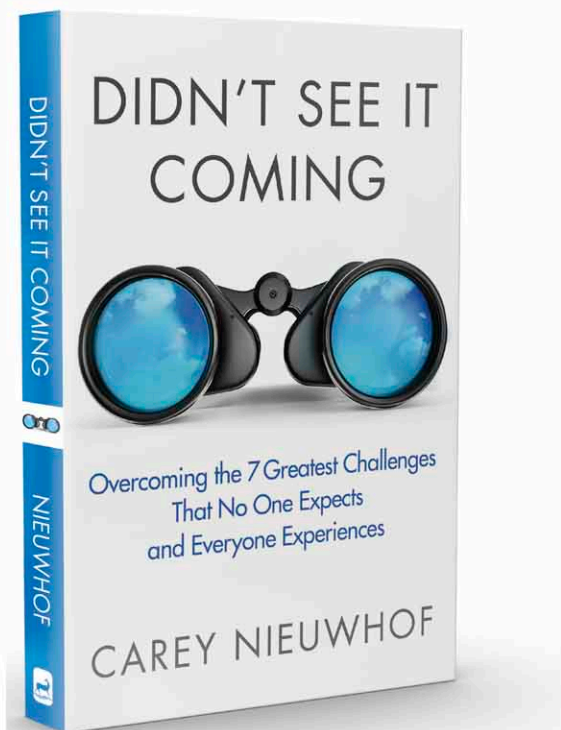
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