

Chapter 1

Introduction

In the last several years, I have been intrigued by the concept of chains. Throughout history chains have been used for a variety of purposes, as well as metaphors to describe events and entities that are connected. What do you think of when you hear about chains? Perhaps, the use that comes to mind most frequently is that of keeping a prisoner in bondage. Others could say that it's a valuable tool used to support heavy objects. Both definitions are accurate, it's just how people choose to view them. As I reflect on chains, I can't help but draw parallels to the challenges and circumstances we face in our everyday lives. So often we feel bound, even paralyzed, by the challenges we face that we lose sight of our dreams. Could there be a healthier, more freeing way to view our challenges? Is it

possible to take what once bound us and turn it into a tool that will help us reach our full potential? Not only do I believe it is possible, I've lived it and I know that you can too!

My name is Blake Shelley. I'm twenty-seven years old and I am no stranger to the power of challenge and circumstance. I was born with Cerebral Palsy, which is a disability that affects my muscle movements and my fine motor skills. Since birth, I've had to persevere and overcome obstacles to accomplish things that come naturally to others. There have been many times where I have felt like a prisoner in my body and could have very easily given up. But living a life as a prisoner, what fun would that be? What would I be contributing to my community, if I sat in my room, isolated, not bettering myself, drooling, day after day? That would be such a waste of the precious gift of life! Even though I face challenges and pain on a daily basis, I choose to live life to the fullest extent. I set realistic goals and I dream big! You can and should do the same!

Through my experience I have subconsciously used a method that has helped me overcome and use my challenges to propel me towards my dreams. In today's culture of instant gratification many people have lost sight of their goals and dreams. Unfortunately, we can't overcome challenges and reach our dreams as fast as we can order a movie, or post a picture to Facebook. This process takes time and deep self reflection. I'm writing this book to help you get from where you are to where you want to be.

Learn to Tell Your Story

Stories are the oldest form of communication and learning across all cultures. It's one thing we all have in common, however everyone has a unique story. One of the most rewarding benefits of self reflection is learning how to tell your story and identify the times in your life that shaped you into the person you are today. By learning to tell your story, both events of the past and what is happening in the present, you can find valuable lessons that will help you and others reach their full potential.

Faith

Before we dive into how we turn our bondage into tools of freedom, I need to point out this method requires a little faith. This can be faith in a deity, in yourself, in humanity or a combination. In my case, my faith is rooted in my relationship with Jesus Christ. Out of this relationship I believe that I have been given the strength to rise above my circumstances and there are good-hearted people in this world.

Turning Bondage into Tools of Freedom

As I reflect over all of the challenges that I have conquered over my short life, I have noticed a common theme. This theme is one of self reflection and setting a course of action. Striving to live life to the fullest, I have learned to run my challenges and circumstances through a process of reflection, which I refer to as the 6 Links of Turning Bondage into Tools of Freedom. Through this process I have been able to overcome my challenges just enough to use it as a tool and embrace the rest.

Let me paint a picture. Imagine that you are at a base of a mountain, longing to reach the summit. However, someone has put you in modern-day shackles, binding your hands and feet. You then realize that one of the links by your right hand is fragile and can be easily removed. Now you have a free hand (with the cuff around it) and a few inches of strong chain to help pull you up the mountain.

This picture can be used to describe our quest to achieve our dreams. The following self reflection exercise is to identify where you are, where you want to be, which links are easily removed and which links you can use to pull yourself up.

The 6 Links of Turning Bondage into Tools of Freedom

The 6 Links of Turning Bondage into Tools of Freedom consists of What, Why, When, How, and Who. Each of these links have several questions about your circumstance and your dreams. Don't worry if you can't answer them all at once. Remember this is a process! However, by making a decision to enter into this process,

you have taken a step towards freedom and success.

1. What

- What is the challenge or circumstance holding me back? What are my chains? What could this be teaching me?

2. Why

- Why am I facing this challenge or circumstance?
- Why do I feel that this situation is holding me back? Is it a physical, emotional, economical, or cultural challenge?

3. Where

- Where do I want to be? This is my dream.

4. When

- When do I want to achieve this? Set goals and deadlines

5. How

- How am I going to reach this dream? Set little practical goals.
- How are these chains keeping me from taking steps toward this?

- How can I remove some of these chains?
- How can I take my current chains and use them to move forward?
- How can I use previous experience to help me move forward?

6. Who

- Who can I share the load with? Who's in my corner?
- Who is the ball on the end of this chain?
- Who can I link up with? Find a mentor.

Find a Support System

The sixth link has perhaps been the most influential in my life. Having a support system filled with people who genuinely care about your well-being and success is vital for us to rise up and reach the summit. We all need encouragement, someone who we can confide in, to come alongside us and someone to follow. Please don't go through life alone!

Come on a journey

In the following chapters I will recount how these links have radically changed my life and helped me reach my dreams. I invite you on this journey with me in hopes that you would also find the strength to turn your bondage into tools of freedom!