

HIS LOVE IS BETTER THAN WINE



Restoring the Ancient Path
of Biblical Sexual Purity



The Boy Who Pushes the Plow
CHRONICLES OF A REFORMER

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THE BOY WHO PUSHES THE PLOW

"I will cause a boy who drives the plow to know more of the Scriptures than you do."

William Tyndale

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation. Other versions are noted in parentheses.

Some names and identifying details have been changed to protect the privacy of the people involved.

Chronicles of a Reformer · The 9 Seasons of the Kingdom of God

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INTRODUCTION

The Plowboy and the Bride

This is what the LORD says: “Stop at the crossroads and look around. Ask for the old, godly way, and walk in it. Travel its path, and you will find rest for your souls.”

Jeremiah 6:16

Five hundred years ago, a scholar named William Tyndale told a learned churchman that if God spared his life, he would cause a boy who drives the plow to know more of the Scriptures than the churchman did. Tyndale gave his life to put the Bible into the hands of ordinary people.

I write under the name The Boy Who Pushes the Plow because that is who I am. I am not a theologian with letters after my name. I am a former football player who spent years in the NFL, a husband, a father, and a man who has needed the grace of God more than most. Everything in this book I learned the hard way, behind the plow, one row at a time.

This book is about sexual purity. I know that for many readers, that word already feels heavy.

The Subject We Don’t Talk About

For too long, sex has been a taboo subject in the church. It is rarely preached from the pulpit. Many of us grew up in homes where it was never discussed, except for a single sentence: “Wait until marriage.”

Yet here is the strange thing. Many of the same believers who get uncomfortable when sex is mentioned in a sermon will spend their Friday night watching movies and shows that glorify fornication and adultery, with scenes of nudity they would never allow in their living room if a real person were standing there. We have made peace with sexual sin on the screen and made war with sexual honesty in the sanctuary.

The silence has not made us purer. It has made us lonelier. Barna’s 2024 research found that 75 percent of Christian men and 40 percent of Christian women view pornography at least at some level, and that two out of three pastors have struggled with it. Four out of five pastors say their churches are not teaching on it adequately.

**What the pulpit will not talk about, the screen will
happily teach.**

Scripture tells us that every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but sexual sin is a sin against our own body, the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:18-19). All sin separates us from God. But not all sin carries the same collateral damage. We are witnessing right now, in marriages, in families

and in ministries, what happens when the church lacks revelation in the area of sexual purity.

That is why I believe revival tarries. And that is why I wrote this book.

Restraint or Renewal?

The purity many of us were taught was mostly about restraint. Don't look. Don't touch. Don't go there. Those fences have their place, and I will tell you about seasons when I needed every one of them. But restraint alone has left us with men who avoid women instead of honoring them, and with women who wonder why the men of God treat them like a threat.

God did not call us only to restraint. He called us to renewal. He wants to change the way we see, so that a man looks at a woman and sees a daughter of God, not an object of temptation. And He wants to show us something so beautiful that lust loses its power.

That something is Himself. Lust is the lie that the created can give us something better than the Creator. The truth is the line the bride sings in the Song of Songs: *your love is better than wine*.

**Purity is not the absence of desire. It is the presence of
a greater one.**

Twelve Things the Lord Taught Me

This book is built around twelve lessons the Lord taught me about purity over the course of my life. Some came through my failures. Some came through other people's pain. A few came in moments when the Lord simply spoke to my heart. You will find them throughout the book:

1. The tape that came back: the enemy returns at an opportune time (Chapter 1).
2. Seeing behind the mask: any of us can be the vessel the enemy uses to make someone stumble (Chapter 1).
3. The power of what we meditate on (Chapter 1).
4. Spiritual fathers and spiritual daughters (Chapter 10).
5. Restraint is not renewal (Chapter 9).
6. Anointed but unknown (Chapter 11).
7. His love is better than wine (Chapter 17).
8. The consummation tent (Chapter 18).
9. Cut it off: self-gratification and the practice of sin (Chapter 16).
10. A pure embrace (Chapter 9).
11. True purity makes us safe for the broken: Joelle's story (Chapter 9).
12. Freedom is possible: the truth I encountered through Every Man's Battle (Chapter 16).

Around those lessons, I have gathered years of teaching on God's original design for sex, the lies we believe about love,

covenant and divorce, the hard questions about sexual identity, and the practical path to freedom.

I will be honest with you about my own story, including an abortion I paid for in college. I will also speak about leaders who have fallen. I do not do that to expose anyone. I do it because we are meant to learn from the falls of others, and that is the true heart of honor. Every one of those stories could have been mine.

A Mixture of Seasons

In my earlier books I have taught that the Kingdom of God moves in nine seasons: Refinement, Repentance, Revival, Reformation, Recalculate, Revolution, Release, Reward and Repeat. Each book has usually focused on one.

This one is different. If the church is going to become a safe place again in the area of sexual purity, we will need a mixture of seasons. We will need Repentance, because we have to own what we have done. We will need Refinement, because God's original design has to burn away the counterfeits we have settled for. We will need Reformation, because the culture of the church has to change, not just individuals. We will need to Recalculate, because our ideas of love have been shaped more by Hollywood than by the Word. And we will need Revival and Release, because the goal is not a cleaner set of rules but a free and joyful bride.

The five parts of this book follow that path.

How to Read This Book

Every chapter ends with a section called For the Road, three questions and one line to carry with you. Don't rush past them. This is not a book to finish. It is a book to walk out.

If you can, read it with others. Purity was never meant to be fought alone. A small group of men, a circle of women, a husband and wife, a father and son: these are the places where the vaults of shame get opened and the healing begins.

*Then those who feared the LORD spoke with each other,
and the LORD listened to what they said. In his presence,
a scroll of remembrance was written to record the names
of those who feared him and always thought about the
honor of his name.*

Malachi 3:16

Eat the chicken and throw away the bone. Test everything I write against the Scriptures. But I pray that somewhere in these pages, you hear the voice of the Bridegroom calling you back to the ancient path.

His love is better than wine. Come and see.

PART ONE

What the Lord Taught Me

Where did my purity story start?

CHAPTER 1

The Tape That Came Back

When the devil had finished tempting Jesus, he left him until the next opportunity came.

Luke 4:13

I was twelve years old when one of my good friends from down the street handed me a pornography tape.

Some of you are too young to remember VHS tapes. You pushed a black plastic cassette into a machine under the television, and the machine swallowed it. That weekend I waited until I thought no one was paying attention, and I pushed the tape in.

It got stuck.

Not a little stuck. Stuck the way that makes a twelve-year-old boy start sweating, because now the evidence is trapped inside the family VCR. I did the only thing I knew to do. I prayed. “Lord, please get it out.”

And it came out. Immediately.

You would think that would have been the end of the story. A boy prays, God answers, the boy repents. But I am being honest with you, so here is what I actually did. I put it right back in.

This time it stayed stuck for an hour. I don't remember everything I prayed during that hour, but I remember the fear. When the tape finally came out, I had learned my lesson. I walked outside and threw that tape as deep into the bushes as my arm could send it.

About three months later, I opened the front door and there it was, sitting on the porch.

I guess my dog had found it. But I have never forgotten the feeling of looking down at that tape. I had thrown it away. I had made my decision. And it came back anyway.

**What you throw into the bushes, the enemy will try to
bring back to your porch.**

Lesson One: He Waits for an Opportune Time

Looking back, I believe that tape on the porch was a prophetic picture. The devil likes to show up again at an opportune time, especially after we have rejected his schemes.

Scripture shows us this with Jesus Himself. After forty days in the wilderness, Jesus answered every temptation with "It is written." The devil left. But Luke is careful to tell us he left *until the next opportunity came*. He did not leave for good. He waited.

Many believers make a sincere decision at an altar, at a camp, or alone in their room. They throw the tape into the bushes. Then they are shocked when, months later, the same temptation shows

up at their door. They think, *I must not have really meant it. Or worse, God must not have really freed me.*

Neither is true. The return of a temptation is not proof that your repentance was fake. It is proof that you have an enemy who is patient.

That is why Paul did not tell Timothy to resist youthful lusts once. He told him to keep running.

Run from anything that stimulates youthful lusts. Instead, pursue righteous living, faithfulness, love, and peace. Enjoy the companionship of those who call on the Lord with pure hearts.

2 Timothy 2:22

Notice that Paul gives Timothy two directions, not one. Run *from* something, and pursue something else *with* someone. Purity was never meant to be a one-time decision made alone. It is a direction you keep walking, in the company of people who love God.

Repentance is a decision. Purity is a direction.

There is something else in that VCR story I want you to see. When I prayed the first time, God answered. He did not answer because I deserved it. He answered because He is kind. Then I treated His kindness like a loophole. The second time, He let me sit in the consequence for a while.

The Lord is patient with us, but He loves us too much to let us treat His mercy as permission. Sometimes the most loving thing He can do is let the tape stay stuck.

A Virgin Who Went to College

I grew up in a big family. My parents believed that children are a gift from the Lord, and they lived like it. I learned early what the Bible says about sex: wait until marriage.

When I left for college at eighteen, I was a virgin, and I meant to stay that way. I didn't drink. I didn't smoke. I stayed away from the parties where I knew temptation would be waiting. I had real convictions from the Holy Spirit, and I held on to them. My plan was simple: stay pure, marry my wife, and then have sex.

But here is what I didn't have. I didn't have anyone who explained to me *why* purity mattered beyond "it's a sin." My dad's advice was "Wait until marriage." That advice was true. But it was not enough. No one told me how to date. No one told me how desire actually works, or what to do when the person you are falling for is in the same fog you are.

A rule without a reason will rarely survive a real temptation.

I want to be honest about my father, because his story is part of mine. He was there and not there at the same time. Sometimes he wouldn't come home for weeks. He was always showing up

for someone else while our own family struggled. He told me to wait until marriage, and that was true. But a son learns more from his father's life than from his father's words, and the life I was watching did not carry the weight of what he said.

A father's words tell a son what to do. A father's life tells him whether it matters.

I didn't understand all of that yet. I would later. And I have learned that a generation needs more than a fence. It needs a vision. "Don't" can hold a young man for a while. Only a revelation of something better will hold him for a lifetime.

Jesus said it plainly in the garden of Gethsemane:

Keep watch and pray, so that you will not give in to temptation. For the spirit is willing, but the body is weak!

Matthew 26:41

My spirit was willing. My body was weak. And I did not yet know how to keep watch.

The Fog

During my freshman year, I met a girl. We connected instantly, even though both of us were in unhappy relationships at the time. I broke up with my girlfriend right away. She stayed with her boyfriend.

We started pushing physical boundaries. A little further, then a little further. There was a still small voice inside me the whole time, the voice of the Holy Spirit, gently saying *stop*. I ignored it. One night we had sex.

What followed felt like a fog of depression settling over me. I had felt a heaviness like this once before, in high school, after crossing lines with a girlfriend. Back then I had wept before God with a broken heart, and I had felt Him meet me in it. This time was different. This time it felt like the presence of the Holy Spirit had withdrawn.

I want to be careful here. The Holy Spirit does not abandon God's children. But sin has a way of putting cotton in our ears and fog on our windows. We stop hearing Him, and it feels like He has left. For five months I wrestled with guilt. I prayed David's prayer over and over:

*Do not banish me from your presence, and don't take
your Holy Spirit from me.*

Psalm 51:11

Here is the strange part. On the field, I was flourishing. I had one of my best games that season, two sacks on the road against a big-name school. People around me saw a young man on the rise. Inside, my soul was withering.

You can be winning in public and dying in private.

That is one of the most dangerous places a person can be, because the applause numbs the pain that was sent to wake you up.

Lesson Two: Seeing Behind the Mask

Right around that time, freshly out of my virginity and trying to make sense of what I had done, I watched the movie *The Devil's Advocate*. There is a scene near the end where a beautiful woman's face suddenly distorts, and for a moment you see something demonic behind it.

That image went straight through me.

*For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies,
but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen
world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and
against evil spirits in the heavenly places.*

Ephesians 6:12

For the first time, I understood that the devil uses willing vessels. And for the first time, I realized that the willing vessel could be *me*. I could be the one the enemy used to cause someone else to stumble.

That changed how I looked at my new relationship. I had been thinking of it as two people who liked each other and moved too fast. Now I began to see the possibility that we were both being used by the enemy, each one the bait for the other, so that both of us would compromise our purity.

I want to say this carefully, because it is easy to twist. The lesson was not “women are demons in disguise.” That is a lie the church has told too often, and it has hurt a lot of women. The lesson was that *I* could be the mask. The enemy was not only coming at me through her. He was coming at her through me.

Before you ask who is tempting you, ask who you are tempting.

When a young man understands that, purity stops being only about protecting himself. It becomes about protecting her. It becomes a way of loving his sister in Christ. We will come back to that idea often in this book, because I believe it is one of the missing pieces in how the church teaches purity.

Unraveling

I wish I could tell you that lesson turned everything around. It didn't, not right away.

I decided the way to fix what I had done was to marry her. If we got married, I reasoned, then what we had done wouldn't be so bad. But you cannot build a covenant on top of a compromise and expect it to hold. She was unfaithful to me more than once, and the relationship crumbled.

Wounded and angry, I ended up sleeping with a friend's sister. Lust and compromise were consuming me now. What started as one line crossed with one girl had become a pattern.

The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life.

John 10:10

The enemy was stealing, and he was close to destroying. I will tell you in the next chapter just how close.

Lesson Three: The Power of What We Meditate On

That second relationship taught me something I have never forgotten. She was older than me, someone I'd had a crush on since I was thirteen. Back then she was out of reach. Completely impossible. And that is exactly what made the fantasy feel safe. I could think about her as much as I wanted, because it was never going to happen.

Then, years later in college, she was suddenly interested in me. What had been impossible was now right in front of me.

That season showed me the power of meditation. I don't mean meditation in the sense of "visualize your goals and they will come true." I mean something darker. I saw how the enemy had been stirring the pot of lust in me for years, through thoughts I had dwelled on and never taken captive. And I realized that because the enemy comes to steal, kill and destroy, he is willing to open doors that we would have called impossible. He wants to see us fall, and he is patient enough to wait years to arrange it.

James describes the process exactly:

Temptation comes from our own desires, which entice us and drag us away. These desires give birth to sinful actions. And when sin is allowed to grow, it gives birth to death.

James 1:14-15

Desire conceives. Sin is born. Sin grows up. Death follows. Every fall you have ever seen started as a thought someone allowed to stay.

What you meditate on in secret, the enemy will try to put in front of you in the open.

That is a sobering thought. But it is also a hopeful one, because it means the battle can be won much earlier than we think. You don't have to wait until you are alone in a room with someone to fight for your purity. You can fight it today, in your thought life, long before the door ever opens.

That is why Paul tells us where to fix our minds:

And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise.

Philippians 4:8

Fixing your thoughts is not the same as emptying your mind. You cannot defeat a fantasy with a blank space. You defeat it

with something more beautiful. That is the whole message of this book, and we will get there: His love is better than wine.

Three Lessons, One Pattern

Three seasons of my life taught me three lessons:

1. The enemy returns at an opportune time, even after we reject him.
2. Any of us can become a willing vessel the enemy uses to cause someone else to stumble.
3. What we meditate on in secret, the enemy will try to make possible in the open.

Put them together, and you see the pattern of the enemy. He is patient. He works through people. And he starts in the mind.

But there is a pattern of God in my story too. He answered a twelve-year-old's prayer over a stuck VCR. He sent a scene in a movie to open my eyes. He did not let the fog become comfortable. Even when I ignored the still small voice, He kept speaking.

The Lord was not waiting for me to clean myself up before He came after me. He was coming after me the whole time.

I share these stories not because I am proud of them. I share them because of something Nancy Walsh once said: if you want to impress someone, share your success stories, but if you want to impact someone, share your failures. Somewhere reading this is a twelve-year-old with a tape in the bushes, a freshman in a

fog, or a grown man who has been meditating on something for years and just watched the door open.

I want you to know: there is a way out, and His name is Jesus.

For the Road

1. What “tape” have you thrown into the bushes that has shown up on your porch again? How does Luke 4:13 change the way you see its return?
2. Have you ever been the willing vessel the enemy used to cause someone else to stumble? What would it look like to protect the people around you, not just yourself?
3. What have you been meditating on in secret? What true, honorable and pure thing could you fix your thoughts on instead this week?

The enemy is patient, but the Father is more patient still.

CHAPTER 2

Locked Vaults

His delight is not in the strength of the horse, nor his pleasure in the legs of a man, but the LORD takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those who hope in his steadfast love.

Psalm 147:10-11 (ESV)

When she told me she was pregnant, I didn't believe her.

She was the girl from my freshman year, the one I had planned to marry before everything between us crumbled. By then I was wounded, I was angry, and I was sleeping with a friend's sister. So when my ex said the word *pregnant*, I heard it as manipulation. I told myself she was trying to pull me back in.

Then the tests confirmed it.

The Holy Spirit whispered two words to me, the same two words Moses set before Israel: *Choose life*. I want you to know that I heard Him. I am not going to pretend I didn't. But fear was louder, and pain was louder, and I let them drown out His voice.

I paid for the abortion. She did not want it. She protested, and I forced her anyway.

That is the hardest sentence in this book for me to write. I am not telling you this to shock you, and I am not telling it to make myself the center of the story. I am telling you because the story does not end there. The ending is the only reason I can bear to tell the beginning.

At the end of the last chapter I said the enemy came close to destroying me. This is how close.

**The enemy nearly succeeded. Grace lives in the word
“nearly.”**

The Sister Who Wasn’t Supposed to Be Born

To understand how far I fell, you need to know where I came from.

I grew up in a big family. After my mom gave birth to my twin sisters, complications arose. Her doctor warned my parents that having more children could endanger her life, so she had her tubes tied.

Then, despite the procedure, she became pregnant again.

The doctor urged her to terminate the pregnancy. He called it a matter of life and death. My parents refused. They believed that “children are a heritage from the LORD” (Psalm 127:3, ESV), and they were willing to trust Him with the outcome. My mom

carried that pregnancy to term and gave birth to my youngest sister.

“The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps” (Proverbs 16:9, ESV). The doctor had a plan. My parents had a plan too, and it involved a surgery. God had a different one.

Growing up, my youngest sister’s life felt like proof of God’s purpose. Her story shaped my stance on abortion from the time I was a boy. I didn’t need a debate. I had a sister. Abortion was sin, no questions asked.

On this one thing, I was certain.

And yet the boy who was so certain grew into a young man who paid for an abortion and pushed the mother into it.

A conviction that has never been tested is not yet a surrendered heart.

What Was Hidden

From the outside, we looked like the perfect Christian family. But we had our own hidden brokenness.

As an adult, I found out things about my father that I’m not able to share here, because those stories belong to the people he hurt. What I learned was worse than anything I’d imagined as a kid. It explained a lot. And it broke my heart all over again.

There is one thing I will share, because it belongs in this chapter. The same father who refused to abort my youngest sister had, I later found out, paid for an abortion himself. He covered up that sin, and my mom knew.

I don't tell you this to dishonor my parents. I tell you because I need you to see what covered sin does. It doesn't stay buried. It damages people, it dishonors God, and it has a way of showing up again in the next generation. And in college, I made the same choice he had made.

What one generation covers, the next generation often repeats.

This is not only true in families. It is true in the church. When sexual sin is hidden in church culture, God's House of Prayer becomes a den of predators. Jesus turned over tables because His Father's house had become a den of thieves (Matthew 21:13). I believe He is turning them over again, and this time the thing being stolen is the purity and safety of His sons and daughters.

The cure for covered sin is not more covering. It is confession, and it is the blood of Jesus.

Some of you reading this hold strong convictions about sexual sin, about abortion, about purity. You are right to hold them. But do not confuse having the right position with having a cleansed heart. I had the right position. What I did not have was a heart

that had been broken open before God. When fear came, my position folded.

Wretched Man That I Am

That decision plunged me into darkness. Paul's cry became mine: "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (Romans 7:24, ESV).

I cut ties with my friend's sister. Then I went back to the toxic relationship with my ex, and I spiraled further down. I believed I had lost my salvation.

Here is the part that still sobers me. The whole time, I kept sharing Christ with other people. I talked about Jesus with my mouth while my heart hid in shame. I was a hypocrite, not the kind who doesn't care, but the kind who is so ashamed that he cannot stop performing.

Shame will never stop you from preaching. It will only stop you from confessing.

That is what makes shame so dangerous in the church. A man drowning in shame can still lead a Bible study. A woman buried in shame can still sing on the worship team. The enemy does not mind if you keep talking about Jesus, as long as you never tell the truth about yourself. Hidden sin and public ministry can live side by side for years. That is not a sign that God approves. It is a sign that He is patient, and that somebody needs to open the door.

Then Grace Found Me

I did not find grace. Grace found me.

God sent me a mentor, a man who had walked a similar path. He did not hand me a list of rules. He introduced me to the gospel of grace, the good news Paul wrote to the Ephesians: “God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can’t take credit for this; it is a gift from God” (Ephesians 2:8). For the first time I understood that my salvation had never rested on my performance, so it could not be destroyed by my failure. It rested on Jesus.

Then I did something I could not have imagined a few months earlier. At a campus ministry meeting, I confessed publicly. I told the room what I had done.

And the chains broke.

I don’t know how else to say it. What I had carried in secret lost its grip the moment I carried it into the light. Confession did in one night what all my hiding never could.

**What you hide, the enemy holds. What you confess,
God heals.**

Later, I began dating the woman who would become my wife, and I vowed to break the cycle. Then a pregnancy scare struck.

I remember kneeling in a restaurant bathroom, surrendering to God. I prayed David’s prayer:

Create in me a clean heart, O God. Renew a loyal spirit within me.

Psalm 51:10

The test was negative. I married her anyway. It was a redeemed beginning, not because we had done everything right, but because this time I had run toward God instead of away from Him.

Collateral Beauty

Ten years after the abortion, I stood before a church in New York and shared a hypocrite's story, and I owned it as my own.

The promise I stood on that day is the one I stand on still: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9, ESV).

The altar flooded with repentant hearts.

My daughter's death exposed the depth of my depravity. There is no softer way to say it. But Paul says that "where sin increased, grace abounded all the more" (Romans 5:20, ESV), and I have lived inside that verse.

Today I still grieve. But I do not live in regret, because God has done what only God can do. "He has made everything beautiful in its time" (Ecclesiastes 3:11, ESV). My daughter waits in heaven. I will meet her there, and I will meet her as a man washed clean, because "the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7, ESV).

That is what I call collateral beauty: God's mercy shining through my darkest hour.

Collateral beauty does not mean God approved of the darkness. It means He refused to let the darkness have the last word.

I need to speak to some of you directly now.

If you are a woman who was pressured into an abortion by a man who was supposed to protect you, I am sorry. I was that man once. The weight of that choice does not belong on you alone, and the Father does not look at you the way the pressure made you feel.

If you made that choice yourself, in fear, in confusion, or alone, the same blood that washed me is enough for you. You are not too far gone.

And if you are a man who paid for one, drove someone to one, or simply walked away and let her carry it, do not hide behind the fact that it happened in her body. It happened on your watch too. Bring it to the cross. There is no grief so deep that His mercy cannot reach the bottom of it.

Locked Vaults

Years later, midway through my NFL career, I sat across from a teammate I'll call Lucius after practice. I told him about the abortion in college, about how shame had pressed on me and how Jesus had brought me through it.

Lucius's face tightened. "Oh, don't tell anybody that," he said. "They'll use it against you. People will lose respect."

To justify his warning, he told me about a time he had been vulnerable with another teammate. He had admitted that he'd been with over eighty women. The teammate's reaction was, "Man, I look at you different." Lucius shrugged, like that reaction proved his point.

I shook my head. "I'm not trying to get people to look at me," I said. "I'm trying to get them to look at who Jesus is."

I explained that vulnerability is not a weakness to be weaponized. It is a doorway to Christ. When someone hears how God redeemed the lowest places of your life, it points them away from shame and toward hope.

Lucius sat silent for a long moment. I left that night praying that more of us would risk humility, so that captives could hear the sound of freedom.

Notice what had happened to Lucius. He had opened up once, and someone looked at him differently. So he learned to lock it away, and now he was teaching me to do the same. That is how vaults get locked in the body of Christ. One bad reaction at a time.

The Lord once showed me a room full of locked vaults. Inside them were the testimonies of His saints on earth. He said to me, "These stories can heal the broken and set captives free, yet because they glorify Me and not self, they remain sealed."

As I understood it, speaking what He has done releases prophetic power that breaks yokes. But shame and the fear of man keep God's people from vulnerability and a broken spirit. Until believers embrace humility and testify publicly about what He has saved them from, many will remain captive. The testimonies that could set them free sit unused behind locked doors, unable to bless the lost and those held by the enemy's lies.

Your testimony is not your reputation. It is someone else's key.

The Essence of Prophecy

When John fell at the feet of an angel in the book of Revelation, the angel stopped him and pointed him back to Jesus:

Worship only God. For the essence of prophecy is to give a clear witness for Jesus.

Revelation 19:10

Many of us think of prophecy only as predicting the future. But Scripture says its essence is a clear witness for Jesus. When you tell what Jesus did for you, you are declaring that He can do it again for the person listening. Your story becomes a word over their life. That is why Revelation also says the saints defeated the accuser "by the blood of the Lamb and by their testimony" (Revelation 12:11). The blood is His part. The testimony is ours.

This is why the enemy works so hard to keep testimonies locked up. He does not mind your past nearly as much as he minds you talking about how Jesus redeemed it.

There is a difference between shame and vulnerability, and it is worth learning to see it. Shame hides in order to protect yourself. Vulnerability opens up in order to point to Jesus. Shame keeps the focus on what you did. A testimony keeps the focus on what He did. Both involve your failure, but only one of them carries power.

Shame protects your image. Testimony reveals His.

Jesus opened His first great sermon with this:

God blesses those who are poor and realize their need for him, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.

Matthew 5:3

The Kingdom does not belong to the impressive. It belongs to those who know they are poor. And the Lord says through Isaiah, “I will bless those who have humble and contrite hearts, who tremble at my word” (Isaiah 66:2). Brokenness is the currency of heaven. We spend so much effort looking strong, when the very thing God is drawn to is the thing we hide.

Psalm 147 says the Lord does not take pleasure in the legs of a man. I spent most of my adult life being paid for what my legs could do. It took a long time for me to learn that God was never impressed by my strength. He was waiting for my surrender.

David learned the same thing after his own fall:

The sacrifice you desire is a broken spirit. You will not reject a broken and repentant heart, O God.

Psalm 51:17

This first part of the book belongs to the season of Repentance, and repentance always begins with honesty.

I am not asking you to tell everyone everything. Wisdom matters, timing matters, and some stories must be shared first with a pastor, a counselor or a trusted friend before they are ever shared from a stage. But I am asking you not to let shame be the one holding the key.

Somewhere there is a young man sitting where I sat, sure that he has lost his salvation and still talking about Jesus with a heart full of shame. Somewhere there is a young woman who was pushed into a decision she never wanted. They are waiting for someone to open a vault.

For the Road

1. Is there a part of your story you have locked away because you are afraid of how people will look at you? What would it look like to bring it first to God, and then to one trusted person?

2. Where have you seen shame keep someone performing instead of confessing? Where do you see it in yourself?
3. Who in your life might need to hear what Jesus has done for you? How could your testimony become “a clear witness for Jesus” this week?

**Your darkest chapter, surrendered to Jesus, can
become someone else’s way out.**

PART TWO

The Original Design

What did God intend?

CHAPTER 3

Sex Was God's Idea

Then God blessed them and said, “Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it. Reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the animals that scurry along the ground.”

Genesis 1:28

There is a story often told about a teenage girl who had decided to save herself for marriage.

One day, in a casual conversation about relationships, a friend teased her about it. Still a virgin? Really? The girl wasn't rattled. She said she didn't think of her virginity as something to lose. She thought of it as something to give, a gift for her husband.

The conversation went quiet. Later, a few of her friends came back and asked her why it mattered so much to her. She told them that sex is a gift from God, meant for the safety of marriage, and that it involves far more than two bodies. By waiting, she was honoring God, her future husband and herself.

Whether that conversation happened in one school hallway or a thousand, I love what that girl understood. Listen to the way our

culture talks. We say a person *lost* their virginity, as if it were car keys. Something misplaced. Something taken. Something you are a little embarrassed to still have.

God never talks about it that way.

Your purity is not something to lose. It is a gift to give.

God's Idea First

Before we talk about what went wrong, we have to talk about what God made right. That is what this part of the book is about.

Look at the first words God ever spoke over the human race. Before there was a law, before there was a fall, before there was a single sin, God blessed the man and the woman and told them to be fruitful and multiply. The first command in the Bible was a blessing, and it could not be obeyed without sex.

Then Scripture tells us how God intended it to work:

That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.

Genesis 2:24 (NIV)

Leave. Unite. Become one. That is the order. A man leaves the covering of his father's house, he is joined to his wife in covenant, and the two of them become one flesh.

Sex was God's idea. Not man's, and not the enemy's.

I need you to settle that in your heart, because the church has often taught purity as if sex itself were the problem. It isn't. The enemy cannot create anything. He has never made a single good thing. All he can do is take what God made and twist it. Every perversion is a counterfeit, and you can only counterfeit something that has real value.

When a young man or woman grows up hearing only "don't," they can come to believe that God is reluctant about sex, or embarrassed by it. Then the world comes along and says, "We are the ones who celebrate this. Your God just wants to take it away." That is a lie. God is not the enemy of your desire. He is its Author, and He knows how it was meant to work.

Your Body Makes a Promise

In the 2001 film *Vanilla Sky*, one character tells another that when you sleep with someone, your body makes a promise whether you do or not.

Hollywood stumbled onto a biblical reality there. Sexual intimacy is not just pleasure. It makes a promise, whether your heart meant to or not.

Paul said it centuries earlier. Writing to a church in a city known for its sexual immorality, he asked, "And don't you realize that if a man joins himself to a prostitute, he becomes one body with her? For the Scriptures say, 'The two are united into one'" (1 Corinthians 6:16). Paul applies Genesis 2:24 even to a

transaction. The man thinks he is buying a moment. God says something far deeper is happening.

You may have seen a claim passed around online that women carry the DNA of every man they have ever slept with. That claim goes far beyond the evidence, so let me tell you what the research actually found. In 2012, researchers at the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center in Seattle examined the brains of 59 women after death and found male DNA in 63 percent of them. The researchers believed it most likely came from pregnancy with a male child. Some have wondered whether sexual union itself might also leave a lasting physical mark. That is a theory, and it is unproven. I am not going to build anything on it.

I don't need to. Scripture already says the two become one flesh. Whatever a microscope can or cannot find, God has told us that sex joins people in a way that does not simply wash off in the morning.

**What feels like a moment to you is a covenant act to
God.**

Here is where our culture has come unhinged. Sex unhinged is sex that focuses on the moment of pleasure rather than the movement of family. The emotional high becomes the goal, instead of the relational covenant that births a family and endures through the years. And when you elevate the experience of the sexual encounter over the endurance of family, the

relationship becomes disposable. The moment someone doesn't measure up to the expectation, they can be traded in.

Later in this book we will look closely at two lies the sexual revolution has preached: that sex is for pleasure, and that desire equals identity. For now, hold on to the truth that answers them. Sex is for marriage, and a biblical identity redirects our desires instead of being ruled by them.

Five Husbands and a Man Who Wasn't

Jesus once sat by a well in Samaria and talked with a woman who had come to draw water. In the middle of a conversation about living water, He said something strange:

He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back." "I have no husband," she replied. Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true."

John 4:16-18 (NIV)

Notice how carefully Jesus counts. Five husbands. Then a sixth man, who is *not* her husband. Living together did not make him one. Jesus drew a line between covenant and cohabitation, between a marriage and an arrangement.

The way I read it, each of those five unions had made her one flesh with a man. The sixth relationship was something

different. She was living with him without the covenant that makes a man a husband.

That leads me to a statement that surprises people:

**Sex isn't just something we do once we are married.
In God's eyes, it is one of the vital acts of how we get
married.**

I am not saying that sleeping with someone makes you married to them. The covenant is made before God and witnesses, with vows. But sex is the act that seals and consummates that covenant. It was designed to be the signature on the promise. That is why using it outside the promise does so much damage. You are signing a covenant you never intend to keep.

And look at how Jesus treated this woman. He knew everything, and He did not humiliate her. He told her the truth and offered her living water in the same breath. She ran back to her village, and “many Samaritans from the village believed in Jesus because the woman had said, ‘He told me everything I ever did!’” (John 4:39). Her testimony opened a vault for a whole town.

Consummation, Not Audition

Many people today treat sex like an audition. You try each other out, and if it works, maybe you commit. Living together first is just being practical, they say. Why would you marry someone without knowing whether you are compatible?

Paul heard a version of that argument in Corinth:

You say, “I am allowed to do anything”—but not everything is good for you. And even though “I am allowed to do anything,” I must not become a slave to anything. You say, “Food was made for the stomach, and the stomach for food.” (This is true, though someday God will do away with both of them.) But you can’t say that our bodies were made for sexual immorality. They were made for the Lord, and the Lord cares about our bodies.

1 Corinthians 6:12-13

The Corinthians said sex was just an appetite, like food. You are hungry, so you eat. You have desire, so you satisfy it. Paul says no. Your body was not made for sexual immorality. It was made for the Lord, and the Lord cares about your body.

Sex is how you consummate a marriage, not how you figure out whom to marry.

Sex isn’t recreation. It isn’t a test drive. It is part of the covenant of marriage. When we use it to decide whether someone is worth committing to, we have turned a covenant into a product review. And people were never meant to be reviewed.

A Picture of Covenant

All through Scripture, God's deepest covenants are sealed with blood. God walked between the pieces of the sacrifice when He made His covenant with Abraham (Genesis 15). Moses sprinkled blood on the people and called it "the blood of the covenant" (Exodus 24:8). And on the night He was betrayed, Jesus lifted the cup and said, "This cup is the new covenant between God and his people—an agreement confirmed with my blood" (Luke 22:20).

I see in the way God made the human body a picture of that same covenant. For many women, the first time she becomes one with her husband involves the shedding of a little blood. I believe God wrote covenant into our bodies, so that the marriage bed itself would remind us that this union is not casual. It is a blood covenant.

Let me be very careful here, because this is a picture, not a medical test. A woman's body is not a certificate of her worth, and plenty of women who have never been with a man would not fit that picture at all. And if your purity was taken from you by someone else's force or manipulation, hear me clearly: what was stolen from you is not counted as your sin. Your covenant with God has not been torn.

At the end of this book, I will share a picture the Lord gave me about a bride, a tent and a bloodstained sheet. It is the most beautiful thing He has ever shown me about purity. For now, just know this. God took sex seriously enough to write covenant into the human body. We should take it at least that seriously.

Your Body Is a Temple

Now we come to the passage that holds this whole chapter together:

Run from sexual sin! No other sin so clearly affects the body as this one does. For sexual immorality is a sin against your own body. Don't you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself, for God bought you with a high price. So you must honor God with your body.

1 Corinthians 6:18-20

The Passion Translation puts verse 20 this way: you were “God’s expensive purchase, paid for with tears of blood.” Every time I read that, I think of Gethsemane, where Jesus prayed so hard that His sweat fell like great drops of blood. That was the price of your body.

Your body is not a playground. It is a sanctuary. The Spirit of Holiness lives there. That changes the question we ask. The question is no longer “How far can I go?” It becomes “What does a temple deserve?”

Let me add something the Lord has been teaching me. All sin separates us from God. There is no sin so small that it doesn’t need the blood of Jesus. But Paul says sexual sin is different in one way: it is a sin against your own body, the very temple God lives in.

All sin separates. Not all sin does the same damage.

A lie and an affair both need the cross. But they do not leave the same wreckage behind. We will come back to that later, when we look at why the church has lost its saltiness on purity.

Grace Is Not a Loophole

If you have read this far and you are thinking, *It's too late for me. I already gave away what was supposed to be a gift*, then hear the gospel.

“For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God’s glorious standard” (Romans 3:23). Everyone. The girl in the story who waited and the young man who didn’t. The pastor and the person in the back row. None of us earned our way into the Father’s house. All of us came in through the same door, and His name is Jesus.

You have already read my story. God does not throw away people who failed. He makes all things new.

But I also have to tell you the other half of the truth, because grace without truth is not really grace. Paul anticipated the question:

Well then, should we keep on sinning so that God can show us more and more of his wonderful grace? Of course not! Since we have died to sin, how can we continue to live in it?

Romans 6:1-2

Remember the twelve-year-old who prayed the tape out of the VCR and then put it right back in? That is what we do when we treat grace as a loophole. We must not use God's grace as an excuse to lower His standard for marriage.

A gospel that preaches only the canceling power of Jesus' blood, and not its transforming power, is a distorted gospel.

His blood cancels your debt. His blood also changes your life. You don't get one without the other.

Too often the church is quick to confront the sins of the world and slow to confront the sins we tolerate in our own pews. We will deal with that honestly in a later chapter. For now, this part of the book belongs to the season of Refinement. Before God can fix what is broken in us, we have to see clearly what He designed us for. Refining is not God being harsh. It is God removing what doesn't belong, so that what is precious can shine.

Sex was God's idea. It was good when He made it. And it can be good again, in the place He made it for.

For the Road

1. How have you heard sex talked about, in your family, your church, or your friendships? Did it sound more like God's idea, or the enemy's?
2. What changes when you see your purity as a gift to give rather than something to lose? What changes when you see your body as a temple?
3. Have you ever treated grace like a loophole? What would it look like to receive both the canceling and the transforming power of Jesus' blood?

God is not the enemy of your desire. He is its Author.

CHAPTER 4

The Lie in the Garden

The woman was convinced. She saw that the tree was beautiful and its fruit looked delicious, and she wanted the wisdom it would give her. So she took some of the fruit and ate it. Then she gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it, too. At that moment their eyes were opened, and they suddenly felt shame at their nakedness.

Genesis 3:6-7

Picture a garden with more trees than you could count.

Fruit hangs from every branch. Rivers run through it. There is no sickness, no shame, no loneliness. A man and a woman walk there with nothing to hide, and in the cool of the day God Himself walks with them. They have never known hunger. They have never been rejected. They have never been told they are not enough.

In the middle of that garden stands one tree they are told not to eat from.

One.

That is where lust was born. Not in a dark alley, not in a back room, not on a screen at two in the morning. Lust was born in paradise, in a perfect world, in people who had everything. That should tell us something about how it works. Lust does not need an empty life to take root. It only needs a voice that can make a full life feel empty.

In the last chapter we saw that sex was God's idea, a good gift given in a good garden. In this chapter I want to show you how the enemy turned that garden into a crime scene, because he is still using the same playbook today. If you can see the lie in the garden, you will start to recognize it in your own life.

Freely Became Not

Listen to what God actually said to Adam:

And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.

Genesis 2:16-17 (KJV)

Notice where God started. He started with *freely*. Every tree. Help yourself. Then, after the abundance, came one boundary, and the boundary was there to protect them.

Now listen to how the serpent framed it:

Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?

Genesis 3:1 (KJV)

Do you see what he did? He took the word *freely* and replaced it with *not*. He took a command that began with a feast and twisted it into a question about a fast. God had said, “Eat from all of them but one.” The devil said, “Did God really tell you no?”

The devil knows that when people focus on their lack instead of their abundance, their attention will shift toward what they can’t have instead of what they do have. Adam and Eve had everything except the one thing that would destroy their relationship with God. So that is exactly what the devil got them to stare at.

What gets your attention will shift your intentions.

Picture a married man with a wife who loves him, children who adore him, a church that honors him. Then one day his whole world shrinks down to one woman at work, one website, one conversation he knows he should not be having. Everything God gave him freely fades into the background. The one thing becomes everything.

So let me ask you the question I have had to ask myself. What is the *one thing* the devil has you focused on right now to hinder your intimacy with God?

You probably know the answer before you finish reading the question.

The Threefold Lie

John gives us a lens for what happened in that garden:

For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.

1 John 2:16 (KJV)

Now put that verse beside Genesis 3:6. Eve saw that the fruit was good for food, that it was beautiful to look at, and that it would make her wise. Three appeals, and they line up with John's three almost perfectly.

1. The lust of the flesh says, "This will meet my needs."

The fruit was *good for food*. It promised provision. The lie is that desire equals permission. Just because you want something, and just because you feel you need it, does not mean God has given it to you.

2. The lust of the eyes says, "This will feel good." The fruit was *beautiful*. It promised pleasure. The lie is that beauty equals ownership. Just because something is lovely to look at does not mean it belongs to you. Proverbs 31:30

reminds us that charm is deceptive and beauty does not last.

3. **The pride of life** says, “This offers more than God’s plan.” The fruit would make her wise. It promised power and a new identity. The lie is that we can find our worth outside of what God says about us.

Sexual immorality repeats that same threefold lie in every generation. And under all three is one deeper lie.

**The oldest lie in the world is that God is holding out
on you.**

The serpent’s whole pitch was that God was not as good as He seemed, that there was something better on the other side of His boundary.

That is the same pitch the enemy makes to a teenager who has been told to wait, to a single woman who is tired of being alone, and to a husband whose marriage has grown cold. *God is keeping something good from you. Take it.*

And what was the result? Their eyes were opened, just as the serpent promised. But they did not see glory. They saw their own nakedness, and they felt shame for the first time. They sewed fig leaves together and hid from the God who used to walk with them.

**Lust promises to open your eyes, and then it shows
you only your shame.**

Like Adam and Eve, believers are still being lured into trading divine purpose for momentary gratification. And every time we make that trade, something in our identity and our mission gets corrupted. Sexual encounters outside God's design will never tell you who you are. They will only tell you what you have lost.

What You Mislabel, You Will Mistreat

There is a phrase I keep coming back to when I teach on this.

What you mislabel, you will mistreat.

Words have objective definitions, but we all carry subjective definitions shaped by our experiences. *Submit*, *family*, *church* and *honor* all mean different things to different people depending on what they have lived through. For one person, *father* means protection. For another it means danger. Words are not just a way to communicate. They are a window into how we see the world. And if you mislabel what you are looking at, it changes how you treat it.

If you call a tiger a cat, you will end up raising a predator instead of a pet.

That is exactly what our culture has done with lust. It has called it chemistry, romance, freedom, self-expression, "just being a guy." It has put a collar on a tiger and invited it to sleep at the foot of the bed. And then it acts surprised when someone gets hurt.

The church is not innocent here either. You can have all the right biblical language and still miss the meaning. When our obedience does not match our vocabulary, it shows that we have not really understood the words we are using, and so we miss the revelation God meant to transform our hearts. Jesus said it this way, quoting Isaiah: “These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me” (Matthew 15:8, NIV).

So let me give you some honest labels.

Noah Webster’s 1828 dictionary defined lust as a “longing desire; eagerness to possess or enjoy,” and also as “carnal appetite; unlawful desire of carnal pleasure.” Look at that first phrase: *eagerness to possess*. Lust always wants to own something. It looks at a person and sees a possession. Webster pointed his readers to Romans 1 and 2 Peter 2, two passages that show where that eagerness ends up when it is left unchecked.

And here is how I define sexual immorality: it is when the desire to defile integrity, holiness and purity excites you instead of repulsing you, disturbing you or offending you.

That definition is uncomfortable on purpose. Deception, lying, self-gratification and pornography all condition a person to dishonor their own temple, their body, and often the bodies and dignity of others as well. Over time, what is forbidden, distorted or destructive can become the very thing the flesh craves, until purity feels foreign and defilement feels normal.

That does not happen overnight. It happens one mislabel at a time. And every step along the way feels reasonable.

There is a path before each person that seems right, but it ends in death.

Proverbs 14:12

The path *seems* right. That is the danger. Nobody walks toward a cliff they can see. The enemy does not show you where the path ends. He just keeps relabeling the next step.

Never Satisfied

Here is something else the garden teaches us. The forbidden fruit did not satisfy. It never does.

Sheol (the place of the dead) and Abaddon (the place of destruction) are never satisfied; so [the lust of] the eyes of man is never satisfied.

Proverbs 27:20 (AMP)

The grave never says, “That’s enough, I’m full.” Neither does lust. One look becomes two. One image becomes a habit. One encounter leaves you hungrier than before. Lust is a fire that grows by what you feed it.

So why do we keep feeding it? I believe one of the biggest reasons is pain.

When the promises of God seem unreachable or far away, one of the lies we believe is that the lust of the flesh will medicate our pain. The single person who has waited for years and wonders if God forgot them. The husband who feels disrespected at home. The young man who never heard his father say “I’m proud of you.” The young woman who has been told her whole life that she is too much or not enough. Lust shows up like a doctor with a prescription. *This will take the edge off.*

It never heals the wound. It only numbs it for a moment, and then the wound is still there, plus the shame.

Author Anthony Hulsebus, in his book *Rejection Exposed*, observes that sexual lust may be the most pervasive and addictive reaction to rejection. He also notes that lust is not only sexual; King Saul lusted for power. And he makes a point that has stayed with me: “You can be selfish without lusting but you cannot lust without being selfish.”

That brings us to a word every one of us needs to be honest about: *entitlement*. Inside a relationship, entitlement is when you decide, consciously or not, that what you want is so important that it outweighs what God wants. It becomes so important that it runs right past any effort to honor the other person’s body as a temple made for the living God. It does not even stop to ask what that person truly desires.

Entitlement does not see a person. It sees a supply.

And entitlement always ends up accusing God. In Ezekiel's day the people said, "The way of the Lord is not just." God answered that it was *their* way that was not just (Ezekiel 33:17). That is the garden all over again. *God is unfair. God is holding out. I deserve this.*

When our burning desire for God is quenched by a burning desire for sexual pleasure, we give birth to an idol called compromise.

I know that idol. I have bowed to it. Maybe you have too. But idols can be torn down, and the way to tear this one down is not only to resist the fruit. It is to remember the garden.

River or Pie

Think about the difference between a river and a pie.

When you dip a cup into a river, there is plenty more for everyone who comes after you. But when you take a piece of the pie, there is less for everyone else. Those two pictures describe two completely different ways of living.

An orphan heart lives with a pie mentality. It is always counting what is left. It is afraid there will not be enough, so it grabs. It compares. It takes what it can before someone else gets it. The Spirit of adoption lives with a river mentality. It knows the Father's supply does not run out, so it can afford to be grateful, to give thanks, and to wait.

Adam and Eve had to walk past their abundance to reach the one thing God was trying to protect them from. And they were not the first to do that. The devil himself ignored the abundance and the privileges God had entrusted to him in heaven:

Your heart became proud on account of your beauty, and you corrupted your wisdom because of your splendor.

Ezekiel 28:17 (NIV)

Many teachers have read this lament over the king of Tyre as a window into the fall of Satan. Whether you read it that way or not, the pattern is the same. Pride looked at what it had been given and decided it was not enough. And the one who fell turned around and offered that same poison to the first man and woman.

When Adam and Eve focused on the one thing they didn't have, they lost the one thing that was truly precious to them, the one thing they actually needed: their relationship with God. They traded the Gardener for a piece of fruit.

Now think about this. If the devil could get Adam and Eve focused on lack in a perfect world, in their unbroken state, what makes us think he won't try the same thing with us, in a broken world, with weak flesh? He will. He is. Every single day.

But here is the good news, and I want you to hear it clearly.

Sexual sin cannot be conceived in a heart that is focused on the abundance of its intimacy with God.

When the Holy Spirit is flowing within us like a river, there is no room for the orphan's panic. You do not have to grab, because you are already full. You do not have to steal fruit, because you know the Father's table is open. That is why this book is not mainly about trying harder to avoid one tree. It is about learning to enjoy the whole garden again, and most of all, the God who walks in it.

The Lord is my best friend and my shepherd. I always have more than enough.

Psalm 23:1 (TPT)

Read that slowly. *More than enough*. Not barely enough. Not enough if you are lucky. *More than enough*.

This is part of the season of refinement. The Lord is not only removing the fruit from our hands. He is retraining our eyes to see the trees we walked past. Here is a question worth asking every time you feel that old pull: What is the enemy telling me I am missing? Often, once you say the lie out loud, you can already hear how false it is.

The God who said *freely* has not changed His mind. The rivers are still running. The table is still set. And He is still walking in the cool of the day, calling out the same question He asked Adam: *Where are you?*

Not because He doesn't know. Because He wants you to come home.

For the Road

1. Where has the enemy replaced *freely* with *not* in your thinking? What are you staring at that is causing you to overlook the abundance God has already given you?
2. Which part of the threefold lie hits you hardest: provision (“this will meet my needs”), pleasure (“this will feel good”) or power (“this offers more than God’s plan”)? What label do you need to correct?
3. Do you live more like the river or the pie? What pain have you been trying to medicate with lust, and what would it look like to bring that pain to your Father instead?

The fruit was never the point. The relationship was.

CHAPTER 5

Love Is Patient, Lust Is in a Hurry

And Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her.

Genesis 29:20 (KJV)

Seven years.

Jacob had nothing to offer. He had run from home with a stolen blessing and a brother who wanted him dead. When he arrived at his uncle Laban's house, he had no dowry, no flocks of his own, nothing to bring to the table but his two hands. Then he saw Rachel, and he loved her.

So he made an offer. "I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel." And Laban agreed.

Think about what that meant. Seven years of tending another man's sheep. Seven summers of heat and seven winters of cold. Seven years of seeing the woman he loved nearly every day and not touching her. In our culture, most couples would call that unbearable. Plenty of people today would call it unnecessary, maybe even unhealthy.

But Scripture says those seven years *seemed to him but a few days, for the love he had to her.*

That is one of the most beautiful sentences in the Bible about love. And it answers one of the most common lies we believe about it.

The Sixth Lie

Later in this book we will look at seven lies we believe about love. This is the sixth one, and I want to deal with it here, because it sits right at the root of the original design.

Lie: Love cannot wait for sexual intimacy.

Truth: Love is patient. Lust is always in a hurry.

Paul's great description of love begins with exactly that word: "Love is patient" (1 Corinthians 13:4). Before love is kind, before it keeps no record of being wronged, before it endures through every circumstance, it waits. Patience is not a side feature of love. It is the first thing on the list.

Jacob's waiting did not prove that his love was weak. It proved that it was real.

Love is a byproduct of knowing the heart before you touch the body. Lust is a byproduct of knowing the body before you know the heart.

Lust needs to touch the body before it gets to know the heart. Love needs to touch the heart before it has permission to touch

the body. Lust is hungry for attention. Love is looking to give affirmation. One is always taking. The other is always building.

This is the season of refinement, and refinement is slow on purpose. Gold is not purified in a microwave. God is not trying to keep good things from you by asking you to wait. He is forming a love in you strong enough to carry the weight of what He wants to give you.

Pursued or Hunted

I want to speak to my sisters for a moment, and then to my brothers.

Sisters, many women struggle to tell the difference between being pursued and being hunted. From the outside, the passion behind seeking a beloved and the passion behind acquiring a trophy can look almost the same. Both men call. Both men show up. Both men say beautiful things.

But the motive is always easy to expose: love is patient, while lust is always in a hurry.

Love is willing to labor, to prove itself, and to protect, without pressure and without jealous possession. Lust disguises urgency as passion. It demands quick access before trust can be earned.

So watch the tempo. If he is in a hurry to isolate you, in a hurry to escalate, in a hurry to secure you before his character has been proven, you may not be pursued as a beloved. You may be

hunted as a trophy, one more to hang on the wall among his other “kills.”

Lust disguises urgency as passion.

Ask yourself honest questions. Is this relationship building trust, mutual respect and a long-term commitment? Or is it rushing toward isolation and physical control? Does this person value knowing my heart and my character before my body? Does he honor my boundaries, or does he test them? True love waits, and it guards the whole person, body, soul and spirit.

Now, brothers. I do not want that warning to land only on the women, because it is not their job to fix what we refuse to lead. If a woman has to spend her whole dating life trying to figure out whether you are a hunter, something is wrong with the men, not with her. We are the ones called to set the tempo. We are the ones called to show, over time, that we can be trusted.

Jacob did not ask Rachel to slow him down. He set the pace himself. He went to work.

A man who loves her will make it easy to see. A man who is hunting her will make it hard.

If you find yourself in a hurry, stop and ask why. What are you trying to secure? What are you afraid will happen if you wait? Usually the answer reveals that you are thinking about what you can get, not about who she is.

Permission from Above

Here is something our culture almost never says. Sexual intimacy needs permission, and the permission has to come from higher than two people's feelings.

When permission to touch the body has not been granted by God through the covenant called marriage, the body, soul and spirit of a person can feel violated and condemned, even when both people said yes. That is why so many people walk away from “consensual” encounters feeling strangely emptied. Something in them knows a door was opened that heaven had not unlocked.

You cannot grant someone sexual access to your body if heaven has not granted them permission, because you cannot give away something that does not belong to you. We saw in Chapter 3 that your body is a temple and that you were bought with a price. The temple belongs to the One who paid for it.

For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God.

1 Thessalonians 4:3-5 (NKJV)

Notice Paul's contrast. Holiness and honor on one side, the *passion of lust* on the other. And notice who he says lives by

passion: people “who do not know God.” Lust is what happens when desire has no knowledge of God to anchor it.

Hebrews says it just as plainly:

Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.

Hebrews 13:4 (NIV)

Marriage is not the cage around sex. It is the covenant that makes sex safe.

When the Heart Is Ignored

I have to say something hard here, and I want to say it carefully.

What happens when someone touches a body without caring about the heart at all? Follow lust to its end, and it has a name. It is called sexual assault.

Lust in a hurry, lust that refuses to know the heart, lust that treats a person as a trophy, is the same spirit that, left unchecked, takes what was never offered. It is not a different thing. It is the same thing grown up.

If that happened to you, hear me clearly. It was not your fault. You did not give anything away. It was taken from you. Nothing in this chapter about permission or waiting was ever written to put weight on your shoulders. The weight belongs to the one who took. Your Father sees what was done to you, He grieves it,

and He is able to restore what was stolen. If you have never told anyone, please find a safe person, a counselor, a pastor you trust, or the authorities, and let someone walk with you.

And to the men reading this: this is why self-control is not optional. The patience of love is not just a nice idea for good Christian dating. It is the line between honoring God's daughters and harming them.

The Cheap Counterfeit

The enemy has never created anything. He can only counterfeit. Whatever God makes original, the devil makes a *perversion*, a cheap demonic copy of the original version.

He hates God's original design for sex because it brings glory to God through two becoming one flesh. And he knows something about us. He knows we can grow impatient. He knows we may settle for the counterfeit instead of waiting on God for the real promise, the one that protects His people instead of prostituting them.

Abraham and Sarah show us how this works. God promised them a son. The years went by, and the promise felt slow. So they made their own plan, and Ishmael was born. Later the promised son, Isaac, finally came. And look what happened:

But Sarah saw Ishmael—the son of Abraham and her Egyptian servant Hagar—making fun of her son, Isaac.

Genesis 21:9

**The counterfeit you settle for will always mock the
promise you were waiting for.**

Every “Ishmael” in our lives will attack God’s promised seed and His purposes. The shortcut does not just sit quietly in the corner. It competes with what God is doing. The relationship you rushed into will fight the marriage God wanted to give you. The habit you settled for will mock the freedom He promised.

And the counterfeit is often celebrated. Jesus told the Pharisees:

Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God.

Luke 16:15 (KJV)

What our culture applauds, heaven often grieves. Here are some of the counterfeits I see, the original version beside the perversion:

- Building an ark vs. building an empire
- Discipling your kids in Christ vs. discipling your kids in sports
- Believing in biblical monogamy vs. believing in cultural promiscuity
- Building a family vs. building a franchise
- Protecting Jesus’s glory vs. protecting your brand or ministry

None of those counterfeits looks evil on the surface. Every one of them can be admired by people. But every one of them is a shortcut to something God wanted to give in His time and His way.

This applies to more than dating. Spiritually speaking, God wants us to know His heart for His Body, His character, before we are given permission to touch His Body, to minister to His Bride. A leader who rushes into influence before he knows the heart of God for people will handle the church the way a hunter handles a trophy. We will look more closely at that in later chapters. For now, just see the pattern: the order is always heart first, then touch.

A Bowl of Stew

How did Jacob learn to value waiting? Scripture gives us a contrast in his own brother.

One day Esau came in from the field exhausted and hungry and found Jacob cooking a pot of stew. Esau asked for some. Jacob asked for his birthright in exchange.

“Look, I’m dying of starvation!” said Esau. “What good is my birthright to me now?”

Genesis 25:32

So Esau swore it away, ate the meal, got up and left. Scripture’s verdict is short: “He showed contempt for his rights as the firstborn” (Genesis 25:34).

Jacob was far from perfect. He was a schemer, and he would reap some of that scheming later from Laban himself. But in this moment he valued the prophetic promise over the momentary pleasure, while Esau valued instant gratification more than the promises of God.

Rick Joyner, in *There Were Two Trees in the Garden*, observes that Esau may have looked strong on the outside but was weak in spirit, more concerned with feeding his appetite right now than with his eternal inheritance. Joyner says we should be shocked that anyone would trade a birthright for a bowl of stew, and even more shocked to discover how much of that same nature lives in most of us.

The writer of Hebrews connects Esau directly to sexual sin:

Make sure that no one is immoral or godless like Esau, who traded his birthright as the firstborn son for a single meal. You know that afterward, when he wanted his father's blessing, he was rejected. It was too late for repentance, even though he begged with bitter tears.

Hebrews 12:16-17

Listen to Esau's words again, and you will hear the voice of every sexual temptation you have ever faced.

The lie of sexual sin says, "I'm dying for this right now. What good is my purity to me in this moment?"

That is the lie. You will not die. It only feels that way. And what you are being asked to trade is worth infinitely more than what you are being offered.

I know waiting can feel exhausting. Maybe you have been single longer than you hoped. Maybe your marriage is in a dry season and the wait for healing feels endless. Maybe you have fallen before and you are tired of fighting. God has a word for the weary:

He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength. Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.

Isaiah 40:29-31 (ESV)

Even the strongest young men fall exhausted. I have been one of those young men. Strength was never going to be enough. But those who *wait* on the Lord get new strength. Waiting is not weakness. It is where God pours His strength into us.

And if you have already sold something for a bowl of stew, do not stop reading here. Esau's story is a warning, not a verdict over your life. Esau wept over the blessing he had lost. You can do more than weep over a blessing. You can run back to the One who gives it. The Father who made a way for Jacob the schemer has made a way for you through His Son. In the season of

refinement, He does not throw out the gold because it had impurities. He puts it in the fire to make it shine.

Jacob served seven years, and they seemed like days, because of love. When you see how much you are loved by God, waiting stops feeling like a punishment. It starts feeling like a promise.

For the Road

1. Where are you in a hurry right now? What are you afraid will happen if you wait on God's timing?
2. Looking at the original-versus-perversion list, which counterfeit has the most pull in your life? What "Ishmael" may be mocking a promise God gave you?
3. When temptation says, "What good is my purity to me right now?", what truth will you answer it with? Write it down before the moment comes.

Love waits because it knows what it is waiting for.

CHAPTER 6

Salt and Sugar

Taste and see that the LORD is good. Oh, the joys of those who take refuge in him!

Psalm 34:8

Set a spoonful of salt next to a spoonful of sugar on a white plate, and most of us could not tell them apart from across the room. Both are white. Both are grainy. Both pour the same way. You only find out which is which when it hits your tongue.

Salt can look like sugar, and sugar can look like salt. That is exactly how love and lust work. From a distance they resemble each other. Both feel strong. Both pull at the heart. Both can make you do things you never thought you would do. But one leaves a sweet taste in your mouth, and the other leaves you bitter.

That is why the psalmist does not say, “Read about the Lord and see.” He says, *taste* and see. Discernment is not only a matter of information. It comes from experience. If you have only ever tasted salt in your life, you may never recognize the sweetness of sugar. And if you have never tasted the real love of God, you will keep mistaking lust for love.

**You cannot recognize the counterfeit until you have
tasted the real thing.**

Salt or Sugar?

I have a question I love to ask young people: “Salt or sugar?” It is a question every believer needs to learn to ask, because the enemy rarely puts a label on the jar.

Bible teacher Jen Wilkin once wrote, “It is not coincidental that a lack of discernment and a neglected Bible are so often found in company.” I agree with her. The person who does not know the Word of God will not know the taste of truth. And the person who does not know the taste of truth will swallow almost anything, as long as it looks sweet.

Here is the root of the confusion. Lust tells us that a person, made in the image of God and belonging to God, can give us something better than God Himself. We will spend a whole chapter on that lie near the end of this book. For now, just notice how it works. It never shows up looking like poison. It shows up looking like dessert.

There is something else about salt. When you eat it by itself, it does not satisfy your thirst. It makes you thirstier. Lust works the same way. Every bite promises to fill you, and every bite leaves you wanting more.

Lust never satisfies. It only makes you thirstier.

The Woman in the Red Dress

In the movie *The Matrix*, there is a training program where Morpheus walks Neo through a crowded city street and teaches him what to watch for. In the middle of the crowd, a woman in a striking red dress walks past, and Neo turns his head. When he turns back, the woman has become an Agent with a gun pointed at him.

She was never just a woman in a dress. She was a deliberate distraction, built into the program to see whether the trainee would lose focus.

That scene is a picture of what intelligence agencies call a honey trap. A honey trap is when someone uses a romantic or sexual relationship to get something from a target: information, influence, money, or evidence for blackmail. The relationship is not real. It is bait. The whole point is to get you close enough to be compromised.

The book of Proverbs described the honey trap thousands of years before anyone made a movie about it:

For the lips of a forbidden woman drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil, but in the end she is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword. Her feet go down to death; her steps follow the path to Sheol; she does not ponder the path of life; her ways wander, and she does not know it.

Proverbs 5:3-6 (ESV)

Notice the progression. Honey at the beginning, wormwood at the end. Sugar on the lips, salt in the wound.

I need to say something carefully here. Proverbs was written as a father speaking to his son, so it pictures temptation as a woman. But I believe this passage is talking about a spirit, not about women. The honey on those lips is flattery. It is false affirmation. The seducer in your life could be a man or a woman, a coworker, an old flame in your messages, or a screen in your pocket at midnight. Women are not the enemy in this book. Many women have been the targets of honey traps set by men.

What makes the honey work is hunger. People who feel rejected are desperate for validation. If no one has told you that you are valuable, the first person who does will have enormous power over you. The enemy knows this. He likes to keep us ignorant of his schemes so we cannot see the attack coming.

With persuasive words she led him astray; she seduced him with her smooth talk.

Proverbs 7:21 (NIV)

Flattery is the honey. Rejection is the hunger. Lust is the trap.

The Bitter Aftertaste

Think about this for a moment. Most married men and women would refuse any medicine that promised great benefits but would take away their ability to be physically intimate with their spouse. No matter what it offered, the loss would be too great.

Yet sexual sin has that same effect on our intimacy with God. It does not change God's love for us. It robs us of closeness with Him. The adversary thrives when God's people do not understand this, because the undisciplined lust of the flesh leads to a famine of intimacy with the living God.

We almost always underestimate the bitter consequences. Samson was captivated by Delilah, and it cost him his eyes and his freedom. David saw Bathsheba from a rooftop, and the sword never left his house. There is an old saying that sin will take you farther than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay, and cost you more than you want to pay.

Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.

Galatians 6:7-8 (NIV)

People say the road to hell is paved with good intentions. I would add that human wisdom, left to itself, always leads to costly compromises that leave us full of regret. Proverbs warns us that there is a path that seems right but ends in death. Jesus said the gate is wide and the road is broad that leads to destruction, and many go that way (Matthew 7:13-14). The broad road is not usually marked “destruction.” It is marked “freedom.”

Did you notice the last line of that Proverbs passage? *Her ways wander, and she does not know it.* That is one of the scariest parts of sexual sin. It blinds. The person caught in it often cannot see the pattern they are repeating. God said through Hosea, “My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge” (Hosea 4:6, NIV). Paul said the god of this age has blinded minds so they cannot see the light of the gospel (2 Corinthians 4:4). Pharaoh watched plague after plague and still could not see where his hardened heart was taking him.

Ignorance can feel like bliss in the beginning. But eventually the consequences of avoiding reality catch up, and they often leave a person spiritually bankrupt.

The grass is not always greener on the other side. All that glitters is not gold.

Sometimes you get what you want, but you won't like what you get.

Joseph understood this when Potiphar's wife grabbed his cloak. He did not stay to debate the honey. He ran. We will look at his story more closely in a later chapter.

Four Counterfeits

Perversion is a cheap version of the blessings God has already promised us. In our impatience, we grow tired of waiting for His timing, and we foolishly grab with our own hands what He wanted to give us as a gift.

The adulterous woman in Proverbs offers four counterfeits. I want you to learn to recognize them, because they still show up today:

1. **Counterfeit love.** A false intimacy that mimics real affection but is fleeting and self-serving. It has none of the depth, commitment and selflessness of true love.
2. **Counterfeit fulfillment.** A promise of satisfaction that turns out shallow and temporary. Real fulfillment comes from a life lived on purpose with God. The counterfeit leaves you empty.
3. **Counterfeit freedom.** It feels like escape from rules and limits, but it leads straight into bondage and regret. True

freedom is found in a disciplined life that brings lasting peace.

4. **Counterfeit happiness.** It promises joy through indulgence, and it delivers guilt and sorrow. Real joy grows in healthy relationships and in walking in step with God.

Every one of these looks like sugar. Every one of them is salt.

Some people will say, “That’s your truth. Mine is different.” But think about where that leads. If truth were only subjective, nothing could ever be proven false. No counterfeit could ever be exposed, because there would be no original to compare it with.

If truth were subjective, nothing could ever be proven false.

The battle for discernment starts in the imagination. One University of Vermont study, by researchers Hicks and Leitenberg in 2001, found that 98 percent of men and 80 percent of women in committed relationships reported fantasizing about someone other than their partner. That means most of us have tasted the counterfeit in our minds long before we are ever offered it in real life. The question is not whether the honey will be offered. The question is whether we will recognize it.

The Sin of Onan

There is a strange story in Genesis that I believe speaks directly to our generation. Judah’s son Er died, and by the custom of that

time, his brother Onan was responsible to give Er's widow, Tamar, a child who would carry on his brother's name.

And Onan knew that the seed should not be his; and it came to pass, when he went in unto his brother's wife, that he spilled it on the ground, lest that he should give seed to his brother.

Genesis 38:9 (KJV)

Onan wanted the pleasure without the responsibility. In his eyes, his personal liberty outweighed what God wanted for his life and his family.

Around the time Roe v. Wade was overturned, I asked the Lord one morning in prayer, "Was this not an act of repentance?" I sensed Him say, "The sin of Onan is in the land."

That stopped me. We want the pleasure of our sin without the consequences of our sin. The church speaks passionately against abortion, but how often does it speak about the sexual immorality that so often leads to it? We address the fruit and not the root. And I believe one reason we avoid the root is that our own hands are not clean when it comes to sexual purity.

We cannot keep fighting the fruit while we keep watering the root.

I say this with a trembling heart, not a pointed finger. You already know from my own story that I have a daughter waiting for me in heaven. I am not writing as someone who stands

above this. If you have walked through an abortion, there is no condemnation for you in Christ. There is grace, there is healing, and there is a Father who has not stopped loving you. My point is not to add shame. My point is that the church will never heal a wound it refuses to trace back to where it started.

Borrowing Pain from the Future

You may have heard this old saying:

Watch your thoughts, before they become words. Watch your words, before they become actions. Watch your actions, before they become habits. Watch your habits, before they become character. Watch your character, before it becomes your destiny.

Every destiny starts as a thought. A thought is not the same wound as an action, and in a later chapter we will see what happens when the church treats a scratch and a shotgun wound as if they were the same. But every serious wound started somewhere small. The honey is always tasted in the mind first.

So how do we resist something that tastes so sweet in the moment? Here is something that has helped me.

**Sometimes, to make a wise decision, you have to
borrow pain from the future and bring it into the
present.**

Before you take the bite, picture the aftertaste. Picture your spouse's face, or your future spouse's face. Picture your children. Picture the moment you would have to tell your pastor,

your parents, or your friends. Picture the intimacy with God you would trade for a few minutes of sugar. When you bring that pain into the present, you realize it is never worth making a permanent decision based on a temporary feeling.

That takes vision. Without it, we drift.

Where there is no prophetic vision the people cast off restraint, but blessed is he who keeps the law.

Proverbs 29:18 (ESV)

Notice what happens when vision is missing. People cast off restraint. A man without a picture of his future will trade it for whatever is in front of him tonight.

Comfort is a drug.

Once you get used to it, it becomes addicting. Give a weak man easy pleasure, good food and cheap entertainment, and he will throw his ambition and his purpose right out the window. The enemy does not always need to tempt us with something outrageous. Sometimes he only needs to keep us comfortable enough that we stop dreaming.

I want to end this chapter with good news about salt. Jesus called His people the salt of the earth (Matthew 5:13). In my own teaching on the seasons of God, salt is the season I call Recalculate. Real salt stings. It corrects our course. It humbles our pride and stings our selfishness until we are back in line

with God's purity. That sting is not God rejecting you. It is God refusing to let you settle for a counterfeit.

So if you have tasted the bitterness of lust, do not run from the Lord's correction. Let it sting. Then taste and see that He is good. Once you have tasted His goodness, the honey on a stranger's lips will never look the same again.

For the Road

1. Where in your life have you mistaken salt for sugar? What did the aftertaste teach you?
2. Which of the four counterfeits (love, fulfillment, freedom, happiness) does the enemy most often offer you? What is the real thing God wants to give you in its place?
3. Practice borrowing pain from the future. Picture one specific temptation you face, and write down what it would cost you a year from now if you gave in.

Taste the real, and you will spot the counterfeit.

PART THREE

Why Revival Tarries

Why has the church gone quiet on purity?

CHAPTER 7

Two Sisters

*Yet even though Oholibah saw what had happened to
Oholah, her sister, she followed right in her footsteps.
And she was even more depraved, abandoning herself to
her lust and prostitution.*

Ezekiel 23:11

Johnny Manziel was one of the most exciting college football players of his generation. He won the Heisman Trophy as a freshman. Then he was drafted in the first round, and within a couple of years his NFL career was over. In a Netflix documentary about his rise and fall, he said something I have never forgotten: “I had every single thing that I could’ve ever wanted ... and when I got everything that I wanted, I think I was the most empty that I’ve ever felt inside.”

I spent many years in the NFL. I know how loud the stadium is, and I know how quiet the hotel room is afterward. That sentence does not surprise me at all. Solomon said the same thing three thousand years earlier:

“Meaningless! Meaningless!” says the Teacher. “Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless.” What do people gain from all their labors at which they toil under the sun?

Ecclesiastes 1:2-3 (NIV)

When the trophy does not fill the hole, we go looking for something else that will. And very often, the something else is sex.

**When our dreams fail to satisfy us, we will
compromise our character to satisfy our flesh.**

The Glory, the Gold and the Girls

The late evangelist Steve Hill once pointed to the three temptations John describes in his first letter: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life (1 John 2:16). Hill ranked pride of position and place first, materialism second and sexual immorality third. He passed along John Wimber’s short name for them: the glory, the gold and the girls.

I call them an ungodly trinity: the love of power, money and sexual immorality. They usually travel together, because they grow from the same root. That root is greed, a rejection of godly contentment (1 Timothy 6:6-10). Paul calls greed idolatry (Colossians 3:5). It runs on the lie that fulfillment is found in control, in having, or in indulging, instead of in Christ’s sufficiency (Hebrews 13:5).

Power corrupts by lifting me above others. Money enslaves by promising me I can live without God (Matthew 6:24). And sexual immorality replaces the patient, sacred intimacy God designed with a fleeting, distorted pleasure (1 Thessalonians 4:3-5). Greed always isolates. It breeds pride and secrecy. Contentment does the opposite. It breeds gratitude and community.

That is why so many gifted people fall in the same order. First they get the glory. Then the gold follows. And then, almost every time, the girls, or whatever their particular version of that temptation is.

**What you tolerate in private in days of peace will be
exposed publicly in days of pressure.**

Two Sisters

In Ezekiel 23, God tells the prophet a hard story. There were once two sisters, daughters of the same mother. Even as young girls in Egypt, they gave themselves to prostitution. The older was named Oholah, and the younger was Oholibah. God says, “I married them, and they bore me sons and daughters.” Then He tells Ezekiel who they are: Oholah is Samaria and Oholibah is Jerusalem (Ezekiel 23:2-4).

Oholah lusted after the Assyrian officers, attractive young men in handsome uniforms. When she left Egypt, she did not leave her spirit of prostitution behind. God finally handed her over to the very lovers she desired, and they destroyed her.

And then comes the verse at the top of this chapter. Her younger sister watched the whole thing happen, and she followed right in her footsteps. She was even more depraved.

In its context, this chapter is about Israel and Judah chasing foreign nations and their idols instead of the God who married them. But I see in these two sisters a picture of our own times. I believe two ideas have worked together like sisters to seduce the Western world, and much of the church with it, away from covenant love. The first is Romanticism. The second is the sexual revolution.

There is nothing new under the sun. The names change, but the spirit is the same.

The Older Sister: Romanticism

Romanticism was an artistic, literary, musical and intellectual movement that began in Europe toward the end of the 18th century and was at its peak roughly from 1800 to 1850. It emphasized emotion and individualism. It was partly a reaction against the Industrial Revolution and against the cold, rational mood of the Enlightenment. Some of what it valued was beautiful: nature, art, the heart.

But when emotion is put on the throne, it eventually takes over marriage too. Romanticism lifted personal feeling and gratification above family and covenant. Left unchecked, this carnal romanticism replaces covenantal trust and unconditional love with intuition and fleeting feelings. It hijacks biblical love.

Here is how I put it.

Romanticism unhinged builds on feelings and encounters instead of faithfulness and endurance.

It creates expectations built on relational feelings and romantic moments instead of on the rock of covenant faithfulness. And it has produced a generation of what I call relational opportunists. They refuse to settle down because they are afraid of missing out. They believe unconditional love is boring and restrictive. In reality, they are the ones missing out, on the depth and the safety of covenant love.

Romanticism also turned love into something we consume. We have become fixated on the mountain tops of love, the emotional highs, while we despise the valleys where love gets tested. We have been trained to value the experience a person gives us more than the person God made in His image. We fall in love with how someone makes us feel rather than with who they truly are. Then, when they stop producing the feelings we want, we take our love back and call it “falling out of love.”

That is not love. That is a transaction.

Covenant love works the other way. It does not wait for the feeling before it shows up. It shows up in the valley, on the ordinary Tuesday, in the hospital room and in the season when nothing feels romantic at all. That is the kind of love God has shown His people from the beginning. He married two

unfaithful sisters in Ezekiel's story, and through prophet after prophet He kept calling His people home.

The Younger Sister: The Sexual Revolution

If Romanticism was the older sister, the sexual revolution was the younger one who watched what happened and went further.

The sexual revolution was a social movement in the United States, roughly from the 1960s to the 1980s, that challenged traditional codes of sexual behavior. It pushed for acceptance of sex outside of marriage, and with it came the normalization of the birth control pill, pornography, premarital sex, public nudity and the legalization of abortion.

I believe the sexual revolution sold the world two lies.

The first lie is that **sex is for pleasure**. The second is that **desire equals identity**. In other words, sex exists to make you feel good, and whatever you want is who you are.

Here is the truth that answers both. Sex is for marriage, the covenant where a man and a woman become one flesh (Genesis 2:24). And your God-given identity is meant to direct your desires, not the other way around. You are not what you crave. You are who God says you are.

Think about how this works in real life. Every one of us has desires that do not line up with God's design. Some are sexual. Some are about money, attention or control. The world says, "Your desire tells you who you are, so embrace it." The gospel

says, “God tells you who you are, so bring your desire to Him.” A son who knows he is loved by his Father does not have to obey every hunger he feels. He can feel the pull and still say no, because his identity is not up for grabs. His desires are real, but they are not his master.

That is why identity matters so much in the fight for purity. When I do not know who I am, every desire feels like a command. When I know whose I am, desire becomes something I can steward instead of something I must serve.

Desire is a servant, not a definition.

You can see the fruit of these two sisters in the numbers. Between 1867 and 1879, the American divorce rate was about 0.3 divorces per 1,000 people each year. By 1999, it was 4.1 per 1,000. That is a rise of about 1,270 percent.

The world called all of this freedom. But in his book *There Were Two Trees in the Garden*, Rick Joyner has written that Satan’s attempts to enslave us are often subtle, and at times they even look like liberty. He observes that the more “free” a person becomes in chasing satisfaction, the less satisfaction he actually finds. The appetite grows and the fulfillment shrinks, until a person is consumed by the very thing that promised to free him. Peter said it first:

They promise freedom, but they themselves are slaves of sin and corruption. For you are a slave to whatever controls you.

2 Peter 2:19

The freedom the world offers always ends in bondage.

The Power of Agreement

Why do I call them sisters and not just two bad ideas? Because the enemy understands a Kingdom principle: agreement multiplies power. Moses asked how one could chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight (Deuteronomy 32:30). If agreement multiplies power for the people of God, the enemy knows it can multiply power for darkness too.

So he uses these two ideas together. Romanticism says, “Follow your heart.” The sexual revolution says, “And your body may follow wherever your heart goes.” Together, they attack God’s design for marriage and family at its foundation. If the enemy can twist love into a feeling instead of a covenant choice, he can destroy the foundations of the righteous.

If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?

Psalms 11:3 (ESV)

In the House of God

You might think this is only a problem “out there” in the world. It is not. Like Oholibah, the church watched what happened to the culture, and instead of learning from it, we followed in its footsteps.

These two sisters have planted unrealistic expectations in Christian marriages. We idolize the peak experiences of love and struggle to show unconditional love in the ordinary, unglamorous moments.

And it has not stopped at marriage. It has changed how we do church. Instead of seeking belonging and family in the house of God, we chase entertaining experiences and charismatic leaders. We value momentary emotion over lasting Kingdom impact. We run after the next exciting event rather than investing in real community. We lift up celebrity-like leaders who may be distant and unapproachable, while we overlook the humble shepherds who actually know and care for their flock.

When we expect people to meet needs only God can meet, it hinders our relationship with God, the true source of guidance and love. And a church that runs on the thrill of the encounter will produce believers who run their marriages the same way.

This is why I believe this part of the book belongs in a season of Reformation. Revival is not only about a fresh fire. It is about a return to the ancient foundations, so that the fire has something to burn on.

**A church built on encounters will raise marriages
built on encounters.**

Renewing the Mind

Here is the hope. What the world has trained into us, the Spirit of God can train out of us.

Many researchers believe that pornography and compulsive sexual behavior can shape the brain's reward system, much like other habits that flood the brain with dopamine. Over time, natural pleasures can feel dull and the craving grows. Shame and isolation often follow. I am not a scientist, and I want to be careful not to claim more than the research shows. But I know this much from Scripture and from life: what we repeatedly feed, we strengthen.

The good news is that the same brain that can be shaped toward bondage can be reshaped toward freedom. Scientists call it neuroplasticity. The Bible calls it renewal.

Paul's answer to every stronghold of the mind is the same: be transformed by the renewing of your mind (Romans 12:2). We will see in Chapter 9 what that renewal looks like for the way men see women.

Renewal happens through repentance, through soaking in the Word of God, and through surrendering our thoughts to Christ's authority. Paul describes it as warfare:

We use God's mighty weapons, not worldly weapons, to knock down the strongholds of human reasoning and to destroy false arguments. We destroy every proud obstacle that keeps people from knowing God. We capture their rebellious thoughts and teach them to obey Christ.

2 Corinthians 10:4-5

Romanticism and the sexual revolution are strongholds of human reasoning. They will not fall to a better argument alone. They fall when a thought shows up, “You deserve this,” “Follow your heart,” “This is who you are,” and you capture it and bring it to Jesus.

Healing begins when grace dismantles shame and the Word of God restores purity. You do not have to follow in your sister's footsteps. Oholibah saw what happened and went the same way anyway. You have seen it too. You can choose a different road.

**You are not what you crave. You are who God says
you are.**

For the Road

1. Where have you seen the glory, the gold and the girls travel together, in the world, in the church or in your own heart?
2. Which of the two sisters has had more influence on you: the idea that love is a feeling, or the idea that sex is for

pleasure and desire is identity? Where did you first learn it?

3. What is one thought you need to take captive this week and bring to Christ?

Covenant love is not boring. It is the safest place on earth.

CHAPTER 8

Malachi 2 Before Malachi 3

Here is another thing you do. You cover the LORD's altar with tears, weeping and groaning because he pays no attention to your offerings and doesn't accept them with pleasure.

Malachi 2:13

If you have been in church for any length of time, you have heard Malachi 3.

You have probably heard it right before the offering buckets came around. “Will a man rob God?” The preacher reads about the windows of heaven, the storehouse and the devourer, and then the ushers step forward. I am not mocking that. Giving matters, and I believe in the tithe.

But I have often wondered about the chapter right before it.

In Malachi 2, God's people are crying at the altar. They are weeping and groaning, and they cannot understand why heaven has gone quiet. They are bringing offerings. They are showing up. And God tells them plainly why their worship is not being received. It has nothing to do with money.

I have heard Malachi 3 preached more times than I can count. I can hardly remember hearing Malachi 2 preached at all. I wonder where the culture of the church would be today if we had preached the second chapter as often as the third.

We preach the curse of the unpaid tithe, but not the curse of sexual immorality in our families.

The Chapter We Skip

Here is God's answer to the people weeping at His altar:

You cry out, "Why doesn't the LORD accept my worship?" I'll tell you why! Because the LORD witnessed the vows you and your wife made when you were young. But you have been unfaithful to her, though she remained your faithful partner, the wife of your marriage vows. Didn't the LORD make you one with your wife? In body and spirit you are his. And what does he want? Godly children from your union. So guard your heart; remain loyal to the wife of your youth.

Malachi 2:14-15

Read that slowly. The tears were real. The offerings were real. The worship service was full. But God was watching something the people had stopped watching. He was watching what happened in their homes and in their marriage beds.

God ties the acceptance of our worship to our faithfulness in covenant. He does not separate the altar from the bedroom. We

are the ones who did that.

A verse later, Malachi goes on to say what God thinks about divorce, and we will give that its own chapter later in this book. For now I want you to see the order. Before God ever says “Will a man rob God?” He says, in effect, “Will a man rob his wife?”

Jesus told a story about a man who had his religious life in perfect order:

The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed this prayer: “I thank you, God, that I am not like other people—cheaters, sinners, adulterers. I’m certainly not like that tax collector! I fast twice a week, and I give you a tenth of my income.”

Luke 18:11-12

Notice what he was proud of. He fasted, and he tithed. Those are good things. But he used them as proof that he was not like the adulterers. Jesus said it was the broken tax collector, not the tither, who went home justified.

Here is a paradox I see in the religious spirit. It teaches, without ever saying it out loud, that tithing guarantees God’s blessing even when a person is living in sexual sin, and that failing to tithe brings a curse even on someone who lives a pure life. Put that way, we can see how upside down it is. So I have to ask: is the real problem in American Christianity a lack of tithing, or is it the sexual immorality we have left unchecked in our own house?

The religious spirit will make you more afraid of missing church than of being defiled by pornography.

Tithing and fasting will reveal your spiritual discipline. Sexual purity will reveal the fruit of your character and your true hunger for God.

Taboo in the Pulpit, Welcome on the Screen

For too long, sex has been taboo from the pulpit.

At the same time, many cultural Christians spend their evenings watching shows and movies that glorify fornication, adultery and nudity. We laugh at it. We binge it. We recommend it to our small group. Then a preacher stands up on Sunday and talks plainly about sex, and suddenly we are uncomfortable.

The sin never bothered us. The sermon does.

I find it interesting that the church is often eager to deal with the world's sins. We are quick to speak about abortion, same-sex marriage and gender confusion. But we do not want to look at what we are lacking in our own purity and consecration, especially when it comes to pornography, fornication, adultery and unbiblical divorce. Those are the sins we currently enable inside the body of Christ.

Judgment begins with the house of God, not with the house next door.

So let me ask some questions, and I am asking them of myself first. Do you tolerate sexual immorality:

- in the movies and shows you watch?
- within your household?
- in the way you dress?
- in your dating relationships?
- in your work environment?
- with your kids, in what you allow them to see and in what you never talk about?

These are not questions to shame you. They are questions to wake us up. If we want to make the church great again, we have to tackle this. There is no revival that goes around it.

What the Numbers Say

Back in 2016, the well-known evangelist Josh McDowell told CBN News, “I would personally say that from all my knowledge now, pornography is probably the greatest threat to the cause of Christ in the history of the world.”

That may sound like a big claim. The numbers since then have not made it smaller.

In 2024, Barna and Pure Desire released a study called *Beyond the Porn Phenomenon*. It found that 54 percent of practicing Christians view pornography. Among Christian men, about 75 percent view porn at some level. Among Christian women, about 40 percent. And this is not only a problem in the pews.

Two out of three pastors, 67 percent, said they have struggled with porn, and 18 percent said they are struggling right now.

Then came the number that should break our hearts the most. Eighty-one percent of pastors said their churches do not adequately teach on it.

Our children are not waiting for us to get comfortable. A 2023 Common Sense Media report found that 73 percent of teenagers ages 13 to 17 have seen pornography online. The average age of first exposure was twelve. Fifteen percent saw it at ten or younger. And 58 percent said they first saw it by accident.

I was twelve when a friend handed me a tape. Today a twelve-year-old does not need a friend down the street. He needs only a phone, and more than half the time he is not even looking for it.

The enemy is discipling our children while the church is deciding whether the topic is appropriate.

I do not share these numbers so you can feel hopeless. I share them because you cannot heal a wound you refuse to look at. If three out of four men in the church are fighting this battle, then the man sitting next to you on Sunday is not your enemy. He may be your brother in the same trench. And if most of our pastors have struggled, then suspicion will not save us. What we need is a church culture where it is safe to confess and serious about getting free.

Is All Sin Equal?

People often ask me, “Isn’t all sin the same?”

Here is how I answer. All sin separates us from God equally. But not all sin carries the same collateral damage.

Paul makes this distinction himself. He tells us to run from sexual sin, because every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but sexual immorality is a sin against our own body (1 Corinthians 6:18). We looked at that whole passage in Chapter 3. The point here is simple. A lie and an act of adultery both need the blood of Jesus. But only one of them usually ends with a family split in two, a child carried between two homes, or a woman who can no longer sit in a church without shaking.

There is a long-running television crime drama that opens every episode by telling the audience that, in the justice system, sexually based offenses are considered especially heinous, and that an elite squad of detectives exists just to investigate them.

Does Hollywood know something about sexual sin that the church has forgotten?

The world will glamorize sex on one channel and prosecute its abuses on the next. At least it admits that some wounds go deeper than others. Too often the church has flattened everything into “sin is sin” and then wondered why the people who were harmed by sexual sin never felt safe in our buildings.

All sin separates. Not all sin leaves the same wreckage.

I believe we are witnessing what happens when the church lacks revelation in sexual purity. We have treated it like a small thing, and it has cost us in ways we are only beginning to count.

Remember Uzzah. When David was bringing the ark of God back to Jerusalem, the oxen stumbled and the ark tilted. Uzzah reached out and steadied it with his hand, in direct violation of God's instructions for how the ark was to be carried, and he died right there beside it (2 Samuel 6:6-7). I do not tell that story to make you afraid of God. I tell it because it shows that holy things have to be handled God's way. The ark was the place of God's presence. Today, Paul says, your body is.

How many times have we been killed spiritually by the consequences of treating God's dwelling place like a common thing?

Fruit, Not Root

We think the main issue in the church is sexual immorality. I have come to believe it is only the fruit. The root is pride.

Pride says, "I can handle this." Pride says, "My gift is strong enough to cover my private life." Pride keeps the struggle hidden, because confessing it would cost us our image. And pride is the fruit of religion, because religion teaches us to manage how we look instead of letting God change who we are.

Humility is the opposite, and we will look more closely at how pride works in the next chapter. For now, know this: if you only

cut the fruit, it will grow back. The axe has to go to the root.

Marriage Will Expose It, Not Fix It

One of the lies we believe about love is that marriage will fix a lust or pornography problem.

I hear it from young men all the time. “Once I’m married, I won’t need this.” The idea is that a wife will be the cure. That idea is dangerous, and it is unfair to her.

Marriage will not fix your lust. Marriage will expose it.

Lust has very little to do with a lack of access to sex. Lust is a heart that has learned to take instead of give. Paul reminds us that the body was not created for illicit sex but for the Lord (1 Corinthians 6:12-13). If you bring a heart trained by pornography into the marriage bed, you will bring the pornography with you. You will compare. You will consume. You will treat the woman you promised to cherish as one more image to use.

Porn does not prepare you for marriage. It can shipwreck your marriage.

Think about what it actually does. It breaks trust. It steals real intimacy and replaces it with a counterfeit. It tells both husband and wife that they are not enough. It is selfish and lazy, because it trains a man to receive pleasure without ever having to love. It brings performance problems and dissatisfaction into the

bedroom. It is linked to depression, stress and anxiety. It changes the way the brain responds to pleasure. And it is demeaning, both to the people on the screen and to the one watching. One study found that porn use increased the likelihood of marital infidelity by as much as 300 percent.

Every one of those things is the opposite of what God designed sex to be.

Keeping the Marriage Bed Pure

I want to speak now to married believers, because many of you thought this chapter was for single people.

The writer of Hebrews says that marriage should be honored by all and the marriage bed kept pure (Hebrews 13:4). That word warns against adultery with another person, and it also calls us to protect what happens between a husband and wife from anything that would defile it, including a screen.

If you are married and caught in pornography, here is what I want you to hear.

First, it is not your spouse's fault. A husband is not looking at porn because his wife is not attractive enough or available enough. That is the lie talking. Do not put your sin on her shoulders.

Second, secrecy is the soil where this grows. Bring it into the light. That usually means telling a trusted, mature believer or pastor first, so you have help, and then telling your spouse

honestly. Do not trickle the truth out a little at a time. Every new discovery feels to her like a brand new betrayal.

Third, when your spouse is hurt, let her be hurt. Her pain is not an overreaction. Do not rush her to forgive you so that you can feel better. Repentance is patient with the wound it caused.

Fourth, get real help. Counseling, accountability and a plan for your devices are not signs of weakness. They are what humility looks like with its sleeves rolled up.

And if you are the spouse who discovered it, hear me too. You did not cause this. You are not crazy for feeling what you feel. You are allowed to ask for honesty and for help, and God sees your tears at the altar.

Men, this is where we lead. We do not demand trust. We rebuild it, one honest day at a time.

**A pure marriage bed is guarded by a humble
husband.**

Rend Your Hearts

The book of Malachi ends with silence. After Malachi, heaven did not send another prophet for about four hundred years. I do not want the church to keep weeping at the altar and wondering why the windows of heaven feel shut, when God has already told us why.

But I also want you to know that God has never stopped inviting His people home. Long before Malachi, the prophet Joel heard the same Father's heart:

“Yet even now,” declares the LORD, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments.” Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster. Who knows whether he will not turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him?

Joel 2:12-14 (ESV)

Yet even now. After everything. After the numbers, after the scandals, after the secret years. Even now.

God is not asking us to tear our clothes and put on a show of sorrow. He is asking us to tear our hearts open and let Him in. That is what reformation looks like: a people who return.

I believe this is part of why revival tarries. We have been bringing our offerings and skipping our repentance. But the moment we put Malachi 2 back in front of Malachi 3, I believe the Lord will turn and leave a blessing behind Him.

For the Road

1. Why do you think the church has preached Malachi 3 so much more than Malachi 2? What has that taught people about what God cares about?

2. Look back at the “Do you tolerate” questions. Which one did the Holy Spirit put His finger on for you?
3. If you are married, is there anything in your life that is defiling the marriage bed? If you are single, are you expecting marriage to fix something only Jesus can heal?

God weighs our faithfulness before He counts our offerings.

CHAPTER 9

Restraint Is Not Renewal

Treat older women as you would your mother, and treat younger women with all purity as you would your own sisters.

1 Timothy 5:2

Midway through my NFL career, one of my wife's best friends from college said something to me I have never been able to shake.

She told me she thought something was wrong with her.

I asked her to explain. She told me that she had once gone up to a pastor after the sermon. She simply wanted to thank him and tell him how well the service had gone. But he was awkward toward her. Then his wife showed up and gave her a mean look.

As she told me this, she started to cry. She said that godly men always treat her this way, but worldly men treat her better. Then she asked me the question that broke my heart: "What's wrong with me?"

Nothing was wrong with her.

In that moment I realized that something was wrong with us. The version of purity we were teaching in the church was mostly about restraint. It was not about renewing the mind. We had taught men how to keep their distance from women. We had not taught them how to see God's daughters, instead of seeing an object of temptation or gratification.

When godly men make a daughter of God feel dangerous, our purity has missed the point.

Restraint Is Not Renewal

I want to be fair to that pastor. I don't know his story. Maybe he had been hurt before. Maybe he was fighting a battle no one knew about, and keeping his distance was the only way he knew to stay faithful. Maybe his wife had good reasons to be guarded. I am not writing to condemn him. I am writing because his awkwardness and her tears exposed something in all of us.

Restraint says, "Stay away so you don't fall." There are times when that is wise. Joseph ran, and we will talk about him in a moment. But restraint by itself only changes your behavior. It leaves the way you see people untouched. A man can keep every rule and still look at a woman as a threat to be managed. And she can feel it.

Paul never told us to merely hold our breath around the world. He told us to be changed from the inside:

Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.

Romans 12:2

Renewal is different from restraint. Restraint puts a fence around a wild heart. Renewal gives you a new heart. Restraint asks, "How do I avoid her?" Renewal asks, "How does the Father see her, and how do I honor her the way He does?"

Restraint manages lust. Renewal replaces it with honor.

Paul gave Timothy a simple picture. Treat older women as mothers. Treat younger women as sisters, *with all purity*. Think about how a good brother treats his sister. He does not run from her in the church lobby. He is not stiff and strange when she says hello. He is warm, safe and protective. He would fight anyone who tried to use her. That is the kind of purity Paul had in mind, a purity that makes the people around you safer.

Men Go First

I want to say something clearly, because I believe it is one of the missing pieces in how the church has taught purity.

Men need to go first.

I am not removing women's responsibility. Every one of us, male and female, will give an account to God for our own heart and our own choices. But God has called men to lead, and for too long many of our teachings have put the weight of purity on women. We told girls to cover up, to be careful, to not be a stumbling block, as if self-control were not a fruit of the Spirit that God also expects to grow in men.

But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!

Galatians 5:22-23

Self-control is on that list for men too. It is not a woman's job to manage what is in a man's heart. If a man's purity depends on every woman around him dressing and acting perfectly, he does not have purity. He has a hostage situation.

Many women have been victims of being viewed as objects of lust and gratification. Some were harassed. Some were touched without consent. Some were blamed for what a man did to them. Many more simply learned to walk into rooms bracing themselves for the way men would look at them. It is the man's responsibility to lead in such a way that women feel safe around men, especially in the house of God.

**Self-control is a fruit of the Spirit, not a burden we
hand to women.**

Here is an observation that has stayed with me. Most women I know feel more comfortable around a gay man than around a Christian man.

I want to be careful, because this is not a jab at men who struggle with same-sex attraction. We will talk about that with compassion later in this book. My point is about us, the men who call ourselves followers of Jesus. Why would a woman feel safer with a man who has no sexual interest in her than with a man who is filled with the Holy Spirit? It should be the other way around. A man walking in the Spirit should be the safest man in the room.

That observation speaks volumes about how far biblical men have drifted from the ancient path of biblical purity.

So what does it mean for men to lead? It means we stop waiting for the culture, or the dress code, or the women in our lives to make purity easier for us. It means we take responsibility for our own eyes, our own thoughts and our own words. It means that when a man in our circle makes a crude comment, we are the ones who say, “That’s not how we talk about our sisters.” It means we confess our struggles to other men instead of hiding them, so that our battles never become a woman’s burden. Leadership in purity starts with our own example.

Temples Over Trophies

The game ball from my first NFL game once ended up floating in my pool.

A friend saw it and was confused. “Why is that in there? Why isn’t it in a glass case?”

I told him, “Oh, I don’t care. It’s just a ball.” Maybe I took it too far, but I never kept any of that stuff. Old jerseys, rings and trophies were never my thing.

But here is what I have to confess. I didn’t take my body seriously enough, the very temple and resting place of the Holy Spirit. For years I desecrated God’s temple because I thought the created was more valuable than the Creator. Jesus said that a man who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart (Matthew 5:28). I lusted, and I dishonored women, because I did not understand what Jesus and Paul taught about sexual sin.

I understand now. Paul says it plainly: you do not belong to yourself, for God bought you with a high price, so you must honor God with your body (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

What if we had been taught this from our youth? What if every boy in the church grew up knowing that his body is the temple of the living God, and that the girl sitting next to him in youth group is a temple too?

A trophy sits on a shelf. A temple carries the presence of God.

Now I want to spend my days treating what is truly sacred. Not trophies, and not buildings made by human hands, but the

bodies of people created in God's image, meant to be the resting place of the Holy Spirit and the bride of Christ.

Treating people as temples also means examining the desire that turns them into trophies. Sometimes lust is fed by more than physical appetite. It is fed by the same need to prove ourselves that makes another person's success feel like our defeat.

The Twin Sisters

Why Lust and the Spirit of Competition Travel Together

Lust and the spirit of competition are twin sisters, born of one root: the flesh's drive to take and to win at all costs. Lust wants to possess a person; competition wants to beat one. Either way, another human being becomes a means of proving my worth, a prize to claim or a rival to conquer.

I am speaking here of selfish rivalry, the need to establish my value by defeating someone else. There is a difference between giving your best in a contest and making superiority over others the foundation of your identity.

Like twins, they share the same features. Both feed on comparison. Lust says, "I need what I don't have." Competition says, "I need more than you have." Neither is ever satisfied. Win one contest or conquest, and the craving simply resets.

Where one sister goes, the other follows. Men often talk about sex like a game, keeping score and chasing trophies. When your worth comes from winning, staying pure feels like losing.

The Pattern in Scripture

Scripture repeatedly places these desires alongside one another. James asks, “What is causing the quarrels and fights among you? Don’t they come from the evil desires at war within you?” (James 4:1–2, NLT). The battles around us expose the appetites within us.

Romans 13:13 warns against sexual promiscuity and immoral living alongside quarreling and jealousy. Galatians 5:19–21 names sexual immorality, impurity and lustful pleasures among the works of the flesh, together with quarreling, jealousy and selfish ambition. In 2 Corinthians 12:20–21, Paul fears finding quarreling, jealousy, anger and selfishness, as well as unrepented impurity and sexual immorality.

John places “a craving for physical pleasure” alongside “pride in our achievements and possessions” (1 John 2:16, NLT). These are related expressions of a heart seeking satisfaction apart from the Father.

David’s actions in 2 Samuel 11 show how desire can become possession and then destruction. He takes Bathsheba and later arranges for her husband Uriah to die. The man whose covenant should have been honored becomes an obstacle to be removed. The commandment had already drawn the boundary: “You must not covet your neighbor’s wife” (Exodus 20:17, NLT).

The Cure

The twin sisters are both thirsts, and only one love satisfies them: His love is better than wine (Song of Songs 1:2). A man filled with the Father's love doesn't need to conquer a woman or crush a brother to know who he is.

The goal of the Kingdom is not winning:

“Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too.”

Philippians 2:3–4 (NLT)

In God's economy, success isn't being the best. It's giving your best.

You will never be able to truly celebrate that which you are competing with. As long as another person's blessing feels like a threat to your worth, their success will feel like your loss. You may applaud with your hands while your heart is still keeping score.

I believe this is one of the greatest crucibles God uses to test His chosen ones: can you celebrate someone else receiving the opportunity, recognition or blessing you hoped for? Can you honor what God is doing in them without making it a verdict against you? The test reveals whether we love His purposes more than our own prominence. A heart secure in the Father's love can rejoice when another person flourishes, because their blessing does not diminish our belonging.

That change of heart gives purity a different purpose. We no longer ask what another person can do for our appetite or our reputation. We ask how to honor God and the person He made. Joseph gives us a picture of that renewed way of seeing.

Joseph Saw a Person

Joseph is the young man every purity talk mentions, and for good reason.

Joseph was a strikingly handsome man. As time went on, his master's wife became infatuated with Joseph and one day said, "Sleep with me." He wouldn't do it. He said to his master's wife, "Look, with me here, my master doesn't give a second thought to anything that goes on here—he's put me in charge of everything he owns. He treats me as an equal. The only thing he hasn't turned over to me is you. You're his wife, after all! How could I violate his trust and sin against God?"

Genesis 39:6-9 (MSG)

Notice what Joseph saw. He did not only see temptation. He saw a covenant that belonged to another man. He saw trust that had been placed in him. He saw God. Even the woman trying to use him was, in Joseph's words, "his wife," someone who belonged to a marriage and not to Joseph's appetite.

It was Joseph's heart toward God, his humility, and his revelation of the fear and the beauty of the Lord that kept him from compromising his purity. Joseph did not just have strong willpower. He had a renewed way of seeing.

**Pride convinces you that someone's body can be used
by you for your own pleasure.**

That is what pride does. It tells you that your desire is the center of the room, and that other people exist to satisfy it. And when pride takes over, it aborts our personal responsibility to obey the God of the Scriptures. Humility is the mark of a wise virgin, someone who has learned how to get oil of their own. Joseph had oil in his lamp long before Potiphar's wife ever spoke to him.

And when the day came that she grabbed him by his cloak, Joseph did not stay to argue with his flesh. He left his cloak in her hand and ran out of the house (Genesis 39:12). Running is sometimes exactly what renewal does. The difference is what Joseph was running toward. He was not running from women. He was running to protect a marriage, a master's trust and his own walk with God. Fleeing sin and fearing people are two very different things.

What Renewal Looks Like

So what does a renewed man actually look like? Here is what I have come to believe.

In ministry settings, he is warm and present. When a woman comes up after a service to say thank you, he looks her in the eye, receives the kindness, and blesses her. He does not need to flinch. He keeps wise boundaries, like staying out of hidden, private settings and not building emotional intimacy with a

woman who is not his wife. But those boundaries are about avoiding secrecy, not avoiding people. His wife knows his heart because he is open with her.

At work, he treats women as colleagues and equals. He does not comment on their bodies. He does not laugh along when other men do. He is the man who changes the tone of the conversation simply by being there.

Online, he guards his eyes and his inbox. He does not follow, like or linger on images that reduce women to bodies. He does not send private messages he would be embarrassed for his wife or his pastor to read.

In his thought life, he does not entertain fantasies about the women he serves alongside. When a thought comes, he takes it captive and turns it into a prayer for her as his sister.

Jesus is our model. Look at Him at the well in Samaria. He sat with a woman alone in the middle of the day, a woman with a painful history. His disciples came back and were surprised He was even talking to her (John 4:27). He was not awkward. He was not afraid of her. He told her the truth about her life and offered her living water, and she ran back to her town with more dignity than she had when she arrived.

Look at Him in Simon the Pharisee's house in Luke 7. A woman known for her sin came in, wept over His feet, and wiped them with her hair. Simon was scandalized. He thought, if this man

were really a prophet, he would know what kind of woman is touching him. Jesus answered him with a question:

Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head.

Luke 7:44 (KJV)

Simon saw a category. Jesus saw a daughter. Simon kept his distance and called it holiness. Jesus drew near and stayed perfectly pure.

**The holiest man who ever lived was also the safest
man a broken woman ever met.**

Lesson Ten: A Pure Embrace

There was a season when I had a conviction that I would not hug women. I want to be honest about why. It was not because I had arrived at some higher level of holiness. It was because I knew I was operating in impurity, and I didn't trust what was going on inside me.

I had a friend who did not live by that rule. He hugged people, women included, and it bothered me. One day I said something to him that was almost passive-aggressive, a little jab about him hugging women.

He looked at me and said, “I don’t have to act like I’m a pervert when I know I’m not.”

Something about that shook me.

He was not being careless, and he was not mocking my conviction. He was telling me that he knew the level of purity he was walking in. I had to admit that my rule was not really about protecting women. It was about managing me. That was the right thing for me to do in that season, because you have to be honest about where you are. But I began to see that it was never meant to be the destination.

You have to know the level of purity you are walking in, and you were never meant to stay at the lowest one.

Over time, the Lord showed me what a pure embrace can do. I was part of a church that held a time of ministry for people’s hearts, and at one point the leaders said, “If you have never received a fatherly or motherly hug, this is the time to get up and get one.” I watched people get up and collapse into the arms of spiritual mothers and fathers. Grown men and women who had carried years of rejection wept like children.

Another time, I was helping lead an inner healing session with a young man. In the middle of it, he confessed a deep, dark sexual secret he had never told anyone. A good friend of mine was ministering with me, a big, stocky man. He got up, walked over and wrapped that young man in a hug, and the two of them wept together.

No sermon could have said what that hug said. *You are not too dirty to be held. You are not alone. The Father has not turned His face away.*

I did not grow up in an affectionate home. Hugs were not part of our language. So I have been amazed to see how, when purity is truly walked out, a holy embrace becomes a tool the Lord uses to cleanse and heal. It is the father running to the prodigal and throwing his arms around him before the son can finish his speech (Luke 15:20). It is Paul weeping with the elders of Ephesus as they embraced him on the shore (Acts 20:37).

Here is the wisdom in it. A man who knows he is struggling should be honest about that and set boundaries that protect the people around him. There is no shame in that season. But the goal is not a church where men are afraid to touch anyone. The goal is a church where men are so renewed that their embrace makes people safer, not more afraid.

**Restraint keeps its distance. Renewal can be trusted
with a hug.**

Raising Sons and Daughters

I said in the first chapter that my father told me, “Wait until marriage.” That was true, but it was not enough. A rule without a reason will rarely survive a real temptation.

Fathers, our sons need more than “don’t.” They need to know why.

Teach your son that his body is a temple. Teach him that every girl he meets is somebody's daughter and, more importantly, God's daughter. Teach him that self-control is a fruit of the Spirit and a mark of strength. Teach him that a real man makes women feel safe. Teach him how to be warm without being careless, and how to be careful without being cold.

And show him. Your son will learn more from how you treat his mother than from any talk you give him. He is watching how you speak about women, what you laugh at, what you watch, and how you look at the server at a restaurant.

Our daughters need something too. They need to hear that they are not a danger. They need to know that they are not responsible for a man's lack of self-control, and that God made them worthy of honor. Tell your daughter that a man who loves God should make her feel safe, not ashamed. If a godly man ever makes her feel the way my wife's friend felt, she needs to know the problem is not her.

Both our sons and our daughters need a home where they can bring their questions and their failures without fear. If they cannot come to us, they will learn about sex from a screen, and the screen will not teach them that they are temples.

I believe the Lord is moving His church out of a season of restraint and into a season of renewal and release. He is releasing a generation of men who will go first, who will see daughters instead of objects, and who will make the house of God a safe place again.

I think about that young woman crying and asking what was wrong with her. I pray that the next generation of daughters never has to ask that question about the men of God in their lives.

Lesson Eleven: True Purity Makes Us Safe for the Broken

Let me tell you about a woman I'll call Joelle.

Joelle had been dating a man for nine months. She trusted him enough to move with him, bringing her young daughter along. Then one day, sitting across from her in a restaurant booth, he coldly told her what he really intended. She would pay for their life by selling her body. He threatened her daughter's safety to keep her silent. Her love for her child was turned into a weapon against her, and for years she lived under that exploitation.

There was a moment when she wanted out. One night she was arrested. The next morning, when she was released, she walked outside the jail looking for someone to help her. What happened next shook her to her core. No one wanted to help. People looked at her with shame. And in that moment she came to believe she was no longer part of the human race.

That morning could have been her exodus. Instead, it convinced her that freedom wasn't possible, because no one cared.

Let me be clear: Joelle was being abused and coerced. What was done to her did not make her impure or diminish her worth. The shame belonged to those who exploited her, not to her.

I believe part of the reason people failed her is the way purity has been falsely taught in the Church. When purity is taught as keeping our distance from people who are broken, we learn to look at someone like Joelle with shame instead of compassion. Jesus never taught purity that way. The purest Man who ever lived let a woman with a sinful reputation wash His feet with her tears (Luke 7:37–38), and He didn't mind being called a friend of tax collectors and other sinners (Matthew 11:19). His purity didn't keep Him away from broken people. It's what made Him safe for them.

Purity that won't touch the broken isn't holiness. It's distance.

Even so, something in her refused to break. She planned her escape carefully, and one day she fled with her daughter, holding on to a sliver of hope.

Today Joelle leads an organization that helps women who've survived trafficking, giving them education, resources and someone who will fight for them. Her pain became a road map to freedom for others. And here's the part I love most: she calls what happened in her life collateral beauty. Her past doesn't define her anymore. It fuels her.

That's what redemption can look like. Misery becomes ministry. Pain becomes purpose. Crushing becomes consecration. Nothing about what was done to her was good. But God did not waste a single tear of it.

The very place the enemy wanted to destroy you can become the door God opens to your destiny.

For the Road

1. Have you ever confused restraint with renewal? Where in your life are you keeping rules without letting God change the way you see people?
2. When someone like Joelle needs help, would your response make her feel safe or ashamed? What would compassion that takes action look like?
3. Fathers and mothers, what are you teaching your sons and daughters about why purity matters, and what are they learning from how you live?

Real purity sees God's daughters the way their Father sees them.

CHAPTER 10

Spiritual Fathers and Spiritual Daughters

For even if you had ten thousand others to teach you about Christ, you have only one spiritual father. For I became your father in Christ Jesus when I preached the Good News to you.

1 Corinthians 4:15

Halfway through my NFL career, I was reading through the laws of Leviticus about fathers and daughters. In plain words, the passage said a father must not sleep with his daughter.

I remember my honest reaction. *Duh. Do I really need a Bible verse to tell me that?*

It seemed like the most obvious commandment in the whole book. Who needs to be told that? I was ready to keep reading.

Then the Lord stopped me. I have had a handful of moments in my life when a verse opened up and swallowed me, and this was one of the deepest revelations I have ever received. The impression in my heart was clear:

Spiritual fathers are sleeping with their spiritual daughters, and that is why there is an epidemic of sexual immorality in the church.

I sat there with my Bible open, and the “duh” was gone. What seemed too obvious to need a verse in the natural was happening all the time in the spirit. Pastors with women they counseled. Worship leaders with young singers on their teams. Mentors with the girls they disciplined. Men who had been given a daughter to protect, who used her instead.

**What we would never tolerate in a family, we have
learned to tolerate in the family of God.**

Incest in the House of God

I know that is a hard word. I don’t use it to shock anyone. I use it because I believe it is how heaven sees what we have been calling “an affair” or “a moral failure.”

When a pastor sleeps with a woman in his congregation, the church usually treats it like two adults who fell into sin together. Sometimes that is all it is. But very often something else is going on. He holds the microphone, the title and the trust. She came to him because she was hurting, or hungry for God, or looking for the father she never had. He was supposed to cover her. He used his covering to get close enough to uncover her.

That is not a romance. That is a betrayal of a father’s trust.

I want to be very clear about where the weight falls. When someone with spiritual authority crosses that line with someone under his care, the responsibility belongs to the one with the authority. A daughter is never to blame for her father's sin. If you are a woman who was drawn into something like this by a leader you trusted, hear me: you are not the problem the church needs to solve. You are a daughter who should have been protected.

In those same laws, God gives a warning that reads like a diagnosis of our generation:

*Do not defile your daughter by making her a prostitute,
or the land will be filled with prostitution and
wickedness.*

Leviticus 19:29

Notice what God connects. The way fathers treat daughters affects the whole land. When fathers defile daughters, it doesn't stay in one house. It spreads until the land is filled with it.

That is exactly what I believe we are seeing. Every time a shepherd uses a sheep, it sends a message through the whole flock: *purity is for the people in the pews, not for the people on the platform*. Young men watch it and conclude that the rules are for beginners. Young women watch it and learn that the house of God is not safe. And the land fills up.

When fathers defile daughters, the whole land gets sick.

Many Teachers, Few Fathers

Paul told the Corinthians that they could have ten thousand teachers, but they did not have many fathers. I think he could say the same thing to us.

We have never had more teaching. Sermons, podcasts, conferences, books, clips on every phone. But a teacher and a father are not the same thing. A teacher gives you information. A father gives you himself. A teacher can leave when the class is over. A father is still there when you fail.

Somewhere along the way, the church began to measure leaders the way the world measures performers. Can he fill a room? Can he move a crowd? Is his ministry growing? Pastor Jack Hayford once noted that our society praises and pays its athletes, entertainers and persuasive leaders as long as they keep the show on the road, but that this is not the measure God calls the church to use. His conclusion is one I want written over every pulpit:

“Character, not merely charisma, is the mark of a spiritual leader.”

I spent about twelve seasons in a world that rewards charisma. I know what it is like to be valued for what you can produce on Sunday afternoon. And I can tell you that when the church starts

building leaders like franchises instead of raising them like sons, it will get exactly what the franchise model produces: stars who are protected because they are profitable.

A franchise asks, *What can this person do for the brand?* A father asks, *Who is this person becoming?*

Charisma can draw a crowd. Only character can be trusted with a daughter.

When Shepherds Become Pimps

Here is the harshest sentence in this chapter, and I want to say it carefully.

This is why so many shepherds who were called to be spiritual fathers and mothers have become spiritual pimps.

A pimp is someone who uses another person's body to meet his own needs, while telling her that he is taking care of her. That is what it looks like when a leader uses the people he was called to serve. He speaks the language of covering, but the covering is a cage.

How does a man who was called to be a father end up there? I believe it starts with a wound that was never healed. A leader who hasn't found his value in Christ will use and abuse the people he is called to serve and empower. If his worth comes from being needed, admired and wanted, then the people under him stop being sons and daughters. They become supply.

This is where the “honey” of Proverbs 5 shows up in a spiritual form. The honey on the lips is flattery and false affirmation. People who feel rejected are hungry for validation, and an insecure leader knows exactly how to feed it. “You are so anointed.” “No one understands me like you do.” “God has knit our hearts together.” The words sound like a father’s blessing. They are bait.

None of this is new. Solomon said it long ago:

What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun.

Ecclesiastes 1:9 (NIV)

Eli’s sons, who served at the tabernacle itself, slept with the women who served at its entrance (1 Samuel 2:22). The pattern is as old as the priesthood. And so is the cost. The ark was taken, and the glory departed from Israel. When fathers fall this way, the people lose more than a leader. They lose a sense that God is near.

Sexual sin produces a kind of spiritual impotency. A man can keep preaching, keep building and keep drawing a crowd, while the life has gone out of what he carries. Is any carnal pleasure worth forfeiting the far greater pleasure of intimacy with God and knowing Him? I don’t believe it is. And I don’t believe any man who has traded one for the other would tell you it was worth it, once the bill came due.

Untethered Sympathy

How can a person preach the truth and live the opposite? I have asked that question many times. One answer the Lord has shown me is a deception I call, borrowing a phrase from Pastor John Piper, *untethered sympathy*.

Reflecting on the fall of a well-known leader, Piper observed that this man did not only use his power. He used his pain. He presented himself as a burdened, wounded warrior for the gospel, and he drew people into giving him a kind of comfort that the truth would never have allowed. Piper's lesson was that sympathy must stay tethered to the truth. In his words, "Every time sympathy is called for, it needs to be tethered to the truth." Then it can be given freely when the truth calls for it, and held back when the truth says no.

Untethered sympathy is empathy cut loose from the Word of God.

It works in two directions. A leader can use it on the people around him: *I carry so much. I am so alone. You are the only one who understands*. And we can use it on ourselves. When life gets disappointing or too painful to bear, untethered sympathy lets us lower our theology to match our pain. We start making excuses for why God's commandments don't apply to us right now. We set down our cross. We climb off the altar of self-sacrifice because, after all, *you deserve to be happy*.

I want to be careful. Empathy is a beautiful thing. Jesus wept with Mary and Martha. He was moved with compassion for the crowds. We are called to feel people's pain and walk with them through their process. But we can only go as far as the truth goes. Refuse the humanistic gospel that gives people permission to lay down their cross in the name of kindness.

Love without empathy is offensive, but love without truth is a lie.

I have also learned to listen closely to what a teacher returns to again and again, especially when it comes out with an unusual heat. I don't say this to make anyone suspicious of every preacher. But sometimes the sin a man condemns most loudly in others is the one he is fighting hardest to hide in himself. Our accusations can turn out to be our confessions. That is a warning for every one of us who teaches, and it is a warning I take personally.

Turn the Hearts of the Fathers

The Old Testament closes with a promise and a warning, and both are about fathers:

Look, I am sending you the prophet Elijah before the great and dreadful day of the LORD arrives. His preaching will turn the hearts of fathers to their children, and the hearts of children to their fathers. Otherwise I will come and strike the land with a curse.

Malachi 4:5-6

Think about that. Of all the things God could have named as the mark of a coming revival, He named the restoration of fathers. And He named the alternative. A land without fathers is a land under a curse.

There is an old African proverb that says the child who is not embraced by the village will burn it down to feel its warmth. I have seen that in the natural, and I have seen it in the church. Sons and daughters who were never covered go looking for warmth anywhere they can find it, and the enemy is happy to provide it.

In his book *Fatherless Generation*, John Sowers points to the work of psychologist Paul Vitz, who studied the lives of a number of famous atheists and found that many of them had lost their fathers early or had fathers who failed them. Vitz called it the “defective father hypothesis.” Sowers does not argue that a bad father guarantees unbelief, and neither do I. But his point stands: our fathers powerfully shape how we picture God. They either project trust and security that make faith feel possible, or they project rejection and abandonment.

If that is true of natural fathers, it is true of spiritual fathers too. When a woman is used by the man who was supposed to represent God to her, it doesn't only wound her body and soul. It can wound her picture of the Father Himself. That is part of why this sin is so destructive, and why Jesus said it would be better for someone to have a millstone hung around his neck than to cause one of His little ones to stumble (Matthew 18:6).

Fathers don't only shape how we see ourselves. They shape how we see God.

When a Father Won't Come Clean

This chapter is personal for me, because I know what it is to have a father whose words and life did not match. In Chapter 2, I told you what I learned about my father as an adult, and that my mom knew.

Today my parents are still married, but I do not speak with them. There are boundaries in place, and I want to be honest about why. People were hurt, and my parents have been unwilling to repent and come clean about their sin and their hypocrisy.

That is not an easy thing to write. Scripture tells me to honor my father and mother, and I take that seriously. But honor has never meant silence in the face of harm. Honor does not protect sin. It protects truth, and it protects the people sin has wounded.

Boundaries are not the opposite of love. Sometimes they are how love protects what God is healing.

Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone.

Romans 12:18

Those words, *all that you can*, matter. Peace takes two people. I cannot repent for someone else. I can forgive. I can pray. I can keep the door open to a real reconciliation built on truth. But I cannot pretend nothing happened, because pretending is exactly how hidden sin survives from one generation to the next.

This is the same pattern I have watched in the church. A spiritual father falls, the family closes ranks, the people who were hurt are asked to stay quiet for the sake of the ministry, and the sin is never brought into the light. We call it honor. God calls it covering.

Here is the good news: my healing was never waiting on my parents. I have learned that I was fathered by God all along.

Even if my father and mother abandon me, the LORD will hold me close.

Psalms 27:10

If your earthly father was distant, harsh or hiding things, it is easy to assume your heavenly Father must be the same. He isn't. He is the Father to the fatherless (Psalm 68:5). And He is raising

up a generation of sons and daughters who will become the fathers and mothers their own parents never were.

The cycle ends when one generation is willing to come clean.

What True Fathers Do

I don't want to end this chapter only with warnings, because the answer to bad fathers is not no fathers. The answer is true ones.

Paul is our model. He called Timothy "my true son in the faith" (1 Timothy 1:2). He told the Philippians that Timothy had served with him in the gospel "like a son with his father" (Philippians 2:22). He reminded the Thessalonians that he had treated each of them "as a father treats his own children," encouraging and urging them to live lives worthy of God (1 Thessalonians 2:11-12). And he told Timothy to treat older women as mothers and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity (1 Timothy 5:2). That is a father's heart. It sees family where lust sees opportunity.

From Paul's life, I see at least three things true spiritual fathers do.

They cover. A father's authority exists for the protection of the one under it. A true father never uses his position to get access. He uses it to build a wall around the people God has trusted to him. That means he doesn't create secrets. He doesn't isolate. He doesn't counsel a vulnerable woman alone behind a closed

door week after week. He makes sure other people, including his wife and his elders, can see everything he does.

They protect. When a father sees a wolf, he doesn't negotiate with it. He stands between the wolf and the children. If someone in his care is being harmed, even by another leader, even by a friend, he believes her, he protects her, and he brings it into the light.

They raise up. A franchise holds on to its stars. A father sends his children out. Paul poured into Timothy and then released him to lead a church on his own. The measure of a spiritual father is not how many people need him. It is how many people he has helped become whole enough to stand without him.

If you are a leader reading this, let me speak to you as a brother. Your value is not in your platform. It is in being a son of God. If you have found your worth in being needed, admired or wanted, you are standing closer to the edge than you think. Get honest with someone today. Let your wife, your elders or a trusted friend into the places no one sees. You do not have to wait for exposure to choose repentance.

And if you are a daughter who has been wounded by a spiritual father, I want you to know that the Father Himself has not used you and will never use you. He is the Father every other father was supposed to point to. What was done to you is not who you are.

I believe this is part of the Reformation season the church is in. God is not tearing down fatherhood. He is restoring it. He is turning the hearts of fathers back to their children, so that sons and daughters can trust the house of God again.

For the Road

1. Before reading this chapter, how would you have described a pastor or leader who has an “affair” with someone under his care? How does the picture of a father and daughter change the way you see it?
2. Where have you seen untethered sympathy at work, in a leader, in a friend, or in yourself? What would it look like to keep your compassion tethered to the truth?
3. Who are the spiritual fathers and mothers in your life? If you are a leader, who are you covering, protecting and raising up, and who can see everything you do?

The cure for broken fathers is not fewer fathers, but true ones.

CHAPTER 11

Anointed but Unknown

For God's gifts and his call can never be withdrawn.

Romans 11:29

The story of Samson confused me for years.

Here was a man set apart for God before he was born. The Spirit of the Lord came on him in power. He tore a lion apart with his bare hands. He struck down armies. And the whole time, he had a weakness for women that he never seemed to fight.

One night stands out. Judges 16 tells us Samson went to Gaza, a Philistine city, and slept with a prostitute there. The men of the city surrounded the place and waited to kill him at dawn. But Samson got up at midnight, took hold of the city gates, posts and all, tore them loose, put them on his shoulders and carried them to the top of a hill.

Same night. Same man. A prostitute's bed and a miracle of strength.

When I read that, I had a real problem. *Lord, how could a man who was living in lust and fornication keep operating under Your anointing?* It didn't fit anything I had been taught. I had

assumed that power from God was a sign of approval from God. If He was still using you, you must be all right with Him.

Then the Lord brought me to a verse in Romans: the gifts and the call of God can never be withdrawn. And something clicked that has shaped the way I see ministry ever since.

Just because God is using you doesn't mean you know Him.

Gifts Given, Fruit Grown

I want to be honest about that verse. When Paul wrote Romans 11:29, he was talking about Israel. God had made promises to His people, and even their rejection of the Messiah could not cancel God's faithfulness to those promises. That is the context, and we should respect it.

But the principle runs all through Scripture. God does not take His gifts back the moment we misuse them. King Saul was still prophesying while he was hunting David to kill him (1 Samuel 19:23-24). Samson was still carrying gates while he was sleeping with prostitutes. The gift kept working long after the heart had wandered.

Here is the difference I have come to see. A gift is given. Fruit is grown. Gifts are deposited in you by God's choice. Fruit grows in you through relationship, surrender and time. You can have a gift you never earned. You cannot have fruit you never cultivated.

That is why we cannot judge a person's walk with God by the size of his gift. And that is why the most frightening words Jesus ever spoke were not spoken to pagans. They were spoken to gifted people:

Not everyone who calls out to me, "Lord! Lord!" will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Only those who actually do the will of my Father in heaven will enter. On judgment day many will say to me, "Lord! Lord! We prophesied in your name and cast out demons in your name and performed many miracles in your name." But I will reply, "I never knew you. Get away from me, you who break God's laws."

Matthew 7:21-23

Look at their résumé. Prophecy. Deliverance. Miracles. Those are not small things. And Jesus does not argue with any of it. He doesn't say, "You never did those things." He says, "I never knew you."

Many people in the body of Christ live under a false assumption: because God is using me, God must know me. But being used and being known are not the same thing. Samson was used. In the end, he didn't even realize when the Lord had left him (Judges 16:20).

The gift is not the reward. Knowing Him is the reward.

This is why I believe the church needs a season of Reward rightly understood. We have rewarded gifting with platforms and applause. Heaven rewards faithfulness. One day every gift will be laid down, and the only thing that will matter is whether we were known.

The Enemy's Favorite Weapon

I believe sexual sin is the number one weapon the devil uses against prophetic voices and anointed people. He uses it because it does so much damage at once. It corrupts spiritual authority. It fractures intimacy with God. It undermines public witness. It invites shame that keeps a person hiding instead of running to the Father.

Scripture shows the pattern in two of its greatest figures. David, the man after God's own heart, saw Bathsheba from a rooftop, and adultery led to murder, family chaos and national grief (2 Samuel 11-12). Samson, the strongest man who ever lived, gave his secret to Delilah, and it cost him his eyes, his strength and his freedom (Judges 16).

The anointed are not immune. If anything, they are targeted. Paul gives a warning I need as much as anyone:

If you think you are standing strong, be careful not to fall.

1 Corinthians 10:12

The answer is not fear. The answer is vigilance: accountability, real repentance, honesty with trusted people, and a daily dependence on God's grace. The Puritan John Owen put it in words I have never forgotten: "Be killing sin, or it will be killing you."

Sin left alone does not stay small.

The True Heart of Honor

In the rest of this chapter, I am going to name a few leaders whose falls have been made public. I have gone back and forth about this, and I want to tell you why I am doing it and how.

I am not doing it to expose anyone. These stories are already known. I am doing it to learn from them, because Paul says the failures in Scripture were written down as warnings for us (1 Corinthians 10:11). I believe the same is true of the failures in our own generation. If we refuse to look at them, we will repeat them.

So I will tell them soberly, with only the facts that have been publicly documented. I will honor what was true in their teaching. And I will remember that I am not standing above any of them. I have my own story of compromise, and I have told you some of it in this book. Learning, not exposing: that is what I call the true heart of honor.

Honor is not the same as covering up. Honor tells the truth without enjoying it.

Love People, Use Things

Ravi Zacharias was one of the most gifted defenders of the Christian faith of his generation. Millions of people were helped by his teaching. One line attributed to him goes like this: in the economy of God, we are meant to love people and use things, but in the human economy we have ended up loving things and using people.

Is there any irony in that statement?

In December 2020, after his death, the ministry he founded released a preliminary statement confirming that he had engaged in sexual misconduct. The full investigation the ministry commissioned, released in 2021, confirmed it. The man who taught us to love people and use things had been using people.

In the last chapter, I shared Pastor John Piper's lesson about *untethered sympathy*. Piper drew that lesson from this very story. He observed that Zacharias presented himself as a burdened, wounded warrior for the gospel, and used that image to draw out a sympathy the truth would never have given. That is the danger for every one of us who carries a public gift. Our pain can become our permission.

**A man can defend the truth for decades and still
refuse to be ruled by it.**

Grace Without a Cross

Mike Bickle founded the International House of Prayer in Kansas City, a ministry that called a generation to night-and-day prayer and worship. In December 2023, the ministry separated from him. On February 3, 2025, an independent investigation by Firefly reported that it had identified seventeen survivors of sexual abuse or sexually abusive misconduct by Bickle, some of whom were minors, beginning in the mid-1970s.

Seventeen survivors. Some of them minors. Over decades.

The lesson I take from this is not about one man. It is about how grace can be bent into something it was never meant to be. When grace is taught as a covering for sin instead of a power to overcome it, repentance turns into a cycle of “ask for forgiveness later.” Dietrich Bonhoeffer warned the church about this long ago. He called it cheap grace and wrote, “Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross.” Costly grace calls us to follow Jesus. Cheap grace lets us stay where we are and feel forgiven about it.

The culture around a leader can feed the same lie. As reported by Rebecca Hopkins, a former staff member later described being asked by a ministry leader to help disciple a man who had been accused of sexual assault. According to his account, the woman had called the police, but the leader persuaded her not to press charges. When the staff member challenged it, the leader asked him, “Have you ever had an impure thought?” The staff member asked whether he was really equating an impure

thought with rape. The answer he says he received was, “Sin is sin.”

A Scratch and a Shotgun Wound

“Sin is sin” sounds humble. It sounds biblical. In one sense it is true: all sin separates us from God, and all of us need the same Savior. But the enemy can twist that truth into a lie. He can make you believe that the thought of sexual sin and the act of sexual sin are the same thing, and that the act of a predator is no different from the struggle of a young man in his thought life.

When Jesus said that looking at a woman with lust is adultery of the heart, He was not lowering the seriousness of the act. He was raising the seriousness of the thought, showing us how lust damages intimacy with God and how thoughts carry the seed of actions.

All sin separates us from God. Not all sin carries the same collateral damage.

When you treat every wound the same, you treat a scratch with the same urgency as a shotgun wound.

And the opposite happens too. You treat a shotgun wound like a scratch. A woman who was assaulted gets told that everyone has impure thoughts. The man who assaulted her gets a mentor and encouragement. She is victimized a second time by the very people who should have protected her, and a predator is treated like a spiritual patient instead of a wolf in sheep’s clothing.

**Equal grace for all sinners does not mean equal
danger from all sins.**

When the Teacher Becomes the Lesson

Dr. Michael Brown has been a scholar, author and defender of the faith for decades. Commenting on the Bickle allegations, he made the same observation I had made about Samson. He taught that human nature is complex, that a person can preach a powerful, accurate message even while struggling with sexual sin, and that people can operate in supernatural power while living in sin. His example was Samson carrying off the gates of Gaza shortly after sleeping with a prostitute. He warned that this should frighten anyone who points to the success of a ministry or the anointing on a life as proof of God's favor. His words were blunt: "Careful! God knows our hearts."

He was right. That is the same lesson the Lord taught me.

In April 2025, an independent Firefly investigation found that in 2001 and 2002 Brown had engaged in what it called "sexually abusive misconduct" with a 20-year-old employee and an inappropriate relationship with a married congregant. Brown admitted to what he described as an emotional affair, an "adultery of the heart," and denied other details. His elder team disputed the investigators' label and recommended that he return to ministry.

I don't share this to pile on. I share it because his own teaching is the clearest warning I know: the anointing on a life is not

proof of the condition of a heart. He gave that warning to others. It turned out to be a warning for himself. And it is a warning for me.

The same pattern shows up far outside the church. In 2025, Netflix released *Sean Combs: The Reckoning*, a docuseries on the life of the music mogul. The story it tells reveals a sobering truth: when a person's identity is not anchored in God's unchanging love, power without accountability turns intimacy into conquest. That same pattern is often seen in ministry. When the praise of people matters more than the praise of God, the created is worshiped over the Creator, and authority comes loose from accountability.

“Do Not Judge”?

Picture a church where a man volunteers in the children's ministry. He is warm and easy to like. Over months, a few volunteers notice troubling patterns. He insists on being alone with children. He ignores boundaries. He makes jokes that leave some kids uneasy. When someone gently raises a concern, he gets defensive.

Many see the signs. But they hesitate, because for years they have heard “Do not judge.” They don't want to be that person.

Finally, one parent carefully voices a concern, and a younger volunteer decides to follow the church's reporting steps. The man is removed from ministry, an investigation begins, support is offered to the children affected, and the investigation confirms

what the volunteers feared. Then the painful questions come. Why did no one say anything sooner?

I believe revival tarries when discernment is labeled condemnation. We have heard more sermons on “Do not judge” than on “It is written.” But read the whole passage. Jesus did not tell us never to discern. He told us to deal with ourselves first:

*You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye,
and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from
your brother’s eye.*

Matthew 7:5 (NIV)

Then you will see clearly. The goal is clear sight, not blindness. In the same chapter, Jesus told us to watch for wolves in sheep’s clothing and to recognize them by their fruit (Matthew 7:15-16). Examine your own heart first. Then act to protect the vulnerable. Accountability born of love and truth is not accusation. It is stewardship.

Caring for Those Who Have Been Harmed

If the church is going to become a safe place, it is not enough to grieve over fallen leaders. We have to learn how to care for the people they harmed. Here is what I believe that requires.

Believe and protect. When someone tells you they have been abused, your first job is not to protect the reputation of the ministry. It is to listen, to take them seriously and to make sure

they are safe. A victim is never to blame for what a leader chose to do.

Report abuse to the authorities. Sexual abuse and assault are crimes, not only sins. Church discipline is not a replacement for the law. God established governing authorities to punish wrongdoing (Romans 13:1-4), and the church should never persuade a victim not to press charges or handle a crime “in house.” If a child may be in danger, call the police or child protective services right away. If you have been assaulted, you can reach the National Sexual Assault Hotline at 1-800-656-4673.

Don’t treat a predator like a patient. A man who preys on the vulnerable needs repentance and the mercy of God like anyone else. But he does not need access. Shepherds are called to guard the flock from wolves, not to give wolves encouragement and a place of honor.

Restoration of the fallen is not restoration to the platform. Galatians 6:1 tells us to gently restore someone who has fallen into sin. I believe that with all my heart. A fallen leader can be restored to God, to fellowship and, where it is safe, to family. But Scripture says an overseer must be above reproach (1 Timothy 3:2). Restoring a person’s soul is the work of grace. Restoring a person’s authority over others requires proven character over time, and sometimes it should never happen at all.

Grace for the fallen must never cost safety for the flock.

I believe God is raising up a generation of leaders who carry both: the tenderness to restore the broken and the courage to protect the vulnerable. They will be known not only for their gifts, but for their fruit. And more than that, they will be known by Him.

That is the reward. Not the gates of Gaza on our shoulders. Not miracles done in His name. The reward is to hear Him say, *I know you.*

For the Road

1. Have you ever assumed that because God was using someone (or you), God must approve of everything in that life? How does the story of Samson challenge that?
2. Why is it dangerous to say “sin is sin” when it comes to sexual abuse? How can you hold together the truth that all sin separates us from God and the truth that not all sin does the same damage?
3. If someone came to you tomorrow and said a leader had harmed them, what would you do first? Does your church have a clear way to protect people and report abuse?

Being used by God is a gift. Being known by God is the reward.

PART FOUR

Covenant

What is love, really?

CHAPTER 12

The Lies We Believe About Love

Love is a safe place of shelter, for it never stops believing the best for others. Love never takes failure as defeat, for it never gives up.

1 Corinthians 13:7 (TPT)

Almost every fairy tale ends with the same four words: *happily ever after*.

Think about what that phrase actually promises. A season that never ends. Two people who love each other and live untroubled lives together. No sickness, no money fights, no seasons where one of you is distant and the other is lonely. Just the credits rolling while the music swells.

Most of us would never say out loud that we believe in happily ever after. We are grown-ups. We know better. But I have watched that little phrase shape the expectations of believers for years, including my own. Somewhere along the way, we placed our hope for love in a circumstance instead of in the person of Jesus Christ.

If I could go back and speak to my twenty-four-year-old self before my wedding, this is the chapter I would want him to read. Not because I was a bad young man, but because I believed things about love that sounded true and were not. I believed them sincerely. And sincere lies still do damage.

Our hope was never meant to rest on a circumstance.

It rests on a Person.

So before we look at the lies, let's look at the truth. Paul gave us a definition of love that has never been improved on:

Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.

1 Corinthians 13:4-7

Read that slowly. Notice what is missing. There is not one word in that passage about how love feels. Every line describes what love *does*, what it chooses, and what it refuses to do. That should tell us something.

Easy Street and the Ancient Paths

Here is something we don't like to admit in the American church. The American dream promises the pursuit of happiness.

Jesus never did. He promised His followers a cross, a narrow road, and the hatred of the world.

Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake.

Matthew 24:9 (KJV)

I am not saying God is against your joy. He is the author of it. But when we bring an “easy street” gospel into marriage, we set ourselves up to quit. If following Jesus was supposed to be easy, then a hard marriage must mean something has gone wrong. If love was supposed to feel effortless, then the first real struggle must mean it was never love at all.

There is a story often told about a newlywed who was ready to give up at the first serious struggle. “If it’s not easy,” he told his mentor, “it can’t be love.” The mentor asked him a few questions. Was becoming an athlete easy? Was building a business easy? Is raising a child easy? You worked through pain for every one of those things, because they mattered.

I spent most of my adult life in a sport where pain was simply part of the price. Nobody on a football field thinks soreness means you picked the wrong game. Yet many of us think difficulty in marriage means we picked the wrong person. (We will deal with that particular lie in Chapter 14.)

**Hardship does not prove something is wrong.
Sometimes it proves something is worth fighting for.**

The ancient paths were never easy streets. They were walked by people who learned to love through famine, exile, barrenness and betrayal. That is the kind of love the Bible describes. And it is the kind of love the enemy works hardest to counterfeit.

In my teaching I have named seven lies we believe about love. Three of them have homes elsewhere in this book: the lie that marriage will fix my lust (Chapter 8), the lie that love cannot wait for sexual intimacy (Chapter 5), and the lie that I married the wrong person (Chapter 14). In this chapter we will look at the other four.

Lie One: Love Is a Feeling

The truth: love is a choice.

The goal of this lie is simple. The enemy wants you to make a permanent decision based on a temporary emotion.

Feelings are real, and they are not bad. God gave them to us. But feelings make terrible foundations. In Chapter 6 we saw how salt can look like sugar. Love and lust can feel the same in the moment, which is exactly why you cannot trust everything you feel.

Pastor Kris Vallotton has given young couples some startling advice: don't marry the person you fall in love with. His

reasoning is simple. “A fall is an accident, not a choice.” If you fell once, you can fall again, for someone else. A great marriage is never an accident. It is a covenant choice two people keep making for the rest of their lives. So if you fell in love, he says, make sure you also *choose* love, because what began by accident can only be kept by choice.

I think of love like a tree. Feelings are the leaves. They are lovely, and they show that the tree is alive. But leaves flutter and fall, and they come back in a different season. The trunk is what holds the tree up through the winter, and the trunk of unconditional love is choice.

Feelings are the leaves of love. Choice is the trunk.

Peter Vescovi put it this way: “Couples don’t fall out of love; they lose sight of love.” Love is a commitment we make every day, and our feelings tend to follow our commitments, not the other way around.

Ask yourself an honest question. Did Jesus feel like going to the cross?

Then he said to them, “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me.” And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.”

Matthew 26:38-39 (ESV)

His soul was sorrowful to the point of death. Everything in His humanity wanted another way. And He chose the Father's will anyway. That is the greatest act of love in history, and it was not carried by a feeling. It was carried by a choice.

Unconditional love has always been about choosing. Go all the way back to the garden. God planted two trees and gave Adam and Eve a real decision. He did not force their love. In a sense, the whole garden was God saying, "Choose Me." He still says it to every one of us.

Vescovi has another line I have repeated many times: "You cannot fall in and out of love, but you can fall in and out of lust." What rises and crashes with our emotions was never covenant love in the first place.

Refined, Not Fulfilled

Pastor John Piper has described marriage as a parable of covenantal faithfulness, not covenantal bliss. In his teaching, marriage is a living prophetic picture of the truth that God keeps His promises to His bride. That means your marriage is preaching a sermon, whether you intend it to or not. The question is whether it preaches a God who keeps covenant or a God who leaves when the feelings fade.

**Marriage is less about being fulfilled and more about
being refined.**

Pop culture teaches us to focus on the feeling of being *in* love. But being in love, biblically, means being submitted to the lifelong school of unconditional love. Mature love is a choice, not a mood.

Where does the joy come from, then? It comes from the same place it always has:

You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy.

Psalm 16:11 (ESV)

If you are waiting for your spouse to keep you full, you will always be running on empty. But if you are being filled in His presence, you can bring that fullness into your home instead of demanding it from the person across the table.

Love is a filling before it is ever a feeling.

One more word from Vescovi, because I wish I had heard it at twenty-four: “When a temporary emotion leads to a permanent decision you open yourself up to a lifetime of regret. You will not always feel how you feel, but you will always remember the choices you make.”

Lie Two: You Complete Me

The truth: you complement me.

Most people remember the scene from *Jerry Maguire* where he tells her, “You complete me.” It is a romantic line. It is also a dangerous theology.

The goal of this lie is to get your spouse to *complete* you instead of *complement* you. And when you get that cart in front of the horse, you no longer have a spouse. You have an idol.

Now the Lord God said, It is not good (sufficient, satisfactory) that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper meet (suitable, adapted, complementary) for him.

Genesis 2:18 (AMPC)

God did not say He would make Adam a missing half. He said He would make a helper *suitable, adapted, complementary*. Adam’s completeness came from walking with God in the cool of the day. Eve was not given to fill a God-shaped hole. She was given to stand beside him in the work God had called them both to.

Marriage was never meant to be your savior. It was meant to be your refiner.

When we ask a husband or wife to be our savior, we crush them under a weight only Jesus can carry. They will fail you, not because they are wicked, but because they are human. And then the very person God gave you to sharpen you becomes the person you resent.

Here is a phrase most Americans can recite: “Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” It is a beautiful line in a founding document. But is it biblical? Jesus gave us a different pursuit:

*But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness,
and all these things will be added to you.*

Matthew 6:33 (ESV)

Don’t ever let happiness become your goal. Some people are happy but they are not righteous. Some people are unhappy but they are righteous. Happiness rises and falls with circumstances. Righteousness is a position you choose to keep.

Happiness is a feeling. Righteousness is a choice.

Don’t let the feelings of your circumstances determine the position of your character.

Pastor David Platt has pointed out that the gospel and the American dream start in completely different places. The American dream starts with self. It tells you that you are good, that you have what it takes, and that you should work with everything you have to make much of yourself. The gospel starts with God, and with the reality that we were created to make much of *His* name to the ends of the earth.

So does God want us to be happy or holy? I believe He wants us whole, and wholeness only comes from Him. If marriage were the only way a man or woman could be complete, then your destiny would be tied to a person instead of to the God of the

Scriptures. And what would that say to the single, the widowed, and the divorced?

Look at Anna.

Her husband died when they had been married only seven years. Then she lived as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the Temple but stayed there day and night, worshiping God with fasting and prayer.

Luke 2:36-37

Anna lost her husband young. By the world's standards, her story ended there. But she was not incomplete. She spent decades in the presence of God, and she was one of the first people on earth to recognize the Messiah when Mary and Joseph carried Him into the Temple. Her life was not on hold waiting for a man. Her life was full, because it was filled.

If you are single and reading this, hear me: you are not half a person. You are a whole son or daughter of God. Marriage would be a gift to you, not a rescue.

Lie Three: Marriage Is a Contract

The truth: marriage is a covenant.

The goal of this lie is to get you to treat your marriage like a business contract instead of a blood covenant promise.

A contract protects my interests. A covenant gives myself away. A contract says, “As long as you hold up your end.” A covenant says, “Even when you don’t.”

I have heard it put this way: in a contract, I’ll take a bullet *for* you. In a covenant, I’ll take a bullet *from* you. Anyone can be heroic for someone they admire. Covenant love is what keeps a husband or wife present when the wound comes from the very person they promised to love.

I want to be careful here. This does not mean a husband or wife is called to stay in danger. Abuse is not a test of your covenant faithfulness, and getting safe is not a sin. We will talk about that honestly in the next chapter. What I am confronting here is the everyday mindset that keeps one foot out the door.

Contracts prepare you for divorce. Covenants prepare you to endure.

Think about prenuptial agreements. Whatever the legal reasons people give, the heart behind most prenups is planning for the end before you have even begun. That is why so many believers feel something is off about them.

A prenup prepares you for failure, not forgiveness.

God has never related to His people by contract. If He had, we would all have been dismissed long ago. He made covenant with us, sealed in His own blood, and He keeps it even when we don’t. Marriage was designed to be a small, earthly echo of that

kind of faithfulness. Of course there are times when a covenant is broken beyond what one person can hold together, and Scripture speaks to that. We will look at what God has to say about it in the next chapter. But we will never understand the exceptions until we understand the covenant.

Lie Five: Love Is a Reward

The truth: love is a risk.

The fifth lie says that love is the reward of passion and commitment. If I do everything right, if I am devoted enough, if I give enough, then love will be guaranteed to come back to me.

When we treat love as transactional, a prize for good behavior, we grow resentful the moment marriage defies our expectations. But biblical love requires the courage to give freely, without guarantees.

I once played with a teammate I'll call Everett. He was one of the most devoted husbands I knew. He poured his heart into his marriage. He remembered the anniversaries, planned the dates, listened after long days. Over the years, friends and family raised concerns about his wife's loyalty, and he brushed them off. He believed that his passion and effort would protect their love. If he was devoted enough, betrayal could not touch them.

Then he discovered that his wife had been unfaithful.

It shattered him. All his effort suddenly seemed pointless, and the foundation of what he believed about love crumbled. Without realizing it, he had treated love like a transaction: if I do these good things, loyalty will come back to me. As he healed, he came to see that love cannot be earned or possessed. It can only be given.

I don't share Everett's story to tell you that your effort doesn't matter. It matters deeply. I share it because the hardest truth about love is that it makes you vulnerable. C.S. Lewis wrote in *The Four Loves* that "to love at all is to be vulnerable." His point was that whatever you truly love can hurt you. The only way to guarantee your heart is never broken is to give it to no one, and Lewis warned that a heart locked away like that does not stay safe. It turns hard.

Love is not a reward you earn. It is a risk you take.

That is the kind of love God Himself chose. "We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). His love is perfect, selfless and faithful, and yet He does not force anyone to love Him back. Adam and Eve proved that even flawless love can be refused. God commanded the prophet Hosea to love an unfaithful wife as a picture of His own relentless love for Israel (Hosea 3:1). We will look more closely at Hosea in the next chapter. For now, just notice that God took the risk anyway.

If God, whose love is flawless, endures rejection, how much more should we expect that love in a fallen world will cost us

something? True love is not controlling the outcome. It is a choice to trust, to forgive and to keep going, anchored in God's grace rather than in our own effort.

**Only a heart that has been filled by the Father can
afford to love without guarantees.**

Recalculate

If you have ever used a GPS and missed a turn, you know the word it says next: *recalculating*. It doesn't scold you. It simply finds the way back.

I believe this is a season when the Lord is recalculating how His church understands love. Many of us took a wrong turn somewhere. We believed love was a feeling, that a spouse could complete us, that a marriage was a contract, and that love was a reward for doing it right. Some of us built whole relationships on those lies, and we have the wounds to prove it.

But the Lord does not scold us for missing the turn. He shows us the way back to the ancient path. Love is a choice. A spouse is a complement. Marriage is a covenant. And love is a risk worth taking, because God took it first.

That is what I would tell my twenty-four-year-old self. And it is what I want to tell you.

For the Road

1. Which of these four lies have you believed most deeply:
love is a feeling, you complete me, marriage is a contract,
or love is a reward? Where did you first learn it?
2. Are you asking someone in your life to complete you, or
to be your savior? What would it look like to let God fill
you first?
3. Where is love asking you to choose, or to risk, right now,
even though you don't feel like it?

**Love that begins as a feeling can only be kept by a
choice.**

CHAPTER 13

What God Has Joined

For the Lord, the God of Israel, says: I hate divorce and marital separation and him who covers his garment [his wife] with violence. Therefore keep a watch upon your spirit [that it may be controlled by My Spirit], that you deal not treacherously and faithlessly [with your marriage mate].

Malachi 2:16 (AMP)

How would you define a Pharisee?

Most of us would say someone legalistic. A hypocrite. A religious man who loads heavy rules on other people and won't lift a finger to help them carry the load. All true. But we rarely say this: the Pharisees were the ones who made divorce easy.

Some Pharisees came and tried to trap him with this question: "Should a man be allowed to divorce his wife for just any reason?"

Matthew 19:3

In Jesus' day, one popular school of rabbis taught that a man could put away his wife for almost any cause. The question they

brought to Jesus was not a sincere search for truth. It was a trap, and it was built on a culture that had already made covenant cheap.

Legalism and looseness are not opposites. They are often roommates. The same heart that keeps every outward rule can treat a wife like a contract it is free to cancel.

Malachi 2:16 is often summarized in four words: “God hates divorce.” Why? Not because God lacks compassion for broken people. He hates it because divorce carries collateral damage. It wounds families. It marks children. It fractures trust. And it breaks the very thing that was meant to show the world what covenant faithfulness looks like.

God cares about the person who has been betrayed, abandoned, abused or broken. He is near to the wounded. But His compassion for our pain does not mean He lowers the holiness of covenant. We are the ones who do that.

**When the present doesn’t match the promise, we are
tempted to lower our theology to match our pain.**

The answer is not condemnation. The answer is repentance, healing, truth, accountability, and a return to honoring what God calls sacred.

The Equator

In Kingdom principles, truth often lives between two opposite extremes. Think about the North and South Poles. Both are too

cold for anything to grow. But the equator, with its balanced climate, bursts with life. Many spiritual truths are like that. They thrive in the tension between two things that are both true.

Divorce is one of those places. At one pole is casual divorce. It teaches our children that it is fine to harbor resentment and bitterness and then walk away when love gets hard. At the other pole is “stay married at all cost.” It tells a spouse to keep living with a pattern of unrepentant infidelity, and it ends up coddling sexual sin in the name of commitment.

Both poles are frozen. Nothing healthy grows at either one.

The God who says “I hate divorce” is the same God who says of unfaithful Israel, “I had put her away, and given her a bill of divorce” (Jeremiah 3:8, KJV). The book *Delivered from Evil* makes a striking point about this verse. Was it God’s fault that the marriage failed? Certainly not. He was the perfect Husband, and it still did not work. God hates divorce, and it should be resisted to the utmost, but there came a point when even He went through one. The author adds that Scripture points to a day when God will take His estranged bride back.

That one verse holds both truths together. Breaking covenant grieves the heart of God. And persistent, unrepentant unfaithfulness has a righteous response.

Grace covers repentant failure. It was never meant to cover persistent rebellion.

There is a world of difference between a momentary failure that runs toward repentance and a lifestyle of rebellion that hardens the heart. We must not dismiss sexual sin as small, and we must not treat every wounded marriage as a lost cause. The Church is called to do both things at once: resist sin, extend forgiveness where it is truly sought, and raise up homes rooted in truth and grace.

We must choose wisely the legacy we leave our children. Will it be built on biblical truth or on carnal compromise?

The Greatest Man Born of a Woman

Jesus answered the Pharisees by going back past Moses, all the way to the garden.

For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate.... Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.

Matthew 19:5-6, 8-9 (NIV)

Moses permitted. God designed. Those are two very different things. A concession to hard hearts was never meant to become

the standard for soft ones.

Jesus also said this about His cousin: “Among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist” (Matthew 11:11, ESV).

The man Jesus called the greatest of the old covenant did no recorded miracles, built no wealth and held no power. He confronted the Pharisees and Sadducees, but that is not what cost him his life. It was this:

“For John had said unto Herod, It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother’s wife” (Mark 6:18, KJV).

John lost his head for standing up for the covenant of marriage. He did not die defending the growth of his ministry or his income. He died confronting an unbiblical divorce and remarriage in the house of a king.

Many of us can embrace a prophetic voice that calls us to righteousness, right up until it shipwrecks our pursuit of personal happiness.

Are you a prophet, or are you in it for profit?

If you place more significance on building your ministry or your net worth than on nurturing your marriage, you are missing the true substance of revival. Ministry, money and marriage all demand sacrifice, criticism and endurance. But ministry and money bring public recognition. Marriage asks for private surrender.

Pastor Jack Hayford once described a highly visible leader who remarried a week after his divorce was final, explaining that God had not called him to marriage, He had called him to ministry. That kind of thinking sounds spiritual. It is actually the opposite of what John the Baptist died for.

God is more concerned about the covenant and crucible of marriage than the comfort and convenience of marriage.

Husbands, Love Your Wives

Here is how Paul describes the marriage God intended:

And to the husbands, you are to demonstrate love for your wives with the same tender devotion that Christ demonstrated to us, his bride. For he died for us, sacrificing himself to make us holy and pure, cleansing us through the showering of the pure water of the Word of God. All that he does in us is designed to make us a mature church for his pleasure, until we become a source of praise to him—glorious and radiant, beautiful and holy, without fault or flaw.

Ephesians 5:25-27 (TPT)

Notice what Paul says. “Husbands, love your wives.” He does not say, in this verse, “Husbands, love your children.” Of course husbands are called to love their children. But I believe God

needed to declare the priority of loving our wives over the natural pull of our flesh to put the kids first.

A child-centered home tends to produce entitled children. A marriage-centered home models servanthood and unconditional love. Children feel safest when they can see that Mom and Dad love each other. You don't build confident kids by dipping them in gold. You build them by letting them watch a covenant up close.

Sociologist Brad Wilcox has observed that couples who pour everything into their children while neglecting each other are more vulnerable to divorce later in life, once the kids have left home and the couple realizes they have become strangers.

Love your children by loving their mother first.

When Family Becomes an Idol

There is another danger, and it is the mirror image of casual divorce.

In the television drama *Breaking Bad*, Skyler White becomes determined to “keep the family together.” Her loyalty to her husband's lies, which she tells herself is protection for her children, slowly eats away at her integrity until she is laundering drug money and helping cover up destruction. She worships the idea of a whole family while betraying the very thing a family is for.

Jesus warned us about this:

Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.

Matthew 10:37 (NIV)

When family unity is lifted above truth, it becomes an idol. Preserving a relationship at any cost often means sacrificing the very things that made the relationship worth preserving. Sometimes loving your family well means refusing to let them destroy themselves with compromise.

If you put ministry over family, you shelter selfish ambition. If you put your family over God's family, you build a monument to your own image.

This is where we have to talk honestly about abuse. In too many churches, abuse in marriage has been hidden behind holy words like “honor,” “loyalty,” and “covering.” But Scripture never defines any of those words as silence in the face of harm.

Biblical honor does not protect sin. It protects truth, dignity and righteousness. Loyalty is not allegiance to abuse or secrecy. It is faithfulness to God first. Throughout history, control and oppression have often been defended the same way, by twisting Scripture and redefining submission and order to keep people in bondage.

When holy words are cut loose from God's character, they become tools of control. The Bible does not call concealment

honor. It calls darkness into the light.

Look again at the verse at the top of this chapter. In the Amplified Bible, the same breath that says “I hate divorce” also says God hates the one “who covers his garment [his wife] with violence.” God’s hatred of divorce has never been His endorsement of a violent home.

Are There Grounds for Divorce?

Yes.

I want to say that plainly, because many believers have been taught that the answer is always no, and many others have been taught that the answer is “whatever you feel.” Neither is the equator.

Scripture speaks to three situations.

Adultery. Jesus Himself named sexual immorality as an exception (Matthew 19:9).

Abandonment. Paul addressed a believer whose unbelieving spouse walks away:

But if the unbeliever leaves, let it be so. The brother or the sister is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace.

1 Corinthians 7:15 (NIV)

Paul also wrote that a man who will not provide for his own household “has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (1 Timothy 5:8, NKJV). Abandonment is not only walking out the door. A spouse can abandon the covenant while still living in the house.

Abuse. Malachi 2:16 names the man who covers his wife with violence. Many sincere believers disagree about whether abuse is grounds for divorce, and I want to honor that conversation. But I am convinced of this much: no one is ever required by God to stay in danger. Separation for safety is not a sin. It can be a step toward healing, toward true repentance, and in some cases toward a restored marriage.

A warning, though: these standards can also become a list someone searches for reasons to leave instead of reasons to hope. The grounds are a door God has left open for the wounded. They are not an exit sign for the bored.

The Outlier and the Outlaw

So how do you know whether to stay or to leave? There is no simple formula. It takes wisdom.

Picture two married people who have each had an affair.

The first is an outlier. This person generally walks in biblical values and welcomes accountability, but in a moment of weakness, fell. The affair is out of character, not part of a pattern. When it comes to light, this person breaks. They

confess, they submit to counsel, they do the hard work of rebuilding trust.

The second is an outlaw. This person has consistently rebelled against God's Word and rejected every form of accountability. The affair is not a shock. It is the predictable fruit of a lifestyle of defiance.

Which one would you be more willing to give another chance?

There is a difference between long-suffering and enabling. Long-suffering is a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). It is patient endurance through the hard seasons of marriage while love and commitment stay alive. Habitual sin is something else. It is ongoing, unrepentant infidelity or abuse, and it must be confronted, not endured in silence. Jesus gave us a path for that confrontation, and at the end of it He said this:

If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

Matthew 18:17 (ESV)

A boundary breached without consequences is not grace. It is passive permission.

There is a hard truth here too. Sometimes staying in a marriage that refuses God's standard of purity does more damage than leaving. Often it is because one spouse has turned the other into an idol. They cannot imagine life without that person, so they

tolerate what God never asked them to tolerate. When that happens, the idol needs to come down. Not always the marriage, but the idol.

Stories Often Told

There is a story often told in churches that goes something like this.

Picture a woman I'll call Odessa. She was taught to submit. When her husband's anger turned to hitting, she searched the Bible for a verse that would allow her to leave. But her family and her pastor kept quoting submission scriptures and insisting that she stay. Over time she came to believe she had no choice but to endure.

Then a friend I'll call Theda listened to her and gently reminded her that slaveholders once misused Scripture to justify slavery, and the same kind of distortion was being used on her. Theda pointed out that the Bible calls husbands to sacrificial love, not domination, and that pulling out a few marriage verses while ignoring the Bible's witness to justice and to the image of God in every person is a perversion of truth. Spiritual authority is never a license for harm.

Odessa did not need a single "leave now" verse to deserve safety and dignity. Together they made a plan: contact a pastor who would protect her, call a domestic violence hotline, and involve the authorities if needed. Theda stayed beside her through those first steps.

Another version is told about a pastor I'll call Hollis, who loved Hosea. When a woman in his church, Marisol, came to him about constant abuse, he told her to pray and endure, like Hosea. Only after a friend helped her get safe did Pastor Hollis see that Hosea's story is a picture of redemption, not a command to stay under someone's fist.

These are stories, not case files. But I have told them because the pattern in them is real, and too many women have lived some version of it.

If you are being abused, hear me: getting safe is not a sin. Call a domestic violence hotline. Call the authorities. Tell a pastor or a friend who will protect you, not silence you. God is not asking you to bleed for the sake of appearances.

Honor never requires you to hide harm.

A Right to Be Safe Is Not Always a Right to Remarry

Here is something few people understand before they say "I do."

In our legal system, it is often easier to end a marriage than to get out of a non-compete agreement. A non-compete keeps an employee from working for a competitor for a set time after leaving a company. In a similar way, when a divorce happens for reasons other than adultery or abandonment by an unbeliever, Jesus' words place a restriction on remarriage. That is the weight of "till death do us part."

That does not mean anyone has to stay in a dangerous home. Safety and remarriage are two different questions. A person can have every right to be safe and still need to seek the Lord carefully about whether they are free to marry again.

Someone once said that McDonald's is not selling quality, it is selling expectations. You can order a burger in Texas or in China and expect the same taste. God set a standard for love so that we could have right expectations, not so that we could escape the responsibilities of love.

**An expectation you never communicate is a wish, not
a responsibility.**

Talk to each other. Say out loud what covenant means to you. Agree on what faithfulness looks like before you ever need to test it.

Hosea's Kind of Love

The prophet Hosea was told by God to marry a woman who would be unfaithful to him. She was. She left. She ended up in the arms of other lovers and in a place of shame. And then the Lord spoke to Hosea again.

*Then said the LORD unto me, Go yet, love a woman
beloved of her friend, yet an adulteress, according to the
love of the LORD toward the children of Israel, who look
to other gods, and love flagons of wine.*

Hosea 3:1 (KJV)

Out of the three things we talked about in this chapter, adultery, abandonment and abuse, how many did Hosea experience? I believe he tasted all three: the betrayal of the marriage bed, the wife who walked away, and the cruelty of a love that was trampled in public.

What about Christ?

He has experienced every one of them from us. We have run after other lovers. We have walked away. We have mocked and wounded the One who loved us. And still He goes back to the slave market and buys His bride home.

Hosea is not a rule that says every spouse must stay in every circumstance. Hosea is a picture of the heart of God. His love goes further than ours ever could. And Israel's other lovers, those "flagons of wine," never satisfied her the way her Husband could.

Every other lover runs dry. His love is better than wine.

This is a season to recalculate. Some of us have been living at one frozen pole or the other. Some of us made divorce too easy, and some of us made it a weapon against the wounded. The Lord is calling His Church back to the equator, where truth and grace live together and where marriages can actually grow.

If your marriage has been broken, you are not beyond His reach. If you are holding on to a covenant that is hard, He sees you.

And if you are not yet married, let this chapter make you sober before you make a vow. What God joins together is holy.

For the Road

1. Which “pole” were you raised closer to: casual divorce, or “stay married at any cost”? How has that shaped the way you see covenant?
2. Is there any place where you have let ministry, money, or even your children take the place in your heart that belongs to your spouse? What would a marriage-centered home look like for you this week?
3. Have you ever seen holy words like “honor” or “covering” used to hide harm? How can you be a Theda to someone who needs help getting safe?

**What God has joined is holy, and the God who joined
it is near to the brokenhearted.**

CHAPTER 14

I Married the Wrong Person

When the LORD saw that Leah was unloved, he enabled her to have children, but Rachel could not conceive.

Genesis 29:31

“You know what your problem is?”

God whispered those words to me a couple of months after I retired from football.

I knew what it took to survive in the NFL: preparation, focus, discipline, film study, doing the right thing every single day whether you felt like it or not. When I walked away from the game, I took that blueprint with me and started applying it in our home church. I loved the truth. I was committed to the Word.

And the Lord, in His kindness, let me know He appreciated that. He was not correcting my love for the truth or my commitment to His Word. That was not my problem.

My problem was that I had no patience. I was not honoring people's process.

I had taken a standard that was right and turned it into a weight that people could not carry yet. I wanted them to be where I

thought they should be, and I did not give them room to grow there.

A right standard without patience becomes a heavy burden.

That word from the Lord did not only expose how I was leading in ministry. It exposed something I have seen destroy marriage after marriage. The same kind of idealism that made me impatient with people in church is a cancer in many homes. It puts heavy burdens on a husband or a wife and never gives them time to grow into a mature spouse.

Idealism That Kills Marriage

The book *Delivered from Evil* makes a sobering observation: many gifted teachers, counselors and authors who champion Christian marriage end up divorced themselves. One reason is the destructive force of human idealism. It sets expectations no real person can meet. When the marriage falls short, discouragement and frustration move in.

Pursuing God's ideal for marriage is noble. But the enemy is clever. He will take that very ideal and use it as a club. There are good books on marriage that help couples build strong foundations or repair broken ones. But some teaching, rooted in idealism more than in grace, can do real harm.

The same book points to the story of Coach Bill McCartney: it took him forty years to become the husband his wife had

dreamed of. Forty years. Marriage is a long obedience. Expecting perfection on the wedding day can undermine a marriage that would have become great if it had been given time.

Idealism demands a finished spouse. Love makes room for a growing one.

When your spouse falls short of the picture in your head, the enemy will be standing right there with a whisper. And the whisper usually sounds like the seventh lie.

The Seventh Lie

In Chapter 12, we looked at four of the lies the enemy tells about love. We dealt with another in Chapter 5 and another in Chapter 8. This is the last one.

The lie: I married the wrong person.

The truth: What God has joined together, let no one separate.

But at the beginning of creation God “made them male and female.” “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.

Mark 10:6-9 (NIV)

Bishop Bill Hamon tells a story in *Prophetic Pitfalls* about a pastor who was struggling in his marriage. He had decided that his wife was a hindrance to his ministry. She did not have his zeal for the work, and he believed she was holding him back from his calling. He even used Hebrews 12:1, about laying aside every weight, to justify divorcing her. When he sought counsel, he was told plainly that this was not God's will and that he needed to love his wife the way Christ loves the Church.

Later, in prayer, he begged God to free him from his marital "burden" so he could focus on the Church. According to Hamon, the Lord answered him with a question, asking in effect whether He was really going to entrust His Bride to a man who could not take care of his own.

That question turned the pastor around. He went back to work on his marriage. He understood what Paul told Timothy about anyone who wants to lead God's people:

For if a man cannot manage his own household, how can he take care of God's church?

1 Timothy 3:5

Jesus didn't give up on His bride. Why should we give up on ours?

Jacob Saw Rachel, God Saw Leah

No one in Scripture believed the seventh lie more than Jacob.

You know the story. Jacob loved Rachel and worked seven years for her. But Laban switched brides, and Jacob woke up next to Leah. After completing Leah's bridal week, Jacob married Rachel, then served Laban another seven years (Genesis 29:27–30). He did not wait seven more years to marry Rachel, and he never hid which wife he loved.

But look at how Jacob's life ended. On his deathbed, he gave instructions about where he wanted to be buried:

There Abraham and his wife Sarah are buried. There Isaac and his wife, Rebekah, are buried. And there I buried Leah.

Genesis 49:31

Rachel had died on the road and was buried near Bethlehem. Jacob chose to be laid to rest in the family tomb, beside Leah.

While Jacob saw Rachel, God saw Leah.

Many believers have been seduced by a Hollywood version of a love story instead of the ancient paths of the gospel. Rather than embracing the challenges, pain and refinement that come with marriage, they chase a romantic fantasy for their own pleasure and comfort. Instead of seeing God's design for marriage as a way to make them holy, they seek man's version of marriage for the sake of their own happiness.

I see in Leah and Rachel a picture of that choice:

- Jacob wanted Rachel, but Jacob needed Leah.

- Rachel was Jacob's choice, but Leah was God's choice.
- God will use a Rachel, but God will co-labor with a Leah.
- Rachel might cherish you, but Leah will challenge you into your divine destiny.
- Rachel may be your type, but Leah is God's preference.
- Rachel will touch your desire, but Leah will activate your godly destiny.
- Rachel can birth earthly happiness, but Leah will birth kingdom holiness.

This is a picture, not a rule about which kind of person to marry. Rachel was loved by God too. But the picture speaks to anyone who has looked across the room at their spouse and thought, *This is not who I signed up for.*

Leah's Sons

Leah lived most of her life feeling unloved by her husband. But her rejection from Jacob drew her closer to God, and you can see it in the names she gave her sons.

With her first son, Reuben, she was hoping the Lord had seen her misery and that now her husband would love her. With Simeon, she said the Lord had heard that she was unloved. With Levi, she hoped that at last her husband would feel attached to her.

Then came her fourth son. This time she did not say a word about Jacob.

“Now will I praise the LORD” (Genesis 29:35, KJV). She named him Judah.

Somewhere between the first son and the fourth, Leah stopped looking to her husband to tell her she was worth something and started looking to God. And look at what God did with the sons of the “wrong” wife. From Levi came the priesthood. From Judah came King David, and from David’s line came Jesus, the Lion of the tribe of Judah.

God co-labored with Leah to birth His eternal purposes, even though she felt rejected for most of her life.

There is a word here for both husbands and wives. If you are the one who feels like Leah, unseen and unchosen in your own home, your worth was never in your spouse’s hands to give or withhold. The Lord sees you, and He can turn your pain into praise. And if you are the one who has been treating your spouse like the wrong choice, let Jacob’s story sober you. Stop comparing them to a Rachel in your imagination. Start asking God to show you what He sees in the person sleeping beside you. Pray for them by name. Thank Him for them out loud. Honor them in front of your children. You will be surprised how often the heart follows what the hands and mouth decide to do.

**The spouse you call a mistake may be the one God is
building a legacy through.**

Called, and Still Unfaithful

Someone reading this is asking a painful question: “If it wasn’t a mistake that I married the person I did, then why did it end in divorce?”

I want to answer that carefully, because I know some of you carry real scars.

The enemy’s strategy is to erode the foundation of a marriage by sowing doubt about where it came from. If he can convince you that God never really put the two of you together, then every difference between you starts to look like evidence. He magnifies every incompatibility until you forget that marriage itself is ordained by God. “Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the LORD” (Proverbs 18:22, KJV).

The devil’s “circumstantial evidence” against your marriage is a distraction. The way to fight it is to take every thought captive (2 Corinthians 10:5), rebuke the lie of incompatibility, and choose covenant commitment over circumstantial grievances.

Look at Saul. He was truly called. Samuel anointed him king over Israel (1 Samuel 10:1). But Saul did not steward that calling with obedience. He relied on himself instead of God. He feared the people more than he feared the Lord. Samuel told him that to obey is better than sacrifice, and in the end the kingdom was torn from him and given to a man after God’s own heart.

Saul’s failure did not prove that God never called him. It proved that a calling has to be stewarded.

Marriage works the same way. Just because a marriage ended in divorce does not mean God never called you to marry that person. For many couples, the children born of that union are a living reminder that God really did make two into one. A thriving marriage takes two committed people. When one spouse neglects the vows, the collateral damage is real, and it is not always the fault of the one left standing in the wreckage.

Saying “I do” is only the first step. A thriving marriage demands daily surrender: cultivating a servant’s heart, dying to self, walking in righteousness and justice. Saul was called to lead for God but ruled for himself. Too many couples are called to love for God but live for themselves.

Unrepentant sin like abuse, adultery or abandonment can fracture a union even though God designed it. We looked at that honestly in the last chapter, and nothing here takes it back. If you are not safe, getting safe is not a sin. But a failed marriage, like Saul’s failed kingship, does not cancel God’s original design. It exposes human frailty. And the hope for leaders and spouses alike is the same: the broken and repentant heart David modeled, and the grace of a God who restores what sin has broken.

Answering the call is not enough. We have to steward it.

Do We Really Want What We Deserve?

When a marriage gets hard, it is easy to start talking about what we deserve. “I deserve to be happy.” “I deserve someone who appreciates me.” “I deserve better than this.”

But do we really want what we deserve? What every one of us deserves, apart from grace, is eternal separation from God. None of us wants to be paid in full.

And here is the deeper question. Did Jesus get what He deserved?

Jesus was the best husband who never had a wife. He was the best father who never had children. He was the best rabbi who never had a synagogue. He was the best businessman who never had a company. He was the only truly good man who ever lived, and He died for sinners.

The cross isn't about getting what you think you deserve. The cross is about pressing through your pain so someone you love can receive their promise.

That is what Jesus did for His bride. He did not leave her when she was unfaithful. He did not trade her in for a better one. He laid down His life to make her what she could never make herself: holy, radiant and without spot.

This is a season to recalculate. Some of us have been measuring our marriages against a fantasy, and some of us have been measuring our spouses against a version of ourselves we never were. The Lord is not asking you to pretend the pain isn't real. He is asking you to look at your Leah the way He does, and to

let Him do in your home what He did in hers: turn rejection into praise.

Be driven by eternity, not by your external circumstances.

For the Road

1. Where has idealism put a burden on your spouse, your family, or the people you lead? What would it look like to honor their process this week?
2. Have you ever believed the lie, “I married the wrong person”? What does Jacob’s burial beside Leah say to you about how God sees your spouse?
3. Like Leah moving from “now my husband will love me” to “now will I praise the LORD,” what would it look like for you to stop looking to your spouse for your worth and start looking to God?

The Lord sees your Leah, and He is not finished with your story.

PART FIVE

The Way Home

How do we walk free?

CHAPTER 15

Love Is Love?

Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church.

Ephesians 4:15

I once met a man I'll call Ezra. He was quiet, the kind of man who doesn't fill up a room. But behind that quiet demeanor I could sense a storm. Ezra was wrestling with his sexual identity.

Before I said a word to him, the Lord whispered something to my heart: *Speak to his God-given identity, not merely to his same-sex attraction.*

So that is where I started. Ezra had value, real and lasting value, because he was created in the image of God. That is the same value Christ demonstrated when He willingly died for the sins of the whole world. Ezra's struggle did not erase the image of God in him. It did not place him beyond the reach of redemption.

Then Ezra said something that changed the conversation. "I'm a gay Christian," he told me, "who has been rejected by the

Church.”

In that moment I sensed the Holy Spirit shifting my assignment.
Now address the behavior.

Identity comes first. But love does not stop there.

The Courtroom of True Identity

I asked Ezra to picture a courtroom.

“Two lawyers can take the same set of facts and argue opposite stories,” I told him. “But there is only one Judge. I’m not here to condemn you. I’m a lawyer presenting a case from a biblical worldview. You are more than your struggle, and your struggle does not have the authority to define you.”

I want you to notice the order the Lord gave me. He did not send me to Ezra with a verse in one hand and a stone in the other. He sent me first to call out who Ezra was in God’s eyes. Only after Ezra named himself by his struggle and by his rejection did the Lord tell me to speak to his behavior.

That order matters. When we lead with behavior, people hear that God’s love is a reward for getting your life together. When we lead with identity, they hear the truth: God loved them first, while they were still sinners, and He loves them too much to leave them where they are.

**You are more than your struggle, and your struggle
does not get the final word.**

Then I said something to Ezra that I want to share carefully.

When a Burden Feels Like Chemistry

I told Ezra that prophetic people often see others through God's redemptive lens. They notice the potential in someone. They feel the beauty of a person created in His image. They pick up on pain other people walk right past.

But that gift can become distorted. Abuse can distort it. Promiscuity can distort it. Emotional wounds and misplaced intimacy can bend it into something it was never meant to be.

So I asked him, "What if what you perceive as attraction is a distorted echo of your gift? What if it's an emotional or spiritual burden you've mistaken for romantic chemistry?"

He froze. Then he said quietly, "God spoke the same thing to me last week. Pray for me."

In that moment, there was no courtroom of self-righteous judgment. There was no argument to win. The truth came, not through condemnation, but through the quiet clarity of the Father's voice, and through a son who was ready to surrender to Him.

Now let me be very clear about what I am saying and what I am not saying. I am not saying this is the explanation for every person who experiences same-sex attraction. People's stories are different, and I will not pretend to know all of them. I am telling

you what the Lord showed one man in one conversation, and what I have seen in years of ministry.

Here is what I have seen. People who feel deeply, who carry burdens for others, need that gift to be governed by Scripture, wisdom, discernment and self-control. Otherwise compassion and spiritual concern can get tangled up with old wounds and misplaced intimacy. I have watched spiritually gifted people lead others into encounters with *themselves* rather than encounters with the living God.

**A genuine burden for someone should lead them
closer to Christ, not closer to you.**

If God is drawing your heart toward someone with empathy and compassion, do not confuse that with physical attraction. If you are carrying a burden for someone in prayer, do not mistake it for romantic chemistry. And that is true whether the person is the same sex or the opposite sex.

Where the Church Has Failed

Ezra said he had been rejected by the Church. I believe him.

I want to say plainly what too many of us have been afraid to say: the church has often failed people who struggle with same-sex attraction. We have made them the punchline of jokes. We have treated their sin as worse than the porn on our own phones and the lust in our own hearts. We have preached *at* them instead of sitting *with* them. Some have grown up in our youth

groups afraid to tell anyone what they were feeling, and never once heard a leader say, “You are loved, and you are not alone.”

Ezra’s struggle did not erase God’s image in him. Neither does yours. Neither does mine.

I also want to be clear about something else. Men and women who wrestle with same-sex attraction are not the target of this book. Most of the pages you have read so far have been aimed at straight men, at pastors, at spiritual fathers, at people who sit in church every Sunday and quietly keep a secret. If the church is going to speak about this subject with any authority, we have to start with the log in our own eye.

**The church cannot call the world to repentance while
excusing itself.**

Grace without truth leaves people in their chains. Truth without grace crushes them. Jesus came full of both, and that is how we have to come too.

Truth Is Exclusive

So what does the Bible actually say? The late Walter Martin put it simply: “Truth by definition is exclusive. If truth were all-inclusive, nothing would be false.”

That is uncomfortable in a culture that wants everything to be true for somebody. But if God has spoken, then His Word draws

lines, and the loving thing is to tell people where the lines are.

Start at the beginning. When God brought the woman to the man, the very first words of love in the Bible are a man's response to a woman:

“At last!” the man exclaimed. “This one is bone from my bone, and flesh from my flesh! She will be called ‘woman,’ because she was taken from ‘man.’” This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.

Genesis 2:23-24

The Bible talks a lot about marriage, from the garden to the wedding supper of the Lamb. Every time it affirms marriage, it is the union of a man and a woman.

Jesus Himself pointed back to this passage. When the Pharisees questioned Him about divorce, He did not need to mention male and female to answer them. But He did. “Haven’t you read,” He said, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female’” (Matthew 19:4, NIV). Jesus deliberately grounded marriage in sexual difference. We will look more closely at that conversation in the chapter on covenant.

The law of Moses also speaks directly. Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 forbid a man from lying with a man as with a woman, and they say it in absolute terms. Some argue those verses belong with the old food laws and no longer apply. But when you look at the surrounding chapter, Leviticus 18 also forbids incest,

adultery and sex with animals, which the New Testament never loosens. And as we are about to see, the New Testament repeats the same moral line.

Love tells people where the cliff is.

“But Jesus Never Mentioned It”

You have probably heard this argument: Jesus never said anything about same-sex relationships, so it must not matter to Him.

Author and Bible scholar Preston Sprinkle, in his book *People to Be Loved*, makes a helpful point here. Jesus was a Jew speaking mostly to Jews, and every Jewish writer of that era who addressed same-sex relations condemned them. The Jewish historian Josephus, writing in the first century, said that the Law recognized only the union of man and woman in marriage. Jesus did not need to address what no one in His Jewish audience was contesting. And on sexual ethics in general, His standard was not looser than the Law. It was stricter. He said that even a lustful look was adultery of the heart.

Think about it this way. Jesus never directly addressed rape. He never spoke about physical abuse of women, pedophilia or human trafficking. No one would dare say He was therefore permitting them. Jesus is the Living Word, and the written Word addresses these moral sins throughout the Old and New Testaments. Silence on a topic everyone already agreed on is not permission.

Sprinkle also notes that the early church grew out of Judaism and shared its sexual ethics. If the apostles had meant to break from Judaism's clear stance on this question, we would expect the New Testament to say so clearly. It does not. It says the opposite.

Romans 1 and the Mirror

Paul's clearest words on this subject are in Romans 1:

So God abandoned them to do whatever shameful things their hearts desired. As a result, they did vile and degrading things with each other's bodies. They traded the truth about God for a lie. So they worshiped and served the things God created instead of the Creator himself, who is worthy of eternal praise! Amen. That is why God abandoned them to their shameful desires. Even the women turned against the natural way to have sex and instead indulged in sex with each other. And the men, instead of having normal sexual relations with women, burned with lust for each other. Men did shameful things with other men, and as a result of this sin, they suffered within themselves the penalty they deserved.

Romans 1:24-27

Notice where Paul starts. Not with sex, but with worship. People exchanged the truth about God for a lie and began serving the created instead of the Creator. That is the same root we have

traced through this whole book. Every form of sexual sin, straight or gay, grows out of the belief that something created can give us more than the Creator.

Some say Paul was only condemning exploitation: masters and slaves, men and boys. It is true that most same-sex relationships in the Greek and Roman world involved a power difference. But as Sprinkle documents, consensual and committed same-sex relationships also existed in that world, including between women, and Paul's language here is about male and female as the Creator designed them, not only about abuse. His main reason for calling it "against nature" is that it goes against God's original intention.

Now read what Paul says next, because this is where most of us stop reading. After the list in Romans 1, which includes gossip, envy, pride and disobedience to parents, Paul turns to the religious reader nodding along and says, "You may think you can condemn such people, but you are just as bad" (Romans 2:1). And then: "the kindness of God leads you to repentance" (Romans 2:4, NASB).

Romans 1 was never written so we could point. It was written so we could kneel.

Washed

Paul wrote to the church in Corinth, a city famous for its sexual immorality:

Don't you realize that those who do wrong will not inherit the Kingdom of God? Don't fool yourselves. Those who indulge in sexual sin, or who worship idols, or commit adultery, or are male prostitutes, or practice homosexuality, or are thieves, or greedy people, or drunkards, or are abusive, or cheat people—none of these will inherit the Kingdom of God. Some of you were once like that. But you were cleansed; you were made holy; you were made right with God by calling on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

1 Corinthians 6:9-11

Two Greek words in that list are often debated. The first, *malakos*, can carry several meanings, but it commonly referred to men who took the passive role in sex with other men. The second, *arsenokoites*, appears to be drawn from the Greek translation of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, literally “men who sleep with males.” Paul was not inventing a new ethic. He was carrying the old one forward.

But do not miss the most important word in that passage: *were*. “Some of you *were* once like that.” Paul is writing to a church full of former idolaters, former adulterers, former thieves and former drunks, and men who had once slept with men. He puts them all in the same list and then puts them all under the same blood.

The list is long, but the washing is longer.

Nobody in that church got to look down on anybody else. Every one of them had a “were.”

God Is Love, but Love Is Not a God

The slogan of our generation is “Love is love.” It sounds kind. But it quietly makes love the highest authority, above God Himself.

God is love, but love is not a god.

I once heard an interview with a woman who said that the time she felt most filled with the Holy Spirit was when she kissed another woman, the woman who later became her wife. Later in the interview, she rebuked another Christian who pointed her to Romans 1. “When you elevate what the Bible says over my personal feelings,” she said, “you make the Bible an idol.”

I believe her experience felt sincere to her. But sincerity is not the same as truth. Paul warned about this very danger:

But I fear that somehow your pure and undivided devotion to Christ will be corrupted, just as Eve was deceived by the cunning ways of the serpent. You happily put up with whatever anyone tells you, even if they preach a different Jesus than the one we preach, or a different kind of Spirit than the one you received, or a different kind of gospel than the one you believed.

2 Corinthians 11:3-4

There is “a different kind of Spirit” that will tell you what you want to hear. The Holy Spirit never contradicts the Word He inspired. When feelings become the judge of Scripture, feelings have become the idol.

That is why this matters so much to those of us who teach. Jesus said something sobering about leaders who lead others astray:

And he said to his disciples, “Temptations to sin are sure to come, but woe to the one through whom they come! It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were cast into the sea than that he should cause one of these little ones to sin.”

Luke 17:1-2 (ESV)

A gospel of feelings may fill a building. But it cannot fill a soul, and it will not stand on the day the Judge takes His seat. Pastors, if we tell people what they want to hear instead of what God has said, we are not being kind. We are handing them a millstone.

The Same Cross for Everyone

So what do I say to Ezra? What do I say to the young man or young woman reading this who has prayed a thousand times for the attraction to go away and it hasn't?

I say what Jesus says to all of us:

Then he said to the crowd, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross daily, and follow me."

Luke 9:23

Jesus did not create a heavier cross for people with same-sex attraction. The same cross is offered to the married man tempted by porn, to the single woman longing for a husband, to the pastor who wants to be admired, and to me. Every one of us is asked to lay down our own way. Every one of us is promised that the life we find in Him is better than the one we gave up.

And every one of us is offered the same washing. "But you were cleansed; you were made holy; you were made right with God." That is not a promise that every temptation will disappear overnight. It is a promise that your temptation is not your identity, and your past is not your future.

I believe we are headed into a season of revival, and I believe some of the brightest lamps in that revival will belong to men and women who once called themselves by their struggle, and now call themselves by His name. The church has to be ready to

receive them, not with suspicion, but with open arms and an honest Bible.

Your struggle is real, but it is not your name.

For the Road

1. Ezra was first spoken to about his God-given identity, and only then about his behavior. Which order do you usually lead with, in your own heart and with others?
2. Where has the church, or where have you, treated one kind of sexual sin as worse than your own? What would repentance look like there?
3. “God is love, but love is not a god.” Where have your feelings been sitting in the judge’s seat instead of the Word of God?

Every one of us has a “were,” and every one of us can be washed.

CHAPTER 16

A Covenant with My Eyes

I made a covenant with my eyes not to look with lust at a young woman.

Job 31:1

Growing up, no one ever told me masturbation was wrong.

My parents taught me to wait until marriage for sex, and I believed them. But nobody connected the dots between what I did with my body when I was alone and what I was saving for my wedding night. As far as I knew, the one had nothing to do with the other.

Then, during college, I went to an athletes' retreat. One of the guys there, someone I looked up to, said that masturbation was wrong.

I chuckled to myself. *That's not wrong.*

And right then, I heard the Lord say, *Yes, it is.*

Three words. I had been sure of myself for years, and in three words the Lord took my certainty away.

**Sometimes the sin we're sure is harmless is the one
God is most eager to talk about.**

Lesson Nine: The Rehearsal

I have thought about that moment many times since, and here is what the Lord has shown me.

As an athlete, I was trained to visualize. Coaches teach you to picture every play in your head before you ever step on the field. You see the snap. You see your first step. You see yourself beating the tackle and getting to the quarterback. By the time game day comes, your body has already run that play a hundred times in your mind. Visualization works because rehearsal works.

Self-gratification is rehearsal too. It is practicing fornication and adultery. Every fantasy is a play you are running in your head, with a person who is not your spouse, and your body is learning the play. When we treat it as normal for a believer, we give ourselves permission to practice the very thing we say we will never do.

**Whatever you rehearse in private, you are preparing
to perform in public.**

There is another side to it. Paul warned Timothy about what people would become in the last days:

*For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous,
boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents,
unthankful, unholy.*

2 Timothy 3:2 (KJV)

Self-gratification trains us to be lovers of ourselves. Sex was designed by God as a gift you give to another person in covenant. Masturbation turns that gift inward. It teaches the heart that pleasure is something I take, on my schedule, for me. That is the opposite of the self-giving love a husband is called to show his wife, and it is the opposite of the love Christ showed His bride.

I will also tell you my own conviction, and I hold it as a conviction, not as a formula. I believe that habitual self-gratification opens a door to the enemy. Paul wrote, “Neither give place to the devil” (Ephesians 4:27, KJV). In that verse he was talking about anger that we let fester, but the principle runs through Scripture: what we keep feeding in secret becomes a foothold. I believe the enemy uses that foothold to bring shame, isolation and a slow drift away from the presence of God.

I am not writing this to pile shame on anyone. If you are caught in this, you are not a freak, and you are not alone. Plenty of people never had anyone tell them the truth, just like me. But now someone has. And the good news is that the One who said *Yes, it is* also says *You can be free*.

Cut It Off

Jesus said it with words that still make people uncomfortable:

You have heard the commandment that says, “You must not commit adultery.” But I say, anyone who even looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. So if your eye—even your good eye—causes you to lust, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your hand—even your stronger hand—causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.

Matthew 5:27-30

Jesus is not telling us to mutilate our bodies. A man with one eye can still lust. The problem is not the eye. It is the heart. But Jesus is telling us how seriously to take the things that feed it.

So here is how I understand it. If something causes you to birth the action of self-gratification, cut it off. That might be a place you go. It might be a friendship. It might be the music you listen to, the shows you watch, the accounts you follow, the apps on your phone.

If what you see causes you to sin, change what you see.

**If what you touch causes you to sin, change who you
choose to touch.**

Cutting something off will feel like losing part of yourself. Jesus said it would. But He also said that what you lose is small compared to what you save.

Lesson Twelve: Freedom Is Possible

During my first year in the NFL, my mentor gave me a copy of *Every Man's Battle*. At the time, self-gratification was something I struggled with on and off. I knew the conviction the Lord had brought into my life, but beneath the surface I still believed a lie: every man struggles with this, and lasting freedom is not really possible.

Then I read about Job's covenant with his eyes in Job 31:1. He had determined not to look at a young woman with lust. Later in the chapter, speaking about being enticed by another woman and waiting at his neighbor's door, Job declared that if he had been guilty, his own wife could belong to another man (Job 31:9–10). Job was describing the seriousness of adultery. What struck me was how seriously he took faithfulness.

Something broke in me as I read. Job's words confronted a belief I had been carrying without even recognizing it. I had treated this struggle as inevitable. Here was a man in Scripture who had made a covenant with his eyes. Freedom was possible.

The lie said every man had to remain trapped. The truth opened a door.

Jesus said that knowing the truth would set us free (John 8:32). That became personal to me. From that point forward, I was free

of that habit. As I write this at forty-seven years old, that freedom has continued. Learning the truth in God's Word changed what I believed was possible, and that truth broke the stronghold I had carried for years.

There is another lesson here, one I have spoken about in other books. Sometimes we think that for something to be revelation from God, it has to come directly to us. We overlook the truth He brings through another person.

David prayed for God to search him and test him (Psalm 139:23–24). Yet Scripture also shows Nathan the prophet confronting David over his sin (2 Samuel 12:1–13). Those passages remind me that asking God to search our hearts includes being willing to receive truth through the people He sends. We cannot insist that He speak only in the way we expect.

I thank the authors of Every Man's Battle for putting that powerful truth before me. Through their book, they became a Nathan in my life. God used their words to expose a lie and bring His Word home to my heart. The truth was God's, but He was willing to deliver it through someone else.

**Do not miss the freedom God is offering because you
do not recognize the messenger He uses.**

Job's Covenant

Job is one of the oldest stories in the Bible. In the middle of his suffering, defending his integrity before God, he said this:

I made a covenant with my eyes not to look with lust at a young woman. For what has God above chosen for us? What is our inheritance from the Almighty on high? Isn't it calamity for the wicked and misfortune for those who do evil? Doesn't he see everything I do and every step I take?

Job 31:1-4

People ask me all the time, “Is it even possible to walk in purity? Or will I struggle with this my whole life?”

My answer is yes. It is possible.

Job made a covenant with his eyes. He decided ahead of time what he would and would not look at. He did it because he knew God was watching every step, and he knew where the road of lust ends. A few verses later he calls lust “a fire that burns all the way to hell” (Job 31:12).

Now think about this. Job did that without the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. He lived before the cross, before Pentecost, before the new covenant.

Job kept his eyes without the Holy Spirit living inside him. What's our excuse?

You and I have something Job never had. The same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead lives in us. We do not fight this alone, and we do not fight it in our own strength.

Train Like It Matters

I spent most of my life training my body. Before I played a down in the NFL, I lifted, I ran, I watched film, I ate what I was told to eat and I went to bed when I was told to go to bed. Nobody on a professional roster thinks discipline is legalism. It's the price of being on the field.

Paul understood that:

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.

1 Corinthians 9:24-27 (ESV)

Every athlete I ever played with exercised self-control for a contract that would end and a trophy that would gather dust. We are running for a crown that will never fade. If football players can say no to a second plate of dessert for a perishable wreath, sons and daughters of God can say no to a screen for an imperishable one.

Discipline is not the opposite of grace. It is what grace looks like with its sleeves rolled up.

Hide the Word

You do not keep a covenant with your eyes by staring at a blank wall. You keep it by filling your mind with something better.

How can a young man stay pure? Only by living in the word of God and walking in its truth. I have longed for you with the passion of my heart; don't let me stray from your directions! I consider your prophecies to be my greatest treasure, and I memorize them and write them on my heart to keep me from committing sin's treason against you.

Psalm 119:9-11 (TPT)

Many of us learned the older version as children: “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee” (Psalm 119:11, KJV). The psalmist did not just read God’s Word. He memorized it. He meditated on it. He wrote it on his heart.

Remember the athlete’s lesson. Whatever you rehearse, you become. So rehearse the Word. Pick a verse and carry it with you. Say it out loud when the temptation comes. When Jesus was tempted in the wilderness, He did not argue with the devil. He quoted Scripture.

Here is a simple way to start. Choose one passage, maybe even the one above. Read it slowly in the morning. Write it on a card and put it where you will see it: on your mirror, in your car, next to the place you charge your phone. Read it again before bed,

because the night is when many of us are weakest. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you one thing in it you have never noticed. Do that for a week, then choose another.

The Word you hide in your heart is the weapon you will find in your hand.

Meditation is simply rehearsal pointed in the right direction. The same mind that learned to replay what it should never have seen can learn to replay what God has said.

Practical Freedom

Let me get practical, because a covenant needs more than good intentions.

Flee. Scripture never tells us to stand and wrestle with sexual temptation. It tells us to run. Joseph ran out of the house and left his cloak behind (Genesis 39:12). Sometimes the most spiritual thing you can do is leave the room, close the laptop or walk outside.

Confess. “Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed” (James 5:16). Confession to God brings forgiveness. Confession to a trusted brother or sister brings healing. Shame grows in the dark, and it loses its power the moment it is spoken out loud to someone safe. Find one or two people of the same sex who love God, and tell them the truth. Give them permission to ask you hard questions, and answer honestly.

Guard your technology. Put a filter on your devices. Use accountability software that sends a report to someone you trust. Keep your phone out of the bedroom at night and charge it in another room. Most falls happen late, alone and tired. Make the late, alone and tired version of you have to work harder to sin.

Set dating boundaries before the moment. Decide what your physical limits are while your head is clear, not while your heart is racing. Talk about them together. Don't isolate. Spend time in group settings and in public places, especially late at night. And men, treat the woman you are dating the way you would want a young man to treat your own daughter. Honor her father's heart, even if her father isn't in the picture.

Stay in community. Purity was never meant to be a solo sport. Lone rangers fall. Get into a small group, a Bible study, a circle of friends who pray. You need people who will notice when you are drifting.

Fast. Jesus said "when you fast," not "if you fast" (Matthew 6:16). Fasting teaches your body that it is not in charge. When you say no to food for a season, you are training yourself to say no to other appetites too, and you are telling God that you want Him more than anything you crave.

The Day After

Some of you have already made a covenant with your eyes and broken it. Maybe last year. Maybe last night.

Here is what I want you to do: run to the Father, not from Him. The enemy will tell you to hide, to wait until you feel clean enough to pray, to promise God you will do better before you come back. That is a lie. Adam and Eve hid in the trees, and God came looking for them anyway.

But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness.

1 John 1:9

Notice what that verse does not say. It does not say, “If we confess our sins and promise never to do it again, and feel bad for long enough.” It says He is faithful. His faithfulness is the reason you can come back, not yours.

Confess it quickly. Receive His forgiveness completely. Tell your accountability partner. Then ask honestly what led you there, and cut that thing off.

And don’t live on yesterday’s oil. The grace you received yesterday was real, but you need fresh oil today. Get back in His presence. Open His Word. Pray. A relapse is not the end of your story unless you let shame write the next chapter.

A fall is an event. Staying down is a decision.

This is a season of release. God wants to release you from what has held you, and then release you to help others get free. The very place you have struggled can become the place you lead others out.

For the Road

1. Have you ever been certain something was harmless, only to hear the Lord say, “Yes, it is”? What did you do with that moment?
2. Have you quietly believed that lasting freedom is impossible? What truth from Scripture challenges that belief, and what needs to be cut off as you act on it?
3. Who is one person you could confess to and invite into your fight for purity? Are you willing to receive truth through the people God sends?

**Make a covenant with your eyes, and let the Spirit
keep it with you.**

CHAPTER 17

Your Love Is Better Than Wine

Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth: for thy love is better than wine.

Song of Solomon 1:2 (KJV)

I have read the story of Samson more times than I can count. The first time it really grabbed me, I was confused. How could a man who kept falling into lust and fornication keep walking in the power of God? I wrote about that confusion earlier in this book, when we talked about being anointed but unknown.

But the Lord was not finished with me and Samson.

Some time later, I was meditating on his story again. I was sitting with the long, sad line of his choices: the woman from Timnah he demanded because she looked good to him, the prostitute in Gaza, and finally Delilah, who wore him down day after day until he told her everything. As I sat with it, the Lord spoke to my heart. It was one of those moments when a sentence lands in your spirit and you know it did not come from you.

He said: *When you value favor with man more than favor with God, you believe that the created can give you something better*

than the Creator. And that is the sin of lust.

I have been chewing on that sentence ever since. It changed how I understand everything we have talked about in this book. Lust is not only a problem of the eyes or the body. Underneath the body is a belief. Lust is a lie about where the good stuff is. It whispers that the real joy, the real rest, the real yes, is somewhere in a person, and that God is the one standing in the way of it.

The lie of lust is that a man or a woman can give you something better than God can.

This is the seventh lesson the Lord gave me, and I believe it is the key that unlocks the rest. Restraint can hold you for a season. But only a revelation that His love is better will set you free.

Favor With Man, Favor With God

Notice where the Lord started. He did not start with sex. He started with favor.

Samson's whole life was lived in front of people. He was a judge in Israel, a strongman, a riddle-teller, a man who loved to win. He wanted the woman he wanted because she pleased his eyes. He told Delilah his secret because he could not stand her saying he did not really love her. Again and again, Samson needed to be wanted, admired and agreed with. And again and

again, he traded the favor of God for the approval of whoever was in front of him.

John's gospel tells us that some of the leaders believed in Jesus but would not say so openly, because they loved human praise more than the praise of God (John 12:42-43). That is the same root. When the applause of people becomes the water I drink, I will eventually drink from any well that promises it.

I know this from my own life. I told you about the season in college when I was winning on the field and dying inside. The cheers were real. The fog was real too. What I was hungry for was not only physical. I wanted to be chosen, to be desired, to feel like I mattered. Lust offered me a counterfeit of all three, and it offered them fast.

That is why I believe we have to deal with the root and not only the fruit. A man can install every filter on the market and still be a slave to the opinions of people. And a man who is a slave to the opinions of people will find a way around any filter.

**Whatever you need from people, the enemy will offer
you through people.**

The way out is not to stop needing. God made you to need. The way out is to bring that need to the only One who can actually fill it.

Your Maker Is Your Husband

In the same moment, the Lord reminded me of a verse I had read many times without really seeing it.

For your Creator will be your husband; the LORD of Heaven's Armies is his name! He is your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel, the God of all the earth.

Isaiah 54:5

Isaiah was speaking to Israel as a wife who had been ashamed and abandoned. God's answer to her shame was not a lecture. It was a marriage proposal. *I made you, and I will be your husband.*

Men, I know some of you get uncomfortable here. You hear the word "bride" and you feel like the sermon was written for someone else. But this is less about gender and more about reality. All of God's children are His bride. The whole Church, men and women together, is being prepared for a wedding. Paul said it plainly to the believers in Corinth:

For I am jealous for you with the jealousy of God himself. I promised you as a pure bride to one husband—Christ.

2 Corinthians 11:2

Think about what that means for purity. Paul did not call the Corinthians to purity because rules are good. He called them to purity because they were *spoken for*. A bride does not stay faithful because she is afraid of getting caught. She stays faithful

because she is loved, and she knows it, and she would not trade that love for anything.

That is the opening verse of the Song of Songs: *thy love is better than wine*. Wine in Scripture is a picture of joy, celebration and pleasure. The bride is not saying wine is bad. She is saying there is something better. And when you have tasted the better thing, the lesser thing loses its power to seduce you.

**When you know you are His bride, you stop shopping
for a lover.**

I believe this is the missing center of most of our purity teaching. We have told young people what not to want. We have rarely shown them Someone worth wanting more.

The Biggest Lie of the Spirit of Lust

Let me say the lie as clearly as I can.

The biggest lie of the spirit of lust is that a person, crafted in the image of God and belonging to God, can be objectified by us for gratification outside the boundaries of love as defined by Scripture. It suggests that someone made in the image of God can offer us greater joy, greater satisfaction and greater pleasure than the presence of God Himself.

There are two lies wrapped together in that one.

The first lie is about the person. It says she is something to be used. But she is not yours. She is made in God's image, and she

belongs to Him. When I look at a woman and turn her into an object for my own gratification, whether on a screen, in my imagination or in a room, I am handling someone else's daughter as if she were my property. This is why I keep saying that men have to lead in purity. Our sisters should be safe around us, not because they covered themselves well enough, but because we have learned to see them the way their Father sees them.

The second lie is about God. It says He is less. Less satisfying, less beautiful, less fun than what is on the other side of His boundaries. That is the same lie the serpent told in the garden, and it has not changed much since.

Here is what the enemy does not tell you. Every time you trade His presence for a moment of pleasure, you lose something. Sexual sin does not just leave guilt behind. It leaves you weaker.

Sexual sin produces spiritual impotency.

I have seen it in my own life and in the lives of men I have walked with. Prayer gets dry. The Word gets dull. Boldness leaks out. Samson woke up in Delilah's lap thinking he would shake himself free like before, and he did not know the Lord had left him (Judges 16:20). So I will ask you the question I have had to ask myself: are the carnal pleasures of sexual immorality worth forfeiting the far greater pleasures of intimacy with God and the knowledge of Him?

Have You Ever Seen Him as Beautiful?

There is a young man I'll call Silas. He is a real person, and his story has stayed with me.

Silas sat down with his pastor and confessed that he could not stop looking at pornography. Every time he swore he was done, he went back. And he said something very honest: "Women are just so beautiful."

His pastor did not shame him, and he did not hand him a list of rules. He asked him a question. He asked Silas whether he had ever truly looked at God, not only as holy or powerful, but as *beautiful*. More beautiful than anyone in creation.

That question undid him. Silas had known about God since he was a child. He had memorized verses and sung the songs and sat through the sermons. But if he was honest, God had always felt like a distant judge, a list of rules, a way to manage his guilt. Beautiful was a word he used for other things.

He went back to his pastor and admitted it. "I don't think I've ever seen Him as beautiful."

"Then let's start there," his pastor said. He told Silas to write down every Scripture he could find about the beauty of God, His glory, His splendor, His radiance, and to study them the way he had been studying other things.

So he did. Over the following weeks, he searched out passages like these. The psalmist asking the Lord to let the light of His

face shine on us (Psalm 4:6). The King whose robes are fragrant with myrrh (Psalm 45:8). The river of delights God gives His people to drink from (Psalm 36:8). And the line that stopped him, written about the coming King:

Thou art fairer than the children of men: grace is poured into thy lips: therefore God hath blessed thee for ever.

Psalms 45:2 (KJV)

Silas realized that verse was about Jesus. The God who became flesh did not come to shame him. He came to show him a beauty that outshines every counterfeit.

His cravings began to lose their grip. He did not become a man who never felt temptation again. But when the pull came, he learned to pray a simple prayer, *Show me Your beauty again*, and to open the Word.

I love that his pastor did not try to convince him women were not beautiful. They are. God made them that way. The problem was never that Silas saw too much beauty. The problem was that he had stopped at the creature and never let it lead him to the Creator. The bride in the Song says it this way:

My lover is dark and dazzling, better than ten thousand others!

Song of Songs 5:10

Better than ten thousand others. That is not a woman settling. That is a woman who has seen something that ruined her for anything less.

In the first chapter I told you that you cannot defeat a fantasy with a blank space. Silas found out what fills the space.

The Root Beneath the Root

The Lord showed me that the way out of sexual immorality is not only seeing His beauty. It is also repenting of pride. Those two go together more closely than we realize.

When Paul describes how sexual brokenness took hold of the ancient world in Romans 1, he does not start with sex. He starts with worship. People knew God, but they did not honor Him as God or give Him thanks. Their thinking became futile and their hearts grew dark. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and traded the glory of the immortal God for images of created things (Romans 1:21-23). Then comes the verse I want you to sit with:

*They traded the truth about God for a lie. So they worshiped and served the things God created instead of the Creator himself, who is worthy of eternal praise!
Amen.*

Romans 1:25

Do you see it? It is the same sentence the Lord spoke to me over Samson, only written by Paul two thousand years ago.

Worshiping the created instead of the Creator. That is the root. The sexual brokenness that follows in Romans 1 is the fruit.

And what sits under a refusal to honor God and thank Him? Pride. An old saying puts it this way: pride is the root of all sin, and humility is the root of all virtue. Pride says, *I know better what will make me happy*. Pride says, *I deserve this*. Pride says, *I can handle this one*. Pride is what convinces a man that someone else's body is available for his use.

So repentance from sexual sin has to go deeper than "I'm sorry I looked." It has to sound more like this: *Lord, I have treated You as less than what You made. I thought I knew where joy was. I was wrong. You are better.*

Lust is a worship problem before it is a body problem.

That is good news, because worship can be redirected. A heart that was made to adore will always adore something. The goal is not to kill your capacity to be moved by beauty. The goal is to bow it before the right throne.

A Window, Not a Throne

David wrote a verse that I believe holds the cure for the spirit of lust.

One thing I ask from the LORD, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple.

Psalm 27:4 (NIV)

This verse reveals the deepest longing of the human soul. Not merely to be protected by God, blessed by God or anointed by God, but to behold Him.

And think about who wrote it. David knew what it was to look too long at forbidden beauty from a rooftop. He knew the wreckage that followed. Yet this same man said the *one thing* he wanted most was to gaze on the beauty of the Lord. Somewhere along the way, David found a beauty that could eclipse Bathsheba.

David understood something we often forget: we were created to gaze. We were made to behold, to appreciate and to be moved by beauty. We see beauty in people, in art, in nature, in relationships, in excellence, because beauty is not an accident. It is a reflection, a faint whisper, a lesser glory pointing us back to the One who is Beauty Himself.

Many have been shipwrecked by stopping at the created thing and never letting it lead them back to the Creator. When the beauty of creation becomes ultimate in our hearts, it becomes an idol. We cling to the gift and neglect the Giver. We take what is

temporary, fragile and weak, and we ask it to satisfy a longing only the glory of God can fill.

This is how we dishonor the holy. Not always by rejecting God outright, but by treating Him as lesser than what He made. We reduce the Everlasting God to a side note while giving our awe, attention, desire and devotion to created beauty.

Until we understand that all created beauty is only a shadow, we will keep crafting idols out of what was meant to lead us into worship. But when we behold the beauty of the Lord rightly, creation finds its proper place.

Beauty is a window, not a throne.

This is where I believe revival begins for this generation. Not with a louder warning, but with a clearer vision. When the church sees Jesus as He truly is, lust loses its leverage. A bride who is gazing at her Bridegroom does not have time to window-shop.

Pray this with me:

Lord, open my eyes that I may see You for who You truly are. Forgive me for treating You as less than what You made. Forgive me for valuing the favor of people over Your favor. I want to dwell with You. I want to gaze upon You. I want to behold Your beauty and be consumed by Your glory. Show me that You are the beauty behind all beauty, the glory above all

glory, and the only One worthy of my highest praise. Your love is better than wine. Amen.

For the Road

1. Where have you valued favor with people more than favor with God? How has that hunger shown up in your temptations?
2. Have you ever truly seen God as beautiful? What is one Scripture about His beauty you could study this week the way Silas did?
3. What created thing, or person, have you been asking to satisfy a longing only God can fill? What would it look like to let it become a window instead of a throne?

When you have tasted the better wine, the counterfeit loses its power.

CHAPTER 18

The Consummation Tent

And the one sitting on the throne said, “Look, I am making everything new!”

Revelation 21:5

There is a picture the Lord gave me about purity that I have carried for years. It is for the man who cannot forgive himself, and for the woman who is sure she has disqualified herself from a clean future.

It is the eighth lesson the Lord taught me, and I saved it for the close of this book on purpose, because it is where every honest conversation about purity should end. Not with shame. With a bridegroom.

I want to be clear about what this is. I am not telling you a documented custom from history. This is a parable, a picture the Lord spoke to my heart, and I share it the way Jesus shared stories about sons and fathers and lost coins: to show you something true about the heart of God.

Picture a wedding in ancient Israel.

After the ceremony, the bride and groom enter a tent prepared for them, the consummation tent, to become one flesh. A white sheet has been laid down. When the marriage is consummated, the husband takes that sheet and hangs it outside the tent for the families to see. The blood on the sheet is the sign that a blood covenant has been made, and that the bride came to her husband pure.

Now picture a young woman who is about to enter that tent with a secret.

She lost her virginity when she was sixteen. Then she met the man she would marry, and she was afraid to tell him. Every day she promised herself she would tell him the truth. Days turned into weeks, and weeks turned into months. The next thing she knew, she was standing at the altar beside him, and he still did not know.

They said their vows. They entered the tent. And she could not carry it anymore. She fell to the ground weeping and said, "I'm sorry. I did not stay pure for you. I have no right to be your wife. Please forgive me."

Her husband looked at her and said, "I know."

Then he picked up a rock from the ground, cut his own forearm, and let his blood fall on the white sheet. He took that sheet and hung it outside the tent for everyone to see.

He gave his bride a new testimony.

That is the picture of the gospel.

What the Sheet Meant

The idea behind the picture is not made up out of nothing. The law of Moses describes a case where a bride's parents could bring out the cloth from her wedding night as evidence of her virginity (Deuteronomy 22:15-17). In that world, the cloth spoke. It testified to something.

In Chapter 3, I shared why I see in a woman's body a picture of covenant, that God seems to have woven into the very design of marriage a sign of blood. Blood in Scripture is never casual. It is how covenants were cut. It is how sin was covered. It is how life was given. When God made a covenant with Abraham, animals were cut in two. When Israel left Egypt, the blood of a lamb was on the doorposts. When Jesus lifted the cup at the Last Supper, He said it was the new covenant in His blood.

So in this parable, the sheet is a testimony. And the bride's terror is that her testimony is ruined. She cannot give her husband what the sheet is supposed to say. She walks into the most intimate moment of her life believing she will be exposed.

Many of you know that feeling. Maybe not on a wedding night, but in a prayer meeting, in a counseling office, or alone at two in the morning. You know the story your sheet would tell, and you are afraid of anyone seeing it.

The Bridegroom Who Bled

Look closely at what the husband does.

First, he already knows. He did not find out in the tent. He walked to the altar knowing, and he married her anyway. Her confession did not give him new information. It gave him her heart.

That is how God receives our confession. He is not shocked by what you tell Him. He knew before you were born. When we confess, we are not informing Him. We are coming out from behind the trees, like Adam and Eve, and letting Him find us.

Second, he does not condemn her. He does not say, “How could you?” He does not make her earn it. He does not send her back to her father’s house. He does not even talk about it. He acts.

Third, he pays with his own blood. Her testimony is restored at his expense. The sheet that hangs outside the tent tells the truth about his love, not about her past.

Paul says this is exactly how Christ loves His church: He gave up His life for her to make her holy and clean, so He could present her to Himself without spot or wrinkle (Ephesians 5:25-27). Jesus did not wait for us to arrive at the tent with a clean record. He went to the cross knowing everything. He shed His blood so that we could have a new testimony, the testimony of a pure and spotless bride.

**He did not hang your past outside the tent. He hung
His blood.**

I think about the brother or sister who has read the earlier chapters of this book with a sinking heart. You read about Samson and David, about vaults and fog, about the lies we believe about love, and somewhere along the way you thought, *That's me. I already ruined it.* If that is you, I need you to hear this. God's answer to your shame is not a lecture. It is a bridegroom with a wound in His arm.

The prophet Isaiah heard the Lord say it centuries before the cross: though your sins are like scarlet, I will make them as white as snow (Isaiah 1:18). Scarlet becomes white. That should not be possible. That is the point.

A New Testimony

I need to speak a word here to anyone whose purity was not given away but taken. Some of you did not choose what happened to you. Someone stole it, by force, by manipulation, or when you were too young to understand. What was done to you is not your sin, and the Lord does not hold it against you. In this picture, you are not the one who needs forgiving for that. But you may still carry the shame, as if the sheet is yours to hide. The same Bridegroom bled for your healing, too. He came to bind up the brokenhearted and to give beauty for ashes (Isaiah 61:1-3). He gives you a new testimony as well.

And to every one of us, whatever our story, Paul writes:

This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun! And all of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to himself through Christ. And God has given us this task of reconciling people to him. For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. And he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation.

2 Corinthians 5:17-19

Notice the last part. Once we have received a new testimony, we are given a ministry. The bride in the tent does not just get forgiven. She gets a story to tell. That is why I have told you my own story in this book, the tape, the fog, the abortion, the vaults. Not because I am proud of it, but because the sheet outside my tent has Someone else's blood on it, and I want you to see whose.

God does not only forgive the past. He restores what was lost.

And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten.

Joel 2:25 (KJV)

The years the locusts ate do not have the final word. The Bridegroom does. He can rebuild trust in a marriage that started in compromise. He can give a clean conscience to a single man or woman who thought that was gone forever.

Your past is real, but it is not your name.

Grace Is Not a Loophole

Now, because I love you, I have to say the other side of this, too.

Many of us have fallen short of keeping our purity before marriage. Thankfully, God offers regeneration. He makes all things new. But we must not use God's grace as an excuse to lower the biblical standard for marriage. Paul asked the question every generation asks: should we keep on sinning so that grace can increase? And he answered with a resounding no (Romans 6:1-2).

A gospel message that emphasizes the blood of Jesus canceling sin but neglects the power of His blood to transform the sinner presents a distorted view of grace.

**The blood that cleanses you is the same blood that
changes you.**

Think about the bride in the tent. Her husband's mercy did not make her careless about the marriage. It made her his. A woman who has been loved like that does not walk out of the tent looking for the next man. She walks out bound to the one who bled for her.

There is also a word here for married couples. The parable shows the power of honesty in marriage. The bride's secret was heavier to carry than the truth was to tell. If you are hiding something from your spouse, I am not telling you to blurt it out

carelessly. Get wise counsel and pray about how and when. But secrets grow in the dark, and covenant grows in the light. And if your spouse is the one who confesses, remember the bridegroom with the rock in his hand. We are called to extend the same mercy we have received.

At the same time, be careful of chasing a fairy-tale picture of marriage. Idealism can create expectations no human spouse can meet, and it makes it easy to give up on the person in front of you. Honor your covenant. Stay one flesh. Let grace do its slow work.

The Consummation Tent

I once wrote this picture down as a poem. Here are a few of its lines.

She fell to the ground, her secret laid bare,
Confessing her sin, seeking forgiveness in despair.
Her husband, full of love, already knew the truth,
With a rock, he cut his arm, to offer his own proof.

His blood stained the sheet, a symbol of grace,
A new beginning, a fresh start, in this holy place.
Hanging outside the tent, for all to see,
A covenant of love, forgiveness, and purity.

This story echoes a greater sacrifice above,
Of Jesus on the cross, showing unconditional love.

Just as the husband shed his blood for his bride,
Jesus shed his for us, our sins to divide.

The stained sheet outside the tent, a powerful sign,
Of transformation, redemption, in God's design.
Purity, forgiveness, grace, and love,
Gifts we receive from our Father above.

Come Into the Tent

This whole book has been about one invitation. The Bridegroom is better than wine. He is better than every counterfeit, every honey trap, every fantasy and every fog. And He is not standing outside the tent waiting to inspect your sheet. He is waiting inside, already knowing, with His arm already cut.

All that is left is for you to fall down before Him and tell Him the truth.

David did exactly that after his own fall. He did not hide behind his throne or his anointing. He prayed one of the most honest prayers in the Bible, and I want you to pray it with me now.

Have mercy on me, O God, because of your unfailing love. Because of your great compassion, blot out the stain of my sins. Wash me clean from my guilt. Purify me from my sin.

Purify me from my sins, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.

Create in me a clean heart, O God. Renew a loyal spirit within me. Do not banish me from your presence, and don't take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and make me willing to obey you.

The sacrifice you desire is a broken spirit. You will not reject a broken and repentant heart, O God.

Psalm 51:1-2, 7, 10-12, 17

He will not reject you. He has not rejected you. The sheet is already hanging outside the tent, and the blood on it is His.

Walk out of the tent free. Walk out as His bride. And go tell someone else what He did for you.

For the Road

1. What part of your story have you been most afraid would be “hung outside the tent”? What does it mean to you that the Bridegroom already knew?
2. Where have you been tempted to use grace as a loophole rather than as the power to live differently?

3. Who in your life needs to hear the message of reconciliation from you? How could your new testimony give them hope?

The blood on your sheet is His, and it says you are clean.

EPILOGUE

Oil for the Wedding

Then the other five said to the others, “Please give us some of your oil because our lamps are going out.” But the others replied, “We don’t have enough for all of us. Go to a shop and buy some for yourselves.”

Matthew 25:8-9

Jesus told a story about ten bridesmaids waiting for a wedding.

All ten were invited. All ten had lamps. All ten fell asleep while they waited. On the outside, you could not tell them apart. The difference only showed up at midnight, when the cry went out: “Look, the bridegroom is coming!”

Five had oil. Five did not.

The five without oil asked to borrow some, and the answer they got sounds harsh until you understand it. *We can’t give you ours. Go get your own.*

The Oil No One Can Lend You

Purity is like that oil.

Your pastor cannot lend you his. Your parents cannot pass you theirs. Your spouse cannot carry yours for you. You can sit next to a pure person in church for twenty years and still have an empty lamp. At some point, every one of us has to go and get our own.

Don't live on yesterday's oil. The wise and the foolish often look the same until the Bridegroom comes.

That is exactly what we have seen in the area of sexual purity. Gifted people, anointed people, people with platforms and lamps that looked bright, ran out of oil at midnight. And many quiet, unknown saints kept theirs burning through long nights nobody saw.

**You cannot borrow purity. You can only buy it from
the One who sells oil without price.**

Where the Oil Comes From

The oil in Scripture is always the fruit of crushing. Olives are pressed. And the oil of purity comes the same way, through a life pressed into the presence of God.

It comes when you throw the tape into the bushes, and throw it again when it comes back.

It comes when you open the vault and tell the truth about what you have done.

It comes when a man decides to see God's daughters instead of objects, and becomes the safest man in the room.

It comes when you make a covenant with your eyes and cut off what feeds the fire.

It comes, most of all, when you behold Him. When you finally see that He is the beauty behind every beautiful thing, the cheap wine loses its pull. His love is better.

The Bride Is Being Made Ready

Here is the good news at the end of this book. The wedding is still coming. The Bridegroom has not given up on His bride.

*Let us be glad and rejoice, and let us give honor to him.
For the time has come for the wedding feast of the Lamb,
and his bride has prepared herself.*

Revelation 19:7

Notice what John says: the bride has *prepared herself*. Grace does the washing, but she says yes to it. She gets ready. She keeps her lamp burning.

Maybe you are reading this with a lamp that is almost out. Maybe your story looks a lot like mine did in college. Maybe you are a leader carrying a secret, or a spouse carrying a

betrayal, or a young person who has never heard anyone explain why any of this matters.

Hear me. It is not midnight yet. The shop is still open. The One who sells the oil is the same One who hung the sheet outside the tent and gave His bride a new testimony.

Go to Him. Get your own oil. Then help someone else find the shop.

Keep your lamp burning.