



CHANGE THE
MIND



CHANGE THE
MAN

*A Scripture-Based Journey Through
Addiction and Recovery*

Paul Hainline

*“Even though I walk through the valley
of the shadow of death, I fear no evil,
for You are with me.”*

PSALM 23:4

Change the Mind, Change the Man

A Biblical Path from Addiction to Recovery

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CHAPTER 1

The Phone Call

The moment everything splits into before and after.

There's a phone call you're afraid of.

If you love someone who is caught in addiction, you know the one I mean. It doesn't have to ring at two in the morning, although it often does. It can come at noon on a Tuesday while you're at work, or at six in the evening while you're starting dinner, or on a Sunday morning while you're getting dressed for worship. The time doesn't matter. What matters is the half-second between seeing the number on the screen and answering it — that half-second when your chest tightens and your stomach drops and something in you whispers, *This is it.*

Maybe it's the hospital. Maybe it's a police officer speaking in a careful, measured voice that tells you he's said these words before. Maybe it's your child, thick and slurred, saying something that makes the floor tilt under your feet. Or maybe it's not a phone call at all. Maybe it's the knock on the door. The text that says *call me now*. The moment you walk into a room and find something you can't unfind — the pipe, the needle, the bottle, the evidence that everything you feared was true.

However it comes, the result is the same.

The world you lived in five minutes ago — the one where you could still tell yourself it wasn't that bad, still hope you were wrong, still pretend the signs meant something else — that world is gone. And you are standing in a new one, and you didn't ask to be here, and you don't know the way forward.

That is the phone call.

And if you have lived it, you remember everything. Where you were standing. What time of day it was. What the light looked like. Whether it was raining. You remember the sound of your own breathing. You remember the weight of the phone in your hand, or the weight of your legs when you sat down because your body decided for you that you could not remain standing.

You remember because that was the moment your life divided into two parts: before, and after.

. . .

Not long ago, a mother posted something on social media while she was driving her twenty-four-year-old son to a rehabilitation center. It wasn't written for an audience. It was written because the words were boiling over and she had nowhere else to put them. She said:

"Where did we go wrong?"

"We can't help but constantly wonder if there was ANYTHING we could have done better."

"We never imagined drugs would touch our lives."

"Our hearts are broken but we have hope."

Thousands of people responded. Not dozens. Thousands. Because every parent who has ever gotten that phone call saw their own face in hers. Every husband, every wife, every brother and sister and grandparent who has watched addiction drag someone they love into the dark — they all recognized the words, because they've said the same ones. Usually in private. Usually through tears. Usually to no one, because who do you tell?

That mother's post tells you something important about the phone call. It's not just a moment of crisis. It's a moment of isolation. Because the phone call doesn't just tell you something terrible has happened. It tells you that you are now in a club you never wanted to join, and you don't know the rules, and you are terrified that if you say it out loud — if you actually tell someone what is happening in your family — the judgment will be worse than the silence.

So you carry it alone.

And carrying it alone is exactly what will break you.

• • •

Now, if you're reading this book and you are the one caught in the addiction — not the family, but the one the phone call is about — I need you to hear something.

You may not remember the moment the way your family does. Addiction has a way of erasing the edges, blurring the details, rearranging the timeline until you're not sure what happened on which night or how bad it really was. You might remember pieces. You might not remember it at all.

But they remember.

Your mother remembers the exact pitch of the officer's voice on the phone. Your father remembers standing in the kitchen gripping the edge of the counter and not being able to let go. Your wife remembers the moment she stopped being surprised, and that moment broke something in her that she hasn't told you about. Your children — if you have children — remember the night they heard the crying through the wall, or the morning they came downstairs and you weren't there and nobody would explain why.

They carry those moments like scars. And here is something you need to understand, even though it's hard to hear: the phone call didn't happen to you. It happened to *them*. You were the reason for the call. They were the ones who had to answer it.

I know that, because I've been on your side of it. I have been the reason for the call. More than once. And I know what it is to wake up later — sometimes much later — and begin to understand what your family went through while you were destroying yourself. That understanding doesn't come all at once. It comes in pieces, over years, and every piece of it hurts.

But it has to come. Because without it, you don't yet understand what you're recovering from. You think you're recovering from a substance. You're not. You're recovering from everything the substance made you do to the people who loved you the most.

. . .

There is another version of the phone call, and this book cannot be honest if it doesn't address it from the very first chapter.

When the addiction leads somewhere criminal — when the person you love didn't just use, but stole, or hurt someone, or worse — the phone call carries a different weight. The family isn't just hearing that their loved one is in trouble. They're hearing that their loved one has *caused* trouble. Deep, irreversible trouble.

And the question changes.

"Where did we go wrong?" is the family looking inward, searching themselves. That's grief mixed with guilt, and we'll deal with it honestly in this book. But there is another question, and it cuts a different direction entirely: "*How could you?*"

That question is the family looking directly at the addict. And there is grief in it, yes, but there is also something else. Horror. Disbelief. The realization that the child you raised, the person you taught to tie their shoes and ride a bicycle and say

their prayers at night, is capable of something you cannot comprehend. It is the shattering of an image — the image you carried of who that person was — and what replaces it is something you don't recognize.

I need to tell you now, before this book goes any further, that I know this question from the inside. I was introduced to drugs at the age of thirteen. By seventeen, the progression had taken me to places I never imagined I would go. I was arrested for robbery and murder and sentenced to life in prison. I served thirty-three years before parole was granted. I am sixty-five years old as I write this.

I am not writing from a distance. I am not writing from theory. I am writing as the person the phone call was about, and as the person who caused the question "*How could you?*" to be asked by people who loved me and whom I loved — and I had no answer for them.

I still don't. Not a satisfying one. That question will follow me for the rest of my life, and we will come back to it later in this book, because it deserves more than a passing mention. It deserves the weight of Scripture brought to bear on it honestly, without flinching, and without offering cheap comfort to either side.

For now, I simply want you to know that the voice speaking to you in these pages is not the voice of someone who read about addiction in a textbook. It is the voice of someone

who lived it — all the way to its worst consequences — and who found a way through. Not around. *Through*.

. . .

That word — *through* — matters more than you know right now.

There is a passage in the Psalms that almost every person in crisis has heard quoted at some point, whether they were ready to receive it or not. David wrote it, and whatever you have heard people do with this passage — turn it into a greeting card, embroider it on a pillow, say it at funerals until the words have lost their edges — I want you to hear it fresh:

"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me."

Psalm 23:4 (NASB)

Read it again, and this time, watch one word: *through*.

David does not say, "Even though I walk *into* the valley." He doesn't say, "Even though I am *stuck* in the valley." He says *through*. The valley is real. The shadow is real. The death that casts the shadow is real. David is not minimizing any of it. He's walking in the worst of it, and he names it for what it is — a valley so dark that death itself is blocking the light.

But the valley has an exit.

Through means there is an opening at the other end. It means you are not living in a place. You are passing through a place. The darkness is real, but it is not permanent. The shadow is heavy, but it has a border. And the Shepherd — notice that David doesn't say "I hope God is somewhere nearby" — the Shepherd is *with him*. Present tense. Right there. Walking the same path. Already in the valley, already ahead of you, already behind you, already beside you.

Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

The rod was for protection — the shepherd used it to fight off predators. The staff was for guidance — the crook at the top was used to pull a wandering sheep back to the path. David says both are a comfort to him. He is comforted that God fights for him. He is comforted that God corrects him. Both. In the same sentence. Because in the valley, you need both. You need God to protect you from what's out there, and you also need God to pull you back when you're wandering deeper into the dark.

That's where you are right now. If you are the family — you are in the valley, and it is dark, and the shadow is real. If you are the addict — you are in the valley too, whether you can see it clearly yet or not. And if you are someone who picked up this book because you're not sure which category you fall into, or because the addiction hasn't announced itself with a phone call yet but you know something is wrong — you are in the valley.

And the Shepherd is already there.

• • •

This book is going to walk through the valley with you. All the way through. We are going to talk about how the progression happens — the slow, terrible slide from the first choice to the last one. We are going to talk about guilt, and who actually bears it. We are going to talk about the prisons people build for themselves — and the prisons that shame builds around the people who love them. We are going to talk about the hardest thing a family ever does, which is to love someone enough to stop rescuing them.

We are going to talk about the mind — because that is where the real battle is fought and where the real change happens, and the apostle Paul knew it, and a preacher named Freddie Anderson spent his life teaching it, and I know it because I lived it.

We are going to talk about repentance — the real thing, not the performance. We are going to talk about what happens when the addict comes home, and why forgiveness and trust are not the same thing, and why both are necessary. We are going to talk about the long road after the turning — the daily, unglamorous, one-foot-in-front-of-the-other work of living differently.

And at the end, we are going to talk about the God who meets you in the valley. Not sentimentally. Not with clichés.

With Scripture, examined carefully and honestly, because that is the only foundation that holds when everything else has fallen apart.

But all of that starts here. With the phone call. With the before and the after. With the realization that the life you are living now is not the life you planned, and the road ahead is dark, and you don't know the way.

You don't have to know the way.

The Shepherd does.

And the valley has a *through*.

CHAPTER 2

The Progression

How the mind turns — one step at a time.

Nobody wakes up one morning and decides to destroy their life.

That's the thing the family can't understand, and it's the thing the addict can't explain. The mother replays everything — every birthday, every school year, every conversation at the dinner table — searching for the moment it started. The father lies awake running the timeline, looking for the crack in the foundation, the one decision where everything went wrong. And the addict, if he's honest, can't give them what they're looking for. Because there was no single moment. There was no dramatic turning point that would make a good scene in a movie. There was just a progression — slow, quiet, and so gradual that by the time you realize where you are, you can't remember how you got there.

I know, because that's exactly how it happened to me.

I was thirteen years old the first time someone offered me drugs. A friend. Not a stranger in an alley, not a dealer on a corner — a friend. Somebody I trusted, somebody I spent time with, somebody who made it seem like nothing. And I said yes.

I've been asked why. I've asked myself why. And the honest answer is that I don't fully know. Maybe something was missing that I couldn't name at the time. Maybe the moral foundation my parents had laid wasn't deep enough yet to hold against the weight of wanting to belong. Maybe it was curiosity, or boredom, or the simple, stupid confidence of a teenager who believes consequences happen to other people. Probably a combination of all of it. I don't have a neat answer, and I've learned to distrust neat answers when it comes to this subject. If someone tells you they know exactly why they started, ask them again in ten years. The honest ones will tell you it's more complicated than they first thought.

What I do know is what happened next. Because what happened next follows a pattern — and it is a pattern so predictable, so consistent, that the Bible described it thousands of years before anyone coined the term "addiction."

. . .

James, the Lord's brother, wrote a passage that maps the anatomy of temptation with surgical precision. He was not writing about drugs. He was writing about something far broader — the way sin works in any human heart, in any age, under any circumstance. But if you have lived through the progression of addiction, either as the addict or as the family watching it happen, these words will stop you cold:

"But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own desire. Then when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death."

James 1:14-15 (NASB)

Read it slowly. James is building a progression, and every word is chosen.

Each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own desire.

Two words in the Greek tell you everything about how temptation operates. The word behind "carried away" is *exelkomenos* — and it is a hunting term. It means to be drawn out, lured from a place of safety into the open. Picture an animal in its den — secure, hidden, protected. The hunter doesn't charge in after it. He lures it out. He uses something the animal wants — food, curiosity, the scent of something promising — to draw it away from the one place where it was safe.

And the word behind "enticed" — *deleazomenos* — is a fishing term. It means to bait. To set a hook inside something appealing. The fish doesn't see the hook. It sees the bait. It sees something that looks like what it needs, something that promises satisfaction, and it bites — and only then does it discover what was hidden inside the thing it wanted.

James puts these two images side by side deliberately. Hunting and fishing. Drawn out and baited. The person in the

grip of temptation is both the animal lured from safety and the fish closing its mouth on something that conceals a hook.

That was me at thirteen. I was drawn out — out of the safety of the home my parents had built, out of the boundaries I'd been raised with — by something that looked like friendship, like excitement, like a door opening into a world I hadn't seen yet. And inside the bait was a hook I couldn't see. Nobody sees the hook. That's the entire point.

But James doesn't stop there. Watch the next step:

Then when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin.

The metaphor shifts. James moves from the field and the water to the womb. Desire *conceives* — the Greek word is *syl-labousa*, and it is a biological term for conception. Something has been planted. Something is growing. And it will not stay hidden. It will come to term, and it will be born.

This is what the family doesn't see and the addict doesn't feel. Between the first choice and the full-blown addiction, there is a gestation period. The substance is doing its work quietly. The dependency is forming. The habit is taking root in soil that hasn't been examined yet. And on the surface, everything may look fine for weeks, months, sometimes years. But something has been conceived, and it is growing, and birth is inevitable.

I liked the effects. That's the plain truth. The first time was a choice; the second time was a craving wearing the disguise of a choice. And the distance between those two moments —

between choosing and craving — is shorter than anyone wants to believe. The conception had already happened. I just didn't know it yet.

And when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.

"Accomplished" — *apotelestheisa* — means brought to full maturity, carried to completion. Sin has a life cycle. It is conceived in desire, born in the act, and when it reaches its full growth — when it has matured, when it has had time to develop into everything it was always going to be — it produces death. Not might. Not sometimes. *Brings forth* — *apokuei* — another birth word, as if death itself is the final offspring of a chain that started with a single desire and a single yes.

Conception. Birth. Maturity. Death. James described the entire arc of addiction in two verses. The first hit is the conception. The habit is the birth. The full-blown addiction — the one that has consumed your relationships, your honesty, your health, your freedom — that is sin accomplished, fully grown. And what it brings forth is death. Sometimes physical death. Always spiritual death. Always the death of *something* — trust, innocence, a family's peace, a future that will never exist now.

I said yes at thirteen. By seventeen, sin was accomplished.

• • •

But the progression is not only about the substance. It is about the company you keep while the substance does its work.

Solomon, writing centuries before James, stated a principle so blunt it barely needs commentary:

"He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm."

Proverbs 13:20 (NASB)

In the Hebrew, the word for "companion" is *ro'eh* — and it carries more weight than the English suggests. It doesn't mean someone you nod to in passing or sit near occasionally. The root means to graze alongside, to feed together, to share the same pasture. A *ro'eh* is someone whose daily life runs parallel to yours. You eat where they eat. You go where they go. You become what they are becoming.

And the word for "will suffer harm" — *yeroa'* — means to be broken. To be shattered. Not inconvenienced. Not set back. *Broken*. Solomon is not offering a gentle suggestion about choosing friends carefully. He is issuing a warning: if you graze alongside fools — not merely the intellectually foolish, but the *kesilim*, the morally obstinate, those who know better and do not care — you will be destroyed. And there is a wordplay buried in the Hebrew that the English cannot capture: *ro'eh* and *yeroa'* echo each other in sound. The companionship and the breaking share the same syllables, as if Solomon is telling you that the destruction is embedded in the association itself. You can hear the ruin inside the friendship if you listen closely enough.

I lived this. When the drugs entered my life, the people around me changed. Not all at once. Gradually. The friends I'd grown up with — the ones from church, the ones my parents knew — they faded. Not because they rejected me, but because I moved away from them. I gravitated toward people who were doing what I was doing, because they were the only ones who didn't make me feel guilty for doing it. They were my new pasture. And I grazed alongside them, and I became what they were becoming.

One of the sharpest memories I carry from those years is sitting in a diner and watching a group of old friends walk in. People I had gone to school with — a private church school, nine years together. They knew my face as well as they knew their own. And I sat there hoping they wouldn't recognize me. Hoping. As if nine years could be erased by whatever I had become. Of course they recognized me. How could they not? And the embarrassment was physical. I could feel it in my chest, behind my ribs, like something heavy pressing down. I knew what they saw when they looked at me. I knew how far I had fallen. I didn't like who I had become any better than the person I once was — I wouldn't have been embarrassed if I did. And I don't just mean my physical appearance, although there was that too. I mean everything. The way I carried myself. The things I was willing to do. The lies I told without flinching.

And yet — and this is the part the family cannot fathom — there was no urge to stop. The embarrassment was real. The

awareness was real. I could see what I had become. And I kept going.

Why?

• • •

Paul the apostle explains it with a single word that every addict needs to hear, especially the ones who still believe they are in control:

"Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, whether of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness?"

Romans 6:16 (NASB)

The word is *doulos*. Slave. And a *doulos* in the first century was not a hired servant who could give notice and walk away. A *doulos* was property. Owned. A *doulos* did not set his own schedule, choose his own labor, or decide when he had done enough. He belonged to his master, and he did what his master commanded. That was the arrangement. That was the whole of his existence.

Paul says you entered this arrangement voluntarily — not by signing a contract, but by *presenting yourself*. The Greek is *paristanete*, the act of placing yourself at someone's disposal, of offering yourself for service. Every time you obeyed the craving, you were presenting yourself to a master. Every time you said

yes to the substance, you were handing over another piece of your freedom. And at some point — you probably cannot identify the exact moment — the thing you thought you were choosing became the thing that owned you.

This is why the embarrassment did not produce change in me. I could see the damage. I could feel the shame. But I was no longer a free agent making independent decisions about my life. I was a *doulos*, and my master was not interested in my embarrassment or my shame. My master wanted obedience, and I gave it, because that is what slaves do.

The family sees this from the outside and it looks like insanity. *Why doesn't he just stop? She knows what it's doing to her — why won't she just walk away?* And the answer is Romans 6:16. She can't. Not without something more powerful than the master she has been serving. He can't. Not because he doesn't see the destruction — he sees it — but because seeing the destruction and being free from the master are two entirely different things.

• • •

But none of this — the bait, the changed associations, the slavery — none of it explains the deeper engine driving the whole progression. For that, you have to go further back. All the way to Romans chapter 1.

"For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man..."

Romans 1:21-23 (NASB)

Paul the apostle is not writing about addiction here. He is writing about something larger — the universal human pattern of turning away from God. But the pattern he traces is the same pattern, and if you have lived through addiction on either side, you will recognize every step of the descent.

It begins with a failure to honor God as God. Not necessarily a dramatic rejection — not a fist shaken at the sky. Sometimes just a slow drift. An inattention. A quiet letting go of the things that kept your gaze fixed upward. It doesn't feel like rebellion at first. It feels like nothing. A prayer not prayed. A study set aside. A Sunday missed, then two, then a month has passed and you didn't notice. The turning of the mind away from God almost never begins with a loud no. It begins with a silent *not right now*.

Then the thinking changes. The word Paul uses for "became futile" is *emataiōthēsan* — from *mataiōō*, which means to become empty, vain, purposeless. The mind doesn't just go wrong. It goes hollow. It loses its reference point. It spins, reasoning and reasoning and arriving nowhere, because it

has cut itself loose from the one fixed point that gave all other thinking its meaning and direction.

And then the heart darkens. *Eskotisthē* — was darkened. The passive voice matters. The heart did not darken itself. It was darkened as a consequence of the turning away. When you remove the light, darkness does not need an invitation. It fills the space on its own. And the person doesn't feel the darkening as it happens. They feel normal. They feel fine. They feel like themselves. That is part of the darkness — it doesn't announce itself.

And then the exchange. This is the word that haunts me: *ēllaxan* — they exchanged. They traded one thing for another. The glory of the incorruptible God for an image. The truth of God for a lie. It is the language of barter, of transaction, and the trade is always a swindle. You hand over what is infinitely valuable and receive what is worthless, and at the moment of the exchange you are convinced you got the better deal.

Three times in Romans 1, Paul writes the words "God gave them over" — *paredōken*. Verses 24, 26, and 28. God gave them over. He did not push them. He did not shove them into the darkness. He *released* them. He let go. He respected the exchange they had made. He gave them over to what they chose. And what they chose consumed them.

I know this pattern because I lived it. When you take your focus off of God, you naturally become more self-centered. The space God occupied doesn't stay empty. The self rushes in

to fill it. And the self, left to its own resources and its own hunger, will try to fill its own emptiness with whatever is closest and most immediate — a substance, a behavior, a thrill, an escape. It doesn't matter what. The gaze has shifted, and everything that follows — the bait, the hook, the changed companions, the slavery — all of it flows downstream from that single, quiet turn of the head.

The substance was never the real problem. The gaze was.

• • •

There is one more passage that belongs in this chapter, because it answers the question the family keeps asking and can never quite resolve: *Why can't he see what this is doing to him? Why can't she see what is so obvious to everyone around her?*

The writer of Hebrews says it plainly:

"But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called 'Today,' so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin."

Hebrews 3:13 (NASB)

Two words matter here more than any others. The first is *hardened* — *sklērunthē*, from *sklērunō*. This is the root that gives us the medical term "sclerosis" — the hardening of tissue until it can no longer function as it was designed to. A hardened artery can't carry blood properly. A hardened heart can't feel what it was meant to feel. The conviction that used to

sting doesn't reach anymore. The shame that used to stop you in your tracks barely registers. The voices of the people who love you, who are begging you to change — you can hear the words, but they don't penetrate. The tissue has hardened. It happens slowly. One choice at a time. One yes at a time. And by the time the hardening is advanced, the person inside doesn't know it has happened. They think they're the same person they always were. They think they can still feel what they used to feel. They can't.

The second word is *deceitfulness* — *apatē*. Sin lies. That is its nature, and its lies are not crude or obvious. They are tailored. Personalized. Relentless. Sin tells the addict: *You're in control*. Sin tells the addict: *You can stop whenever you want*. Sin tells the addict: *One more time won't change anything*. Sin tells the addict: *You're not like those people — you can manage this*. And the cruelest lie of all: *Tomorrow. You can deal with it tomorrow*.

Every one of those is a lie. And the reason the lies work is the hardening. The heart that has been exposed to sin repeatedly — choice after choice after choice — develops a callus over the place where the truth used to land. Not overnight. Gradually. So gradually that the person doesn't feel it forming. And by the time the callus is thick enough to block the truth entirely, the only voice that still gets through is the voice of the master they've been serving.

This is why the family's pleading doesn't work. Not because the family doesn't love enough. Not because the words aren't right. But because the heart on the receiving end has been hardened by the deceitfulness of sin, and the words are landing on a surface that used to be soft and is now stone.

. . .

If you are the family reading this chapter — the mother, the father, the wife, the husband, the child who has watched a parent disappear into this — I need you to hear something that may be the most important thing this book says to you before the turning comes.

You are not failing because your words aren't getting through. Your words aren't getting through because of what sin has done to the heart you're trying to reach. That is not your fault. And it is not a reason to stop speaking. Hebrews 3:13 says to encourage one another *day after day*. It does not say to give up when it doesn't work. It says keep going. Every day. Because you do not know which day the tissue begins to soften. You do not know which word, on which morning, will be the one that finally reaches past the callus to something still alive underneath.

And if you are the addict reading this — if you can trace the steps from your first yes to wherever you are sitting right now — then you know more than you think you do. You know that James mapped your journey before you took the first step.

You know that Solomon warned you about the companions before you changed yours. You know that Paul described your slavery before you presented yourself to the master. And you know that the engine underneath all of it — the thing driving the whole progression — was never the substance. It was the gaze. The mind that turned away from God, one degree at a time, so slowly you didn't feel it happening.

But it turned.

And if the mind can turn away, the mind can turn back.

That's where this book is going. But we are not there yet. The descent has more to show you — because before the mind turns back, you need to understand what happened to the people who watched you fall, and what happened inside you in ways you haven't yet been willing to face.

The progression brought you here. Understanding it is the first step toward reversing it.

CHAPTER 3

Where Did We Go Wrong?

The question that keeps the family awake — and the answer no one wants to hear.

You've already asked it. Probably a hundred times.

You asked it in the car on the way home from the hospital, or the courthouse, or the rehab center. You asked it lying awake at three in the morning while the house was quiet and the guilt was loud. You asked it over coffee with the one friend you trusted enough to tell, and you watched her face for the answer she was too kind to say out loud. You asked it standing in the bedroom of your grown child, looking at the things left behind — the trophies, the school pictures, the Bible you gave them at graduation — and you asked it with tears running down your face and no one there to hear you.

Where did we go wrong?

It is the most natural question in the world. You raised this child. You fed them, clothed them, loved them, prayed over them, brought them to worship, taught them right from wrong, did everything you knew how to do — and it wasn't enough. Or so it seems. Because here you are. And the child you raised is destroying themselves, and you cannot stop it, and

the only explanation your broken heart can find is that somehow, somewhere, you must have failed.

If you are living in that question right now, I need to tell you two things. The first will surprise you. The second may be the most important paragraph you read in this entire book.

But before I can say either one, we need to deal with the passage that someone — probably someone who meant well — has already quoted at you.

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There is a verse in Proverbs that has caused more guilt in the hearts of good parents than almost any other sentence in the Bible. It is one of the most frequently quoted verses in Scripture, and it is one of the most frequently misunderstood:

"Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old he will not depart from it."

Proverbs 22:6 (NASB)

If you are the parent of an addict, someone has said this verse to you. Maybe not out loud. Maybe just in the way they looked at you when they found out. But the implication was there, and it landed like a stone in your chest: *If you had trained them right, this wouldn't have happened. The fact that they departed proves you didn't do your job.*

That is not what this verse means. And before we go any further, you need to understand why.

The first thing to recognize is what kind of literature you are reading. Proverbs is wisdom literature. That is not a lesser category of Scripture — it is inspired, it is profitable, it is God-breathed. But it is a specific kind of writing, and it operates by specific rules. A proverb states a general principle about how life works under God's moral order. It is not a contract. It is not a guarantee with terms and conditions. It is not a promise that if you perform step A, God is obligated to deliver result B.

The Hebrew word behind "train up" is *chanakh* — and it means more than instruction. It means to dedicate, to inaugurate, to set something apart for its intended purpose. It is the same word used for the dedication of the temple. When Solomon dedicated the temple, he set it apart, consecrated it, gave it to God for the purpose God intended. *Chanakh* carries that same weight when applied to a child — dedicate this child, set them on the right path, consecrate the early years to the purpose God designed.

And the word behind "way" is *derek* — a road, a path, a manner of life. Train up a child according to the path that is right for them. Set their feet on the road. Dedicate the early years to walking it with them.

The proverb says that when you do this, the general principle is that the training holds. *Even when he is old he will not depart from it.* The foundation laid in childhood has a staying power that outlasts the years of wandering. It tends to bring them back. It tends to hold.

But *tends to* and *always will* are not the same thing. And the same book that gives you Proverbs 22:6 gives you this:

"A foolish son is a grief to his father and bitterness to her who bore him."

Proverbs 17:25 (NASB)

The same book. The same inspired wisdom literature. Solomon, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, writes a proverb that acknowledges the grief of a faithful parent over a foolish child. If Proverbs 22:6 were an unconditional guarantee — if faithful training always produced faithful children without exception — then Proverbs 17:25 could not exist. There would be no faithful parent grieving a foolish child, because faithful training would have prevented it. The existence of 17:25 in the same collection tells you that 22:6 is a principle, not a promise. It tells you that Solomon knew — God knew — that some children raised well will still choose poorly.

And there is something else the Hebrew reveals that most people miss entirely. The phrase "even when he is old he will not depart from it" can also carry a less comforting shade of meaning. Some Hebrew scholars have noted that the phrase "in the way he should go" — *al-pi darko* — can be read as "according to his own way." According to his own inclination. His own bent. If you read the proverb with that shade, it becomes not a promise but a warning: if you train a child according to

his own natural inclination — if you let him follow his own way rather than God's way — then even when he is old, he won't depart from that path either. The training sticks, for good or for ill.

I raise this not to be academic, but because you deserve to know that the verse someone used to add to your guilt is far more complex than the way it was handed to you. You were given a slogan. The text is richer, harder, and more honest than a slogan.

Here is what Proverbs 22:6 actually tells you: the training matters. Deeply. The foundation you laid is not wasted. The prayers you prayed are not forgotten. The mornings you drove your child to worship, the nights you sat with them and read the Bible, the years of consistency and faithfulness — none of that disappears because of the choices your child made later. The training is still in there, underneath everything, and the proverb says it has staying power. It can outlast the wandering. It can be the very thing that calls them back when they finally come to themselves.

But it does not — it *cannot* — override the free will of a human being made in the image of God. Your child is not a product you manufactured. Your child is a person with agency, made by God with the capacity to choose, and they chose. That is not your failure. That is their humanity.

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Now we can go where this chapter has been heading from the beginning. Because long before Solomon wrote Proverbs, and long before any well-meaning friend tried to lay your child's choices at your feet, God Himself addressed this question. And His answer is not ambiguous.

The prophet Ezekiel was speaking to a generation of Israelites who had a saying — a proverb of their own, actually — that they used to explain their suffering:

"The fathers eat the sour grapes, but the children's teeth are set on edge."

Ezekiel 18:2 (NASB)

The image is physical, and it was familiar to every Israelite who heard it. Bite into an unripe grape — sour, acidic, not ready — and your teeth react. That sharp, grating sensation that sets your jaw on edge. You feel it in the roots of your teeth. That's the image. The fathers ate the sour grapes — they made the bad choices, they did the sinning — but it's the children whose teeth are set on edge. The children are the ones feeling the pain. The children are the ones suffering the consequences of something they didn't do.

It was a blame-shifting proverb. We are suffering because of what our fathers did. Our situation is their fault. We are paying the price for sins we didn't commit.

God's response was direct and absolute:

"As I live," declares the Lord GOD, "you are surely not going to use this proverb in Israel anymore."

Ezekiel 18:3 (NASB)

Stop it. That is the force of what God says here. Stop using this excuse. Stop passing blame between generations. And then God explains why, in a verse that speaks to every parent who has ever lain awake asking *where did we go wrong*:

"The person who sins will die. The son will not bear the punishment for the father's iniquity, nor will the father bear the punishment for the son's iniquity; the righteousness of the righteous will be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked will be upon himself."

Ezekiel 18:20 (NASB)

Read it again. Slowly. Let every clause land.

The son will not bear the punishment for the father's iniquity. If you, as a parent, have sins in your past — and you do, because we all do — your child is not being punished for them. Your child's addiction is not God's judgment on your failures. That theology is false, and God says so explicitly, right here.

Nor will the father bear the punishment for the son's iniquity. And here it is — the sentence you need to hear. You are not guilty for what your child chose to do. The guilt of their sin belongs to them. Not because you don't love them. Not because you don't grieve for them. Not because their pain

doesn't keep you awake at night. But because God has established a principle that runs from one end of Scripture to the other: each soul stands before Him on its own.

The righteousness of the righteous will be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked will be upon himself.

This is not cold. This is not indifferent. This is the foundation of justice itself. Without individual responsibility, there is no real guilt and no real forgiveness. If the addict's choices are really the parents' fault, then the addict has nothing to repent of — and that robs them of the very thing that can save them. If the parents bear the guilt for the child's sin, then repentance is meaningless, because the wrong person is carrying the weight.

Ezekiel 18 protects both sides. It frees the parents from a guilt that was never theirs to carry. And it places the responsibility squarely on the shoulders of the one who made the choices — which is not cruel, because responsibility is the doorway to repentance, and repentance is the doorway to freedom.

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I can say this with the weight of my own life behind it: my parents did not fail me.

I went to a private church school for nine years. I was raised in a home where God was honored, where the Bible was present, where my parents took me to worship and taught me

the difference between right and wrong. They laid the foundation. They did the work. They gave me every advantage a child could have in knowing God and knowing His word.

And I still said yes at thirteen.

That was not their failure. That was my choice. A foolish, reckless, devastating choice made by a boy who had been given every reason to choose differently and chose anyway. My parents did not put the drugs in my hand. My parents did not choose my companions. My parents did not make the decisions that followed — the lying, the stealing, the escalation, the things that put me in prison. I did those things. Every one of them. And the guilt for every one of them is mine.

If you are a parent reading this, and your story is like my parents' story — if you laid the foundation, if you did the work, if you raised that child in the nurture and admonition of the Lord and they still walked away — then hear me: you did not fail. Your child is not an addict because of something you did or didn't do. Your child is an addict because at some point, in some moment, they made a choice. And then they made another. And another. And the progression carried them where the progression always carries people, because that is how sin works — James told us that in the last chapter.

The training you gave them is not lost. It is still there. And if God is merciful — and He is — it may be the very thing that whispers to them from underneath all the rubble when they finally sit still long enough to hear it.



But I said I owed you two things at the beginning of this chapter, and I have only given you the first. The first was Ezekiel 18 — you are not guilty for your child's choices. That is what Scripture says, and it is true, and you need to believe it.

The second is harder. And it requires the same honesty this book has promised from the beginning.

Not every family that asks "Where did we go wrong?" is asking from a place of innocence.

Some families did fail. Not all. But some. Some children were raised in homes where the Bible was on the shelf but never opened. Some were brought to worship on Sunday by parents who lived as if God did not exist the other six days of the week. Some were raised by parents who were absent — physically, emotionally, or both. Some were raised in homes where there was abuse, or neglect, or addiction already present in the generation before.

If that is your story — if you are reading this chapter and you know, honestly, that the foundation was not laid, or that it was cracked before your child ever had a chance to stand on it — then Ezekiel 18 still applies to you, but differently. You are not guilty for your child's choices. Those choices are still theirs. But you may need to reckon with the fact that you share some of the responsibility for the conditions in which those choices were made. And that reckoning is between you and God, and it

requires the same repentance you are hoping your child will find.

This is the honest handling this subject demands. Because if I tell the faithful parents "it wasn't your fault" and stop there, I am being incomplete. And if I tell the negligent parents "it wasn't your fault" without qualification, I am being dishonest. Circumstances explain how a person arrived at a crossroads. They do not justify which direction the person chose to walk. But the person who helped create the circumstances is not free from examination either.

Here is the good news in that hard truth: if you failed your child, the same God who calls the addict to repentance calls you to it too. The same gospel that offers your child a new beginning offers you one. The same mercy that meets the prodigal on the road home meets the parent who fell short. Ezekiel 18 does not only say that the wicked bear their own guilt. It also says this:

"But if the wicked man turns from all his sins which he has committed and observes all My statutes and practices justice and righteousness, he shall surely live; he shall not die. All his transgressions which he has committed will not be remembered against him; because of his righteousness which he has practiced, he will live."

Ezekiel 18:21-22 (NASB)

That is for you too.

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And if you are the addict — if you have been reading this chapter watching me speak to the parents, waiting for your turn — here it is.

Nobody made you do this.

Not your parents. Not your circumstances. Not the friend who offered it to you the first time. Not the neighborhood you grew up in, not the school you attended or didn't attend, not the things that happened to you that you didn't deserve. All of those things are real. Some of them may have been terrible. And none of them forced your hand.

You chose this.

I know how that sounds. I know it sounds harsh. But stay with me, because what I am about to say next is the most hopeful thing in this chapter.

If you are only a victim of your circumstances — if the addiction is entirely the product of what was done to you, your environment, your upbringing, your brain chemistry, forces beyond your control — then you are powerless. Truly powerless. Because you cannot change your past, you cannot undo your childhood, you cannot rewire the circumstances that supposedly created this. If the addiction is not your fault, it is also not within your power to reverse. You are stuck.

But if you chose this — if somewhere underneath all the pain and the dependency and the slavery we talked about in the last chapter, there was a human being with agency who said yes

when he could have said no — then something extraordinary is true about you.

You can choose to stop.

Not easily. Not painlessly. Not without help, and not without God. The slavery is real — Romans 6 made that clear. But the slavery began with a choice, and the freedom begins with one too. Ezekiel 18 says the wicked man can turn. James 1 traced the progression from desire to death, but the progression is not a closed loop. There is an exit. The mind can turn back. The gaze can shift.

Personal responsibility is not a punishment. It is the prerequisite for change. It is the thing that makes repentance possible instead of meaningless. And if this book is going to walk you through the valley to the other side, it has to start by telling you the truth: you are here because of choices you made. And you don't have to stay here, because you are still capable of making different ones.

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There is a weight to guilt that only the people carrying it understand. The family's guilt whispers *you should have done more*. The addict's guilt whispers *you can never be forgiven for this*. Both whispers are lies, and both will be answered before this book is done — the first by Ezekiel 18, which we have already heard, and the second by a father who saw his son coming from a long way off and ran.

But that chapter comes later. Right now, what matters is this:

The family needs to set down the guilt that doesn't belong to them, so they can see clearly enough to do what actually helps. And the addict needs to pick up the responsibility that does belong to him, so he can do something with it besides drown in it.

Both of those are acts of courage. Both require honesty. And both are made possible by a God who does not traffic in collective guilt or inherited blame, but who looks at each soul and says what He said through Ezekiel: *The righteousness of the righteous will be upon himself. The wickedness of the wicked will be upon himself.* And then, in the very next breath: *Turn. And live.*

CHAPTER 4

All of the Imprisoned Are Not in Prison

Not every prison has walls you can see.

A preacher named Freddie Anderson — the man who taught me how to read the Bible and let it speak for itself — once made a statement that stopped me in my tracks. It was not from a sermon text. It was not an exegetical point. It was an observation about life, delivered the way Freddie delivered most things — plainly, without decoration, and with the kind of precision that doesn't let you look away.

He said: "*All of the imprisoned are not in prison.*"

That sentence changed the way I understood addiction, and it is the reason this chapter exists.

I spent thirty-three years behind literal walls. Concrete, steel, razor wire, count times, lockdowns — I know what a prison looks like from the inside. I know what it sounds like when the door closes and you hear the lock engage and you understand, in a way that no free person can fully grasp, that you are not leaving when you want to leave. You are leaving when someone else decides you can. That is imprisonment. It is physical, it is real, and it is devastating.

But Freddie was right. Not all prisons have walls you can see.

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There is a man sitting in a nice house in a decent neighborhood with a steady job and a family who thinks he's fine. He is an alcoholic. He has never been arrested. He has never missed a day of work. He has never caused a scene at a family gathering. He comes home, he closes the door, and he drinks until the thing inside him stops screaming for a little while. His wife knows. She has known for years. She says nothing, because the last time she said something, it became an argument that ended with a silence worse than the drinking. So she carries it. And he carries it. And the house is a prison with central air and a two-car garage, and neither of them can find the door.

There is a woman in the pew on Sunday morning — well-dressed, composed, Bible in her lap — whose son has not come home in four days. She doesn't know where he is. She doesn't know if he's alive. She drove past the places she used to find him and he wasn't there, and now she's sitting in worship trying to sing a hymn while her phone is on silent in her purse and every muscle in her body is straining to check it. Nobody in that room knows. She has told no one. Because she is terrified that if she says it out loud — if she tells these people, these brothers and sisters in Christ, what is happening in her

family — they will look at her differently. And she cannot bear that on top of everything else.

There is a teenager in his bedroom at eleven o'clock at night, deep into something on a screen that he knows is destroying him. He didn't go looking for it the first time. It found him. But he went looking for it every time after that, and now it is the first thing he thinks about when he wakes up and the last thing he sees before he sleeps, and the guilt is so thick he can barely breathe under it. He has never touched a drug. He has never held a bottle. But he is as enslaved as anyone who has, because the thing that has mastered him doesn't care what form it takes. It only cares that it owns him.

There is a father who lost his wife to cancer two years ago and discovered that the only way to get through the evening hours — those hours between dinner and sleep when the house is so quiet he can hear her absence — is to gamble online until he's too exhausted to feel anything. He tells himself it's harmless. He tells himself he can stop. He told himself that last month when he couldn't make the mortgage payment, and he told himself that again last week when he took a cash advance on a credit card his children don't know about.

All of the imprisoned are not in prison.

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Jesus said something in the Gospel of John that reaches past every one of these situations and names what is happening inside them:

"Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin."

John 8:34 (NASB)

Everyone. Not everyone who commits a particular sin. Not everyone who commits sin past a certain threshold. Everyone. And the word "slave" is *doulos* again — the same word Paul used in Romans 6 that we unpacked in Chapter 2. Property. Owned. Under the authority of a master who does not negotiate.

And Peter, writing to Christians who were already in the faith, sharpened the point further:

"For by what a man is overcome, by this he is enslaved."

2 Peter 2:19 (NASB)

The word for "overcome" is *hēttētai* — to be defeated, to be conquered, to be made inferior to something. And the word for "enslaved" is *dedoulōtai* — from *douloō*, to make a slave of, to bring into bondage. Peter's principle is devastatingly simple: whatever defeats you, owns you. Whatever you cannot say no to has become your master. It doesn't matter if it's legal. It doesn't matter if it's socially acceptable. It doesn't matter if no one can see it. If it has overcome you — if you have lost the

ability to walk away from it — you are a slave. You are imprisoned. And the fact that your prison doesn't have bars doesn't make it any less real.

This is why Freddie's observation matters so much. When people hear the word "addiction," they picture a certain kind of person — someone on the street, someone in a courtroom, someone whose life has visibly fallen apart. And those people are real, and their suffering is real. I was one of them. But addiction is not limited to the people whose imprisonment is visible. The man in the nice house, the woman in the pew, the teenager in the bedroom, the grieving father at his computer — they are all enslaved. They are all behind walls. The only difference is that nobody else can see theirs.

And that invisibility is not a comfort. It is the very thing that makes their prisons so effective.

. . .

Because here is what the silence does. It tells you that you are alone in this. It tells you that nobody else has ever faced what you are facing, that your situation is unique in its shame, that the people around you — especially the people in the church — would not understand. The silence tells the family: keep smiling. Keep performing. Don't let anyone see the cracks. If they knew what was happening in your home, they would whisper about you in the parking lot, and you cannot survive that on top of everything else.

And the silence tells the addict: keep hiding. Keep the secret. Build the wall higher. Because the moment someone finds out, you lose the only control you think you still have — the control over who knows.

The silence is a lie. And it is a lie designed to do one thing: isolate you. Because as long as you are isolated, you cannot be helped. As long as the shame keeps you hiding, no hand can reach you. The prison of secrecy is the most effective prison ever built, because the inmate builds it himself, brick by brick, lie by lie, and at a certain point he has been behind his own walls for so long that he mistakes the prison for home.

I know this because I lived inside it. Long before I went to an actual prison, I was in one. The lying was a wall. The hiding was a wall. The performing — pretending everything was fine when everything was falling apart — that was the thickest wall of all. And the terrible irony is that the walls I built to keep people out were the same walls that kept me trapped inside.

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James, the Lord's brother, wrote a sentence that strikes at the foundation of every prison that shame has ever built:

"Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much."

James 5:16 (NASB)

Three things are connected in this verse, and they are connected in a specific order: confession, prayer, and healing. Not confession and healing. Not prayer and healing. All three, linked, in sequence.

The word for "confess" is *exomologeisthe* — and the prefix *exo* matters. It means out. Out in the open. Not concealed, not whispered, not hinted at. The sins are brought out — out of the dark, out of the silence, out of the prison of secrecy — and placed before another human being. Not before God only, although that comes first and always. But before *one another*. The confession James calls for is horizontal, not just vertical. It is spoken to a person, face to face, out loud.

And the purpose is healing. The Greek word is *iathēte* — from *iaomai*, which means to cure, to restore to health. James ties the healing directly to the confession. Not to the prayer alone — although the prayer matters, and James says so. But the healing is connected to the confession itself. To the breaking of the silence. To the moment when the person trapped behind the wall finally opens their mouth and says the thing they have been terrified to say.

Why? Because the confession does something the silence never can: it breaks the power of the secret. The shame told you that if anyone found out, you would be destroyed. The confession proves the shame wrong. You say it out loud, and you are still standing. You name the sin, and the world does not end. The wall you built to protect yourself — the silence, the

hiding, the performance — turns out to have been the very thing holding you captive. And when you break it open, air rushes in, and light rushes in, and for the first time in as long as you can remember, you can breathe.

This applies to the addict. You already know that. The hiding is the disease progressing. Every secret you keep is another brick in the wall of a cell you cannot escape until you open your mouth.

But it applies to the family too. James does not say confess your sins to one another only if the sin is yours. The family isn't sinning by having an addict in their home. But the shame they carry — the hiding, the performing, the silence — that shame has become their prison. And the way out is the same: say it out loud. To someone. To a brother or sister in Christ who can be trusted with the weight of it. Break the silence, because the silence is killing you as surely as the substance is killing the person you love.

. . .

But here is where this chapter must say something directly to the church, because the family's willingness to speak depends entirely on what they believe will happen when they do.

If the church is a place where a family can stand up and say, "We are struggling. Our child is an addict. We need help. We need prayer. We are barely holding on" — and the response is compassion, and prayer, and arms around them, and meals

brought to the house, and someone sitting with them in the waiting room at the hospital, and the kind of love that doesn't ask questions it doesn't need answers to — then the family will speak. They will break the silence. They will come out from behind the wall, because the body of Christ has given them a safe place to land.

But if the church is a place where that same confession is met with whispers in the hallway, with sidelong glances on Sunday morning, with children being steered away from their children, with a slow and deliberate distancing that everyone can feel but nobody will name — then the family will not speak. They will stay in their prison. They will keep smiling and performing and dying silently in the pew, because the cost of honesty is higher than the cost of silence.

And the church will have failed them. Not the addict. The church will have failed the *family* — the people who did exactly what James 5:16 told them to do and were punished for it.

Paul the apostle wrote to the churches in Galatia:

"Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ."

Galatians 6:2 (NASB)

The word for "burdens" is *barē* — heavy loads, weights too great for one person to carry alone. And the command is not a suggestion. *Bear them*. Pick them up. Get underneath the

weight with the person who is collapsing under it. This is not optional kindness. Paul calls it the fulfillment of the law of Christ. If you want to know what it looks like to live under the authority of Jesus, this is what it looks like: you carry what your brother cannot carry alone.

A family in the grip of addiction is carrying a burden that is too heavy for them. They need the church to be what the church is supposed to be — not a place of judgment but a place of healing. Not a courtroom but a hospital. Not a gallery of spectators watching someone bleed but a body of believers that says, "We are here. We are not leaving. And you are not alone in this."

That is what James meant. That is what Paul meant. And if the church cannot do it — if the body of Christ cannot be trusted with the broken, the ashamed, and the desperate — then the church has ceased to function as the church, no matter how well it sings or how full the pews are on Sunday.

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There is a psalm that belongs here. David wrote it, and the simplicity of it is what makes it powerful:

"The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit."

Psalm 34:18 (NASB)

Near. Not distant. Not watching from a safe remove. *Near*. The Hebrew word is *qarov* — close, at hand, present. And the people He is near to are not the ones who have it together. They are the brokenhearted — *nishberey-lev*, those whose hearts are shattered, broken into pieces. And the crushed in spirit — *dakke-ruach*, those whose spirits have been ground down, compressed, beaten flat.

That is the family hiding in the pew. That is the addict hiding in the dark. That is the husband with the bottle and the wife with the secret and the teenager with the screen and the father with the credit card. Brokenhearted. Crushed in spirit. And God is near to every one of them.

Not near because they earned it. Not near because they cleaned up first. Not near because they got their lives together and presented themselves in acceptable condition. Near because they are broken. Near because they are crushed. That is where God draws close — not to the self-sufficient, not to the performing, not to the ones who have convinced everyone else they're fine. To the shattered ones. The ones who have run out of pretending.

• • •

If you are reading this chapter from inside a prison no one can see — whether you are the addict or the family — I need you to hear what Freddie said one more time.

All of the imprisoned are not in prison.

You may not be behind literal bars. But if shame has silenced you, if secrecy has isolated you, if the performance of normalcy has become so exhausting that you don't know how much longer you can keep it up — you are imprisoned. And the walls of your prison are made of the one material that cannot withstand the truth: silence.

James said confess. Not because the confession is punishment. Because the confession is the door. It is the first crack in the wall. It is the thing that lets light into a place that has been dark for so long you forgot what light looks like.

And God is near. Not later. Not when you deserve it. Now. He is near to the brokenhearted. He saves the crushed in spirit. And He is already closer than you think — waiting on the other side of the silence you are afraid to break.

Break it.

The prison only holds you as long as you agree to stay quiet.

CHAPTER 5

Love That Says No

What if helping is the very thing that is hurting them?

Love That Says No

There is a moment every family dreads.

It does not come suddenly. It builds. It builds through the broken promises and the stolen money and the nights you lay awake listening for the door. It builds through the second chance and the third and the fifth and the tenth, through the phone calls from jail and the drives to rehab and the loans that were never loans and the lies you stopped believing months ago but kept pretending to believe because the alternative was unbearable.

And then one day, you are standing in the doorway of your own home, looking at someone you love — someone you carried, someone you raised, someone whose face you still see at five years old when you look at them now — and you say the word you have been terrified to say.

No.

No, you cannot come back in. No, I will not bail you out. No, I will not hand you money I know will end up in someone else's hands within the hour. No. Not this time.

And it feels like the cruelest thing you have ever done. It feels like abandonment. It feels like you are failing the one person you swore you would never fail. Every instinct in you screams that this is wrong — that love opens the door, love gives another chance, love never turns away.

But you have opened the door before. Every time, you opened it. And every time, they walked back out to the same places, the same people, the same destruction. Your love did not stop the progression. Your money did not stop it. Your tears did not stop it. And somewhere in the wreckage of the latest crisis, a thought began to form that you could barely stand to think:

What if helping is the very thing that is hurting them?

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The instinct to rescue is not weakness. It is the natural response of someone who loves. Parents protect their children. That is what parents do. And when the child is in danger, the impulse to intervene — to shield, to fix, to absorb the blow — is as powerful as any force in nature.

But addiction changes the equation.

What looks like love may be keeping the addict comfortable in their chains. What feels like compassion may be removing the very consequences that could wake them up. Every dollar handed over, every bail posted, every excuse made on their behalf, every mess quietly cleaned up so the neighbors

don't find out — each of these is a cushion placed between the addict and the floor. And as long as the floor never hits, there is no reason to change.

This is not a clinical observation. This is something I have watched happen — to others, and to myself. I have seen men go to prison, serve their time, and walk out the gate with every intention of going straight. Their families were waiting. Their families had kept the lights on, kept the door open, kept the faith. And within months — sometimes weeks — those men were right back where they started. The drugs. The streets. The choices that put them there the first time.

And I will tell you something harder than that, because I have seen it with my own eyes and heard it with my own ears. Some of them walked out with no intention of going straight at all. None. They could hardly wait to get back to it. They served every day of their sentence, and every day of their sentence the mind was right where it was when they walked in. The family was praying. The family was waiting. And the man they were waiting for had never left the life — not in his mind. Not for one day.

Why?

Because nothing on the inside had changed. The circumstances changed. The address changed. The clothes were new. But the mind was the same mind that walked in. And a changed situation without a changed mind is a temporary arrangement.

I have also watched families reach the point where they could not do it anymore. Where the mother who had answered every call finally let it ring. Where the father who had posted bail five times said, "Not this time." Those were not cold people. They were exhausted people. Broken people. People who had loved as hard as they knew how to love, and who had finally come to the agonizing realization that their help was not helping.

And here is what I want you to hear, because this is where Scripture speaks directly to the situation — and says something most people do not expect.

. . .

There was a congregation in the city of Corinth that had a serious problem. One of their own — a member of the body — was involved in sexual immorality of a kind that even the surrounding pagan culture found shocking. He had his father's wife. And the church's response was not grief. It was not alarm. It was pride.

Paul the apostle's letter does not mince words:

"You have become arrogant and have not mourned instead, so that the one who had done this deed would be removed from your midst."

1 Corinthians 5:2

Two words in that sentence deserve your full attention.

The first is *mourned*. The Greek is *pentheō* — and it is the word used for mourning the dead. Not disappointment. Not concern. Not a quiet conversation about “how we can support him through this.” *Mourning*. Paul expected grief from the congregation — the kind of grief a family feels at a funeral. Because what was happening in Corinth was a death of sorts. A man was destroying himself, and the body that was supposed to love him was watching it happen and calling it tolerance.

The second word is *arrogant*. The Greek is *physioō*, and the image behind it is vivid — it means to inflate, to puff up, like a bellows filling something with air. They were inflated. Full of air. Full of nothing. They had convinced themselves that their acceptance of this man’s sin was a sign of maturity, perhaps even of love. Paul saw it differently. He saw a congregation that had confused permissiveness with compassion.

Families do this too. Not always because they are proud, but because they are afraid. Afraid that drawing a line means giving up. Afraid that saying no means they don’t love anymore. And so they keep the door open, and the money flowing, and the excuses coming — and they call it love. But Paul calls it something else entirely. He calls it a failure to mourn.

Because when you love someone who is destroying themselves, the appropriate response is grief — followed by action.

• • •

And the action Paul commanded was the hardest one imaginable.

"I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus."

1 Corinthians 5:5

Read that again slowly.

Deliver such a one to Satan. The Greek word is *paradidōmi* — to hand over, to deliver up. It is the same word the gospel writers use of Judas handing Jesus over in the garden. Strong language. Devastating language. And if you stopped reading at "deliver such a one to Satan," you would be horrified. You would think Paul was calling for cruelty, for abandonment, for writing the man off entirely.

But you cannot stop there. The sentence does not stop there.

For the destruction of his flesh — not the destruction of him, but of his *flesh*. The Greek is *olethros tēs sarkos*. *Olethros* means ruin, destruction. *Sarx* — flesh — is the word Paul uses throughout his letters for the sinful nature, the appetites and patterns that war against the spirit. The target is not the man. The target is what is killing him.

So that his spirit may be saved. There it is. The purpose clause. *Hina to pneuma sōthē* — "in order that the spirit may be saved." Everything in this passage — the removal, the delivery, the destruction of the flesh — all of it points toward one end:

salvation. Not punishment. Not rejection. Not "he made his bed, let him lie in it." The goal is rescue.

This was surgery, not execution. Paul was telling the congregation: remove him from the comfort and safety of this fellowship — not because you have given up on him, but because as long as he is comfortable, he will not change. Let him feel the full weight of where his choices have taken him. Let the flesh meet its consequences. Because only when the cushion is removed does the man have a chance to wake up.

Sound familiar?

. . .

If the story ended there, it would be hard enough. But it does not end there.

Paul wrote a second letter to Corinth. And in that letter, the situation had changed. The man — most likely the same man — had repented. The discipline had worked. The removal had accomplished exactly what Paul said it would accomplish. The man's spirit was saved.

But now Paul saw a new danger:

"Sufficient for such a one is this punishment which was inflicted by the majority, so that on the contrary you should rather forgive and comfort him, otherwise such a one might be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow."

2 Corinthians 2:6-7

The Greek word for "overwhelmed" is *katapothē* — from *kata-pinō*, meaning to swallow down, to devour, to gulp whole. Paul's warning is urgent: if you do not forgive him now — if you do not open the door once the turning has happened — the grief will swallow him alive.

This matters enormously. Because it means the discipline has an endpoint. It is not permanent exile. It is not "once you've crossed that line, you can never come back." The removal was temporary. The purpose was awakening. And once the awakening has happened — once the mind has genuinely changed — the response must be restoration.

Paul continued:

"Wherefore I urge you to reaffirm your love for him."

2 Corinthians 2:8

Reaffirm. Not "start over with conditions." Not "we'll see if he really means it this time." *Reaffirm*. The love was always there. It never stopped. The man needed to know that it was still there.

This is the full picture. The removal and the restoration are not contradictions. They are two movements of the same love. The parent who closes the door and the parent who opens it again when the turning is real — they are the same parent, and they are acting from the same love both times.

• • •

And if you need a higher model than Corinth, look to God Himself.

The writer of Hebrews quotes from Proverbs and then extends the principle into a sustained argument about God's discipline:

"My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when you are reprov'd by Him; for those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives."

Hebrews 12:5-6

The word for *discipline* here is *paideia* — and it comes from the Greek word *país*, meaning child. This is not the language of punishment. It is the language of parenting. *Paideia* is the training of a child by a father who intends for that child to grow. It includes correction. It includes consequences. It may even include pain — the text says He *scourges* every son He receives, and *mastigoō* is not a gentle word. But the purpose is never destruction. The purpose is formation.

And notice the logic of the passage: it is those whom the Lord *loves* that He disciplines, and every son whom He *receives* that He scourges. The discipline is not evidence that God has rejected the son. It is evidence that the son belongs to Him. If there is no correction, Hebrews goes on to say, then you are not a son at all (12:8). The discipline *proves* the relationship — it does not sever it.

And look at how Hebrews frames the result:

"All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness."

Hebrews 12:11

Trained — the Greek is *gegymnasmenos*, from *gymnazō*, the word we get "gymnasium" from. It means to train, to exercise, to condition — like an athlete preparing for competition. Discipline is training. It is not pleasant while it is happening — the text says so plainly, and you do not need the text to tell you what you have already felt. But *afterwards*. Afterwards, to those who submit to the training, it yields the *peaceful fruit of righteousness*. Not bitterness. Not brokenness. Peace.

If God Himself loves through discipline — if the Father of spirits corrects those He receives precisely *because* He loves them — then a family that sets a boundary, a parent who says no, a congregation that removes a member for the purpose of restoring him — they are not being cruel. They are following the highest model of love that exists.

• • •

If you are the one struggling with addiction, hear this.

The people who say no to you are not your enemies. The family member who refuses to post bail, the parent who will not let you back in the house, the friend who finally stopped lending you money — they have not abandoned you. They

have reached the end of what enabling can do, and they are terrified, and they are grieving, and they are still awake at three in the morning wondering if they made the right decision.

They are not punishing you. They are refusing to help you destroy yourself. There is a difference. And somewhere, if you are honest with yourself, you know there is a difference.

The question is not whether they love you. The question is whether you will let their "no" do what it is designed to do — wake you up. Make you feel the weight. Force you to see what you have been refusing to see.

Because as long as someone is always there to catch you, you have no reason to stop falling.

. . .

If you are the family, hear this.

I am not going to give you a formula. I am not going to tell you that if you follow three steps, your loved one will recover. That would be dishonest, and this book promised you honesty from the beginning.

Every situation is different. The boundary that saves one person's life might not be right for another. Some doors need to close; some bridges need to stay open. The line between discipline and abandonment is not always clear, and I will not pretend that it is. This is where wisdom is required — the kind of wisdom James says God gives generously to those who ask in faith (James 1:5).

But I will tell you this: you are not a failure for saying no. You are not unloving. You are not giving up. You may be doing the hardest, most loving thing you have ever done in your life. And it may not feel like love. It may feel like your heart is being torn out of your chest.

That is what mourning feels like. And Paul said that was the right response all along.

• • •

There is one more thing, and it is perhaps the hardest truth in this chapter.

You cannot change their mind for them.

You can create the conditions. You can remove the cushions. You can pray — and you should pray, and you should never stop praying. You can set the boundary that forces them to feel the full weight of their choices. But the turning of the mind is a decision only they can make. Paul told the Corinthians to remove the man. He did not tell them they could repent for him. The congregation did its part. The man had to do his.

And sometimes they don't. Sometimes the door closes, and the person on the other side of it does not come back. Sometimes the consequences come, and instead of waking up, the addict sinks deeper. This book will not pretend otherwise. Some stories do not end the way the family prayed they would. And that is not the family's fault. Ezekiel 18 settled that in

Chapter 3 — each soul bears the responsibility for its own choices.

But sometimes they do come back. Sometimes the removal does exactly what Paul said it would do. Sometimes the floor that you were afraid to let them hit is the very thing that finally brings them to their senses. And when that happens — when the turning is real, when the mind has genuinely changed — do not let the grief swallow them alive. Reaffirm your love. Open the door.

The Corinthian man came back.

The discipline was not the end. It was the beginning of the return.

CHAPTER 6

THINK!

Think. Think. Think.

THINK!

Of all the men I have known in my life, no one changed the way I read the Bible more than Freddie Anderson.

Freddie was a preacher. Not the kind who performed. Not the kind who impressed you with how much he knew, although he knew a great deal. Freddie was the kind of preacher who, when you asked him a question — any Bible question — would pause, and then say the same thing every single time:

"That's a good question. Let's see what the Bible says."

Every time. Not what he thought. Not what some scholar said. Not what a commentary had decided. Never, "Well, the traditional view is..." or "Most people believe..." Always, without fail: "Let's see what the Bible says." And then he would open the Book, and he would show you. And when the Book had spoken, the conversation was over — not because Freddie ended it, but because there was nothing left to argue with. You were not arguing with Freddie. You were looking at the text.

That method did something to me that I did not fully understand until years later. It did not just teach me content —

although it did. It did not just fill my head with Scripture — although it did that too. What Freddie's method taught me was how to *think*. How to let Scripture interpret Scripture. How to ask, "What does the text actually say?" before asking, "What does it mean?" How to recognize error when I heard it — not because I had memorized every false teaching, but because I knew the original well enough that the counterfeit could not pass.

And Freddie taught me one more thing. He taught me the single most important truth in this book, the truth that everything else rests on, the line from which this book takes its title:

If you change a person's mind, you change everything about them. And if you don't change their mind, you don't change anything.

• • •

Freddie once delivered a lesson in a summer series. The subject assigned to him was Philippians 4:8 — "Think on These Things." Most preachers, given that assignment, would have opened to Philippians 4:8, read the verse, and then worked through its terms one at a time: whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute. A fine sermon. A safe sermon. An expected sermon.

Freddie did not do that.

He made an observation that I have never forgotten. He said that the apostle Paul does something the other New Testament writers do not do. In all of his letters — to Rome, to Galatia, to Corinth, to Philippi, to Colossae, to Thessalonica, and to the individuals Philemon, Timothy, and Titus — Paul emphasizes the *mind* more than Peter, James, John, Jude, or even the writer of Hebrews. And Freddie attributed this in part to Paul's dual education — trained in the Jewish tradition under the most prominent rabbi of his generation, but also educated in the Hellenistic world, knowing Greek law, customs, and language. God took everything Paul had experienced and, along with the guidance of the Spirit, wove it into his writings.

And the one reoccurring theme — from Romans chapter 1 all the way through to Philemon — is the mind. *Think*.

Freddie insisted that limiting "think on these things" to the single verse of Philippians 4:8 would do the reader a disservice. That verse, he said, is Paul's doxology — his "finally, brethren" — the culmination of a theme the apostle had been building across every letter he wrote. To drop anchor in that one verse and speak eloquently about its virtues while ignoring the broader framework would be to miss the point entirely.

So Freddie did what Freddie always did. He opened the Book and showed us.

• • •

He started in Romans.

"And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect."

Romans 12:2

There are two words in that verse that stand in direct contrast to each other, and the contrast is the whole point.

The first is *conformed* — in the Greek, *syschēmatizesthe*. It comes from *schēma*, which means outward form, outward fashion, outward appearance. The world presses you into its mold. It shapes you from the outside in — the way you dress, the way you talk, the way you spend your time, the people you associate with. It rearranges the surface. And a person who has been *schēma*-changed looks different on the outside, but nothing fundamental has shifted underneath.

The second word is *transformed* — *metamorphousthe*. You hear the English word "metamorphosis" in it, and that is exactly the idea. But this word does not come from *schēma*. It comes from *morphē* — and *morphē* is the essential nature, the inner form, the fundamental substance of a thing. When a caterpillar becomes a butterfly, that is *morphē*. It is not a caterpillar wearing wings. It is a different creature. The change is total, from the inside out.

Paul the apostle is not telling the Romans to rearrange the outside. He is telling them to be fundamentally changed on the

inside. And the mechanism of that change — the instrument by which *morphē* happens — is the *renewing of the mind*. The Greek is *anakainōsei tou noos*. *Anakainōsis* — renewal, from *ana* (again) and *kainos* (new — and not *neos*, which means new in time, but *kainos*, new in kind, new in quality). And *nous* — the mind as the faculty of moral reasoning, understanding, and judgment.

The mind is renewed. And the renewal is not a surface adjustment. It is a qualitative transformation of the very organ by which you understand, reason, and choose.

This matters more for our subject than you might realize at first glance. Because what is rehab? What is a new address, a new set of friends, a new routine, a geographic change? What is walking out of prison in new clothes with a new plan?

It is *schēma*. Outward rearrangement. Surface change.

And what does the apostle Paul say the need actually is?

Morphē. A transformation of the mind itself. Not the circumstances around the mind — the mind.

• • •

From Romans, Freddie moved to Philippians. And the word shifted.

"Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

Philippians 2:5-8

The word translated *attitude* in verse 5 is *phroneite* — from *phroneō*. And *phroneō* is a different word than *nous*. Where *nous* is the faculty of the mind — the organ itself — *phroneō* is the direction of the mind. It is where the mind is aimed. It includes disposition, inclination, attitude — not just what you know, but what you are inclined toward. What you care about. Where your attention is fixed.

And Paul the apostle says: let this *phroneō* — this direction, this inclination, this mindset — be in you, the same one that was in Christ Jesus. The mind of Christ was a mind aimed at obedience, at humility, at others rather than self. Even when the cost was a cross.

Freddie's point was direct: *think* includes attitude. It is not merely an intellectual exercise. It is the orientation of the entire inner life — what you value, what you pursue, what you are willing to sacrifice for. When the apostle says "have this mind," he is not saying "understand these facts." He is saying "aim where Christ aimed."

The same word appears again in Colossians, and here it connects directly to the thesis of this book.

"Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth."

Colossians 3:1-2

Set your mind — *phroneite*. The same word. The direction of the gaze.

This is the language of aim. Of orientation. Of where the eyes are fixed. And the command is not complicated: *ta anō phroneite* — set your mind on the things above. *Mē ta epi tēs gēs* — not on the things on the earth.

I said at the beginning of this book that the descent into addiction is the story of a mind turning away from God, and the restoration is the story of a mind turning back. That the substance was never the real problem — the gaze was. Colossians 3:2 is the apostle Paul saying the same thing, in different words, to a different audience, about the Christian life in general: where you aim your mind determines everything. If it is aimed at the things above — at Christ, at the hope of heaven, at the will of God — then the things of the earth lose their grip. Not because they stop existing, but because something greater now holds the gaze.

The man sitting in a cell with a needle in his arm had his *phroneō* fixed on the earth. On the flesh. On the next high, the next score, the next temporary escape from a pain that never actually went away. The gaze was not just wrong — it was aimed at something that could never satisfy. And every fix only confirmed that the emptiness was still there when it wore off.

The answer is not merely to remove the substance. The answer is to redirect the gaze.

• • •

And now — only now — are we ready for Philippians 4:8. Because this is where Freddie was headed all along.

"Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things."

Philippians 4:8

The word translated *dwell on* — or in some translations, *think on* — is *logizesthe*, from *logizomai*. And this is yet another word, different from both *nous* and *phroneō*. *Logizomai* is a commercial term — an accounting word. It means to reckon, to calculate, to settle accounts, to weigh carefully on a balance. It is the word a merchant uses when he sits down with his ledger and examines every entry. It is deliberate. It is focused. It

is not daydreaming about lovely things. It is sitting down and *reasoning*.

Three words. Three facets of the mind. *Nous* — the faculty, the organ of understanding. *Phroneō* — the direction, the aim, the disposition. *Logizomai* — the act, the deliberate choice to sit down and reason. And the apostle Paul uses all three, across letter after letter, to make the same argument from every angle: the mind is where everything begins, and the mind is where everything changes.

Freddie said it this way: if a person were to genuinely reason — to sit down and honestly think — they could not help but come to the conclusions the Bible leads to. The problem is that people simply do not think.

And what does the apostle tell them to reason about? Look at the list. Whatever is *true* — not what feels true, not what you wish were true, not what you have told yourself is true. Whatever is *honorable* — worthy of reverence, worthy of respect. Whatever is *right* — just, aligned with God's standard. Whatever is *pure* — clean, uncontaminated. Whatever is *lovely* — pleasing, attractive in the deepest sense. Whatever is of *good repute* — well-spoken-of, commendable.

Think about those things. Reckon them. Sit down with them the way a man sits down with a ledger and does not leave the table until the accounts are settled. That is what *logizomai* means. And when a man does that — when he genuinely reasons about what is true and right and pure — his mind

begins to change. Not because someone forced it. Because truth, honestly examined, does its own work.

• • •

Now listen to Freddie, because this is where the teacher's voice and the student's voice say the same thing.

Freddie said: "You can take a convict out of prison and put him in some brand new clothes and everything else and put him in the best, most perfect situation — and he'll go right back. But when you change his mind, it doesn't matter what degree of poverty he is in, he is not going to go back to the way that he was, or she was — because the mind is changed."

I heard that, and I knew he was talking to me. Not literally — Freddie was speaking to a room full of people. But I knew. Because I had lived both sides of it.

I lived the side where the circumstances changed and the mind did not. I walked out of situations that should have been enough to shake anyone awake — and I went right back. Not because I lacked information. Not because no one had warned me. Not because I didn't know better. I knew better. I had been raised better. But my mind had not changed. My outlook had not changed. My gaze was fixed on the same things it had always been fixed on, and all the new clothes in the world could not redirect it.

And I lived the other side too. The side where the mind finally changed — and once it changed, nothing else mattered.

Not the circumstances. Not the poverty. Not the difficulty. Because the man who thought differently was a different man. Not a rearrangement. A transformation. *Morphē*, not *schēma*.

Your circumstances have changed, but not your outlook. Not your thinking, and not your heart. That is the sentence that defined the first half of my life. And when Freddie said what he said, I heard the second half being written: When the mind changes, the man changes. Everything else follows.

• • •

Freddie used to say that the one without-fail technique for reaching someone was to get them to think. Not to argue with them. Not to rush in flipping through Scripture at a pace no one can follow. Just to ask them to sit down and think.

He told a story about a mother who called him to come talk to her son — a young man named Gus who had not obeyed the gospel. Freddie came, sat down, and asked Gus three questions.

"Does Jesus want you to be saved?"

Yes.

"Gus, do you want to do what Jesus wants you to do?"

Yes.

"When do you think Jesus wants you to do it?"

Now.

Within minutes, Gus was being escorted to the building to be baptized. Freddie did not argue him into it. He did not wear

him down. He asked him to think. And when Gus thought — genuinely thought about what he already knew to be true — the conclusion was unavoidable. The truth did its own work.

That is the power of the mind honestly engaged. And that is why the apostle Paul beat this drum in every letter he wrote, from Romans to Philemon. Because he knew — and Freddie knew — that if you can get a person to think, you can change everything about them. And if you cannot get them to think, you cannot change anything.

• • •

If you are the one struggling with addiction, I need you to hear something that no program and no treatment facility can tell you, because it is not in their vocabulary. It is in the Bible's vocabulary.

No program will hold if your mind does not change. No rehab stay, no intervention, no geographic cure, no change of friends, no new job, no fresh start will last if the inside is still the same. I have watched it happen more times than I can count — in prison, in life, in my own story. People go to rehab because their family begs them to. They go because the court orders them to. They go because the alternative is worse. But they do not go because they have a sincere desire to put the addiction behind them. And as a result, they return to it. Over and over and over again. Even when it lands them in prison.

Even when they lose everything. Because the mind never changed. The gaze never shifted.

Schēma. New clothes on the same man.

You are not going to change until you make up your mind to change. And I do not mean the kind of "making up your mind" that happens in a moment of crisis — the tearful promise at three in the morning, the vow in the back of a police car, the commitment signed on a clipboard at intake. I mean the kind of change the apostle Paul is describing in Romans 12:2. *Metamorphousthe*. A transformation of the essential nature. The renewal of the mind itself. The gaze redirected — not to a program, not to a method, not to willpower — but to God.

Until your focus is redirected to God, and you are convinced it should *remain* on God, the pattern will not break. The substance was never the real problem. The gaze was.

• • •

If you are the family, this chapter contains perhaps the hardest truth you will find in this book.

You cannot change their mind for them.

Chapter 5 told you that sometimes the most loving thing you can do is say no — that removing the cushion may be the act of love that finally forces them to feel the weight. That is true. But even that does not guarantee the turning. You can create the conditions. You can remove the obstacles. You can

pray — and you should pray, fervently and without ceasing. But the turning of the mind is a choice that only they can make. No one can think for another person. No one can redirect another person's gaze by force.

Paul the apostle told the Corinthians to remove the sinning man. He did not tell them they could repent for him. The congregation did its part. The man had to do his. And by the grace of God, he did — but it was his mind that changed, not theirs.

Freddie was right. If you change the mind, you change everything. And if you don't, you change nothing.

. . .

Freddie ended that lesson the way he began it — with Philippians 4:8. But by then, the verse carried the weight of everything he had shown us. It was no longer a single verse with a list of pleasant qualities. It was the culmination of a theme that ran through every letter the apostle Paul ever wrote. It was the answer to the question of how a person changes, how a congregation stays unified, how a life is transformed from the inside out.

Think on these things. What things? Think about the love of God. The sacrifice of Jesus. Think about heaven's hope. Think about the things that are true, and honorable, and right, and pure. Reckon them. Sit down with them. Do not leave the table until the accounts are settled.

I guarantee you — Freddie's word, and I will borrow it — that when you think on those things, it will stabilize your heart. It will stabilize your faith. It will give you the energy you need to finish the race.

The mind is where the descent began. The mind is where the return begins.

Think.

CHAPTER 7

Coming to Himself

True repentance has feet.

Coming to Himself

There is a young man in a parable that Jesus told who did what every addict eventually does, if they are going to survive.

He woke up.

Not physically — he had been awake the whole time. Awake while he demanded his inheritance early. Awake while he traveled to the far country. Awake while he spent everything he had on a life that felt like freedom and turned out to be a cage. Awake while the money ran out and the friends disappeared and the famine came and he found himself standing in a field, feeding pigs, wishing he could eat what the pigs were eating. He was conscious for all of it. His eyes were open the entire time.

But something happened in that pig field that had not happened before.

"But when he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger!'"

Luke 15:17

The phrase is *eis beauton de elthōn* — and it is one of the most remarkable phrases in the New Testament. Literally, "having come to himself." Not "having come to a new realization." Not "having learned something he did not know before." Having come to *himself*. Back to who he was before the far country. Back to what he already knew — that his father's house existed, that his father's servants were better off than he was now, that there was a home he had walked away from.

He did not discover new information in that pig field. He returned to information he had been running from.

• • •

The last chapter was about the mind — that the mind is where everything begins and the mind is where everything changes. That if you change a person's mind, you change everything about them, and if you don't, you change nothing.

This chapter is about what happens when the mind actually turns.

The Bible has a word for it, and the word itself proves the point. The Greek is *metanoia* — and it is built from two words you already know. *Meta* means change — a shift, a turning, an

alteration. And *noia* comes from *nous* — the mind. The same word we unpacked in Romans 12:2. The faculty of moral reasoning, understanding, and judgment.

Metanoia. A change of mind.

Not a change of emotion, although emotion may accompany it. Not a change of circumstances, although circumstances may follow. A change of *mind*. The very word God chose for repentance is a word about the mind — about the organ of understanding being turned in a new direction.

Freddie was right. The apostle Paul was right. And the language itself confirms it: repentance is not fundamentally a feeling. It is a decision. A decision made by the mind, in the mind, about the direction the mind will face from this point forward.

The prodigal came to himself. He came back to what he already knew. And then he did something about it. He got up and went home.

• • •

But here is where we must be careful, because not everything that looks like repentance is repentance. And families know this better than anyone.

There is a difference between "I'm sorry I got caught" and "I'm sorry I did this." There is a difference between tears shed because the consequences finally arrived and tears shed because the sin itself has become unbearable. The first is remorse. The

second is repentance. And they can look identical from the outside.

The addict who sits in a courtroom and weeps — is that repentance? Maybe. But maybe it is the terror of sentencing. The addict who calls from rehab and says all the right things — is that the turning? Maybe. But maybe it is the script that gets the family to keep paying. The addict who swears on everything sacred that this time is different — is that *metanoia*? Maybe. But the family has heard that vow before. They have believed it before. And they have watched it dissolve before, sometimes within hours of the promise being made.

Paul the apostle drew the distinction plainly. In his second letter to the Corinthians, he wrote:

"For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death."

2 Corinthians 7:10

Two kinds of sorrow. One leads to *metanoia* — genuine repentance, the kind you never regret because it changes the direction of your life. The other leads to death. And the difference is not the intensity of the emotion. Both sorrows can weep. Both can wail. Both can make promises. But one is sorrow over the sin itself — sorrow *according to the will of God*, sorrow that says, "What I did was wrong, and I cannot live with myself as the person who did it." The other is sorrow over the consequences — sorrow of the world, sorrow that says, "I am

sorry this is happening to me," while the mind remains exactly where it was.

The Greek for "without regret" is *ametamelēton* — and notice: this word does *not* contain *nous*. It is from *metamelomai*, which means to feel regret, to feel sorry after the fact. *Metamelomai* is about the emotions. *Metanoia* is about the mind. Paul the apostle is making a precise distinction: godly sorrow produces a change of mind so deep that it never reverses itself. Worldly sorrow produces a feeling of regret that fades as soon as the pressure lets up.

The family has lived this distinction a hundred times. They know what worldly sorrow looks like, even if they have never had a name for it. Every broken promise was *metamelomai* — the addict felt terrible, swore it would be different, and meant it in the moment. But the mind never turned. And when the moment passed, the feeling passed with it.

Metanoia does not pass. Because it is not a feeling. It is a change of direction.

• • •

I know the difference, because I have lived both sides.

I knew God was real. I had known it for most of my life. I was raised by parents who believed, in a family that was active in the church. I attended a private church school. I received a solid Christian upbringing and education, and I thank God for that — not because it prevented me from falling, because it

obviously did not — but because that foundation was still there, decades later, when I was finally ready to come back to it. It had not moved. The far country had not erased it.

But knowing God was real and submitting to that reality were two very different things.

For years, I bargained. I told myself I would turn back to God when I got out of prison. When the circumstances changed. When the time was right. It was the most natural delay in the world — I was not rejecting God, I told myself. I was just postponing the reckoning. I would deal with it later. Tomorrow. When things settled down. When I got out.

And before I turned back to Scripture, I tried other paths. I read self-help books — and some of them had useful things to say, but none of them filled the void. I took college courses, and in a geology class I was told the earth was billions of years old, and I will tell you honestly — I rejoiced. Because if the earth was billions of years old, then maybe the Bible was wrong. And if the Bible was wrong, then maybe I did not have to answer for any of it. I wanted it to not be true. I went looking for reasons to disbelieve, because disbelief would have been so much more convenient than repentance.

But there was a voice. Not audible. Not dramatic. Just a quiet, persistent thought in the back of my mind that would not go away: *Really? Are you absolutely sure about that?*

I would push it aside. It would come back. I would find another reason to doubt. The voice would ask the question

again. And over time — not in a moment, but over time — I had to be honest with myself. I believed there was a God. I believed the God of the Bible was real. And if that was true, then everything else followed, and I could not hide from it anymore.

Then came the parole hearings. After twenty years, I was denied. Then denied again. And the realization settled on me like a weight I could not move: I might never get out. I might die in this place. And if I died in this place, I would die without ever having turned back to the God I knew was real.

James, the Lord's brother, wrote a sentence that landed on me like a hammer:

"Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away."

James 4:14

The word for *vapor* is *atmis* — a mist, a puff of steam, the breath you see on a cold morning that is there for an instant and then gone. That is what James says your life is. Not what it might be. What it *is*. And I had spent decades of that vapor telling myself I had plenty of time.

I did not know what tomorrow looked like. I did not know if I would ever walk free. And in that uncertainty, the bargaining finally collapsed. I could not wait for the right time, because there might not be a right time. There might only be *now*.

I took a hard look at my life — at the things I had done, at where I was, at who I had become — and I said *enough*. Not in a dramatic moment. Not with tears streaming down my face in front of an audience. Alone, in a cell, with the full weight of what my choices had cost me and everyone around me. Enough.

That was *metanoia*. Not the feeling — although the feeling was real. The decision. The mind, turning. The gaze, redirecting. Not to a program. Not to willpower. Not to self-improvement. To God.

• • •

If you have read Psalm 51, you have read the prayer of a man who understood repentance. David wrote it after Nathan the prophet confronted him about Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah — and there is not a single excuse in it. Not one deflection. Not one "but the circumstances were..." David does not explain. He does not rationalize. He confesses.

And the way he confesses tells you everything about what real repentance looks like.

In the first two verses alone, David uses three different Hebrew words for what he has done — and each one describes a different dimension of his failure:

"Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; according to the greatness of Your compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin."

Psalm 51:1-2

Transgressions — the Hebrew is *pesha'*, and it means rebellion. Willful defiance. Not a mistake, not an accident, not a moment of weakness. A deliberate crossing of a line you knew was there.

Iniquity — *'avon*. Crookedness. Perversion. The warping of something that was meant to be straight. It carries the sense of guilt — the twisted weight of what you have done pressing down on you.

Sin — *chatta'ab*. The most common word, and the most devastating in its simplicity. It means to miss the mark. To aim at one thing and hit another. To fall short.

David did not pick one word. He used all three. Rebellion. Crookedness. Failure. He left himself no room to minimize, no corner to hide in, no angle from which it could look less terrible than it was. He laid the full reality of it on the table.

And then this:

"Against You, You only, I have sinned and done what is evil in Your sight."

Psalm 51:4

David sinned against Bathsheba. He sinned against Uriah — he had the man killed. He sinned against his household, his

kingdom, his legacy. And yet he writes, "Against You, You *only*, I have sinned." Not because the others did not matter, but because David understood that every sin, ultimately, is a sin against God. Every act of rebellion is a departure from the One who set the standard. Every crooked path is a deviation from the straight one God established. When the mind truly turns, it recognizes that the offense was never primarily horizontal — it was vertical. The prodigal did not merely waste his money. He walked away from his father.

That is what genuine repentance sounds like. No excuses. No qualifications. No "I sinned, but..." Just the raw, undecorated truth laid before God, with nothing held back.

• • •

There is a war that Paul the apostle described that every person who has struggled with addiction knows in their bones — whether they have ever read the passage or not:

"For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate."

Romans 7:15

And a few verses later:

"For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want."

Romans 7:19

Read those verses again. Read them slowly. If you are an addict, or if you have ever been one, you just read the most accurate description of your inner life that has ever been written. The thing I want to do — I don't do it. The thing I hate — that is exactly what I keep doing. The mind knows what is right. The flesh does what is wrong. And the war between them is relentless.

Paul the apostle was not writing about addiction specifically. He was describing the universal human experience of struggling against sin. But the addict reads those words and thinks, *He knows. He knows exactly what this is like.* Because the addict has lived Romans 7. The addict has stood at the threshold of a choice, knowing with absolute clarity what the right decision was — and made the wrong one anyway. Not from ignorance. From bondage.

This is why mere information is never enough. The addict often knows the truth. The prodigal knew his father's house was better. The man in Romans 7 knew the good he wanted to do. Knowledge alone does not produce the turning. Knowledge combined with the will to act — *metanoia*, the mind not merely understanding but deciding — that is what produces the turning.

And God does not leave the sinner to fight that war alone:

"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

1 John 1:9

The word *confess* is *homologeō* — from *homos* (same) and *logeō* (to speak). To say the same thing. To agree with God about the sin. Not to explain it, not to contextualize it, not to offer mitigating circumstances — to say the same thing about it that God says. David did this in Psalm 51: rebellion, crookedness, failure. He called it what God called it. And the promise in return is not merely forgiveness — it is *cleansing*. The slate wiped clean. Not overlooked. Not ignored. Cleansed.

• • •

If you are the one struggling, I need you to hear this from someone who stood exactly where you are standing.

You cannot negotiate your way out of this. You cannot manage it. You cannot moderate it. You cannot time it — waiting for the right moment, the right circumstance, the right set of conditions that will make the turning convenient. There is no convenient turning. There is only the turning itself.

And you may not get the tomorrow you are counting on.

James said your life is a vapor. I thought I had decades to sort it out, and then I was sitting in front of a parole board hearing the word *denied*, and the decades evaporated. You do

not know what tomorrow looks like. You do not know if you will have the chance tomorrow that you have right now, in this moment, reading this page.

The prodigal came to himself in a pig field. Not in a temple. Not in a comfortable chair. Not after he had cleaned himself up and gotten his life together. In the filth, in the shame, in the lowest moment — that is where the turning happened. He did not wait until he was presentable. He got up and went home *as he was*.

That is how repentance works. You do not clean up first and then come to God. You come to God, and He does the cleaning. You come as you are — with the full weight of what you have done, with the three Hebrew words of David's confession hanging on you like chains — and you lay it down. Rebellion. Crookedness. Failure. All of it. And He is faithful and righteous to forgive.

The turn is not a moment. It is a direction. It is the mind deciding — not feeling, *deciding* — that the far country is no longer home. That the gaze will no longer be fixed on the things that were destroying you. That from this day forward, the face is set toward the Father's house.

• • •

If you are the family, you carry a burden this chapter cannot remove, but it can name it honestly.

You want to believe. Every time they say the words — every "I'm done," every "this time is different," every tear-streaked phone call — something in you wants desperately to believe it. Because you remember who they were before. You remember the child, the promise, the person they were supposed to become. And every time they say they are turning, you see that person again for a moment, and the hope nearly breaks you.

And you have been burned. You have believed before, and the words turned to ash. You have opened the door, and they walked back out. You have given the tenth chance, and it ended exactly like the first nine. And now you do not know what to trust. You do not know if this time is real or if this is another performance — *metamelomai* dressed up as *metanoia*.

I cannot give you a formula for discerning the difference. But I can tell you what the text tells us.

The prodigal did not send a message. He got up and went home. Repentance has feet. It moves. It does not merely speak — it acts. When the turning is real, you will see it not in the words but in the direction. Not in the promise but in the sustained movement toward the Father's house, day after day, one foot in front of the other, even when the road is long and the shame is heavy.

Watch the direction. Not the speech. The father in the parable did not wait for the son to finish his rehearsed apology. He saw the son coming from a long way off, and he ran to meet

him. The father was not listening to the words. He was looking at the direction of travel.

And that is the next chapter.

CHAPTER 8

The Father Ran

He did not wait for the speech.

The Father Ran

The last chapter ended with a young man getting up out of a pig field and turning toward home. He had rehearsed a speech. He had the words ready — "Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men." Every word measured. Every phrase calculated to say enough without saying too much. The kind of speech a person practices on the road because they are terrified of the moment they will have to deliver it.

But something happened that the son did not expect.

"But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him and kissed him."

Luke 15:20

The father ran.

• • •

Notice what the text says and what it does not say.

It says the father saw him *while he was still a long way off*. That detail is not incidental. It means the father was watching. It means the father had been looking down that road — maybe not every hour, but often enough that when a figure appeared in the distance, he saw it. The son had been gone long enough to squander an entire inheritance in a far country. He had been gone through the spending and the famine and the pig field. And the father was still watching the road.

If you are a parent who has spent months or years looking for signs of the turning — checking your phone, watching for a familiar number, scanning every face in every memory for some indication that your child is coming home — the father in this parable was doing what you have been doing. He was watching. He had not stopped.

And when he saw the son, the text says he *felt compassion* — the Greek is *esplagchnisthē*, from *splagchnizomai*. This is the strongest word for compassion in the New Testament. It comes from *splagchna* — the bowels, the inward parts, the gut. This is not a polite feeling of sympathy. This is the kind of compassion that seizes you physically, that hits you in the stomach, that doubles you over. It is the same word used of Jesus when He saw the crowds and had compassion on them (Matthew 9:36), the same word used of the Good Samaritan when he saw the beaten man on the road (Luke 10:33). It is visceral. It is

overwhelming. And it moved the father to do something that no dignified man in that culture would have done.

He ran.

In first-century Jewish culture, a patriarch did not run. Running required a man to hitch up his robes and expose his legs — an act considered undignified, even shameful. The expected protocol would have been to wait. To let the son approach. To let the son make his case. To stand at the door of the house and receive the apology with whatever degree of warmth or severity the situation called for. The father had every right to do that. The son had demanded his inheritance early — in that culture, essentially saying, "I wish you were dead." He had squandered everything. He had shamed the family. Protocol said: let him come to you.

The father did not wait for protocol. He did not wait for the speech. He did not wait for the son to clean himself up, to find better clothes, to compose himself into something presentable. He saw the direction of travel, and he ran.

And when he reached the son, he did not ask for an explanation. He embraced him. He kissed him. The Greek says *katephilēsen auton* — and the prefix *kata-* intensifies the verb. This was not a polite greeting. It was a father covering his son's face with kisses, weeping, holding him, refusing to let go.

The son started his speech. He got partway through it: "Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son" (Luke 15:21). But notice

— the last line of the rehearsed speech was "make me as one of your hired men" (15:19). He never got to deliver it. The father cut him off. Not because the confession was unwelcome, but because the father had no interest in negotiating terms. The son was not going to be a hired servant. The son was home.

"But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.'"

Luke 15:22-24

The robe. The ring. The sandals. The feast. Every detail matters. The robe was the best one — the Greek is *tēn stolēn tēn prōtēn*, the first robe, the finest garment in the house. Not a servant's tunic. The father's own robe. The ring was a signet ring — a mark of authority and belonging in the household. The sandals distinguished a son from a servant; servants went barefoot. Every item the father placed on the son said the same thing: you are not a hired man. You are not on probation. You are my son. You were dead, and you are alive. You were lost, and you are found.

• • •

If you are the one who has been in the far country, hear what this parable is telling you.

You do not need the perfect speech. The father was not listening to the speech. He was looking at the direction of travel. The son was still a long way off — dirty, broken, reeking of the pig field, carrying nothing but shame — and the father ran to meet him. Not after the son proved himself. Not after a waiting period. Not after the son demonstrated that this time was really different. The father saw the son coming home, and that was enough to make him run.

This does not mean there are no consequences. We will get to that. But it means that the door is not closed. It means that the God this parable is describing — because make no mistake, the father in this story is a picture of the heavenly Father — does not sit with His arms crossed waiting for you to earn your way back. He is watching the road. And when you turn toward home, He runs.

You come as you are. The pig field is still on your clothes. The shame is still on your face. The rehearsed speech falls apart halfway through because the embrace interrupts it. And the Father says: bring the robe. Bring the ring. This one was dead, and is alive.

• • •

But the parable does not end at the feast. And this is where the text gets harder, because Jesus put the older brother in the story for a reason.

"Now his older son was in the field, and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. And he summoned one of the servants and began inquiring what these things could be. And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has received him back safe and sound.' But he became angry and was not willing to go in."

Luke 15:25-28

The older brother was angry. And from a certain angle, you can understand why. He had stayed. He had worked. He had done everything right — or at least everything expected. He had not demanded his inheritance early, had not squandered anything, had not shamed the family. He had been faithful, day after day, year after year. And now his younger brother — the one who had done all of those things — comes home, and the father throws a party?

"But he answered and said to his father, 'Look! For so many years I have been serving you and I have never neglected a command of yours; and yet you have never given me a young goat, so that I might celebrate with my friends; but when this son of yours came, who has devoured your wealth with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him.'"

Luke 15:29-30

Notice the language. He does not say "my brother." He says "*this son of yours.*" He has disowned the relationship. And his complaint is not really about a goat. It is about fairness. It is the feeling that grace is unjust — that if the prodigal gets the robe and the ring and the feast, then the years of faithfulness meant nothing. That the father's love can be squandered and then reclaimed as though the squandering never happened.

If you are the family, you may have an older brother in the house. Not literally — but there may be someone in the family, in the congregation, in the circle of friends, who cannot celebrate the return. Who sees the embrace and feels not joy but resentment. Who has been faithful, who has carried the weight, who has done the right things — and who cannot understand why the one who threw it all away gets a party.

The older brother is in the parable because he is in the story. He is real. He shows up at nearly every homecoming. And Jesus did not ignore him.

The father's response is gentle but firm:

"And he said to him, 'Son, you have always been with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and has come to life again, and was lost and has been found.'"

Luke 15:31-32

Two things. First: *"all that is mine is yours."* The father does not diminish the older son's faithfulness. He does not dismiss it. He acknowledges it — everything I have is yours. The years of service were not wasted. The faithfulness was real, and it is recognized.

Second — and the father corrects the language — *"this brother of yours."* Not "this son of mine." *Your brother.* The father will not let the older son disown the relationship. The one who came home is not a stranger. He is your brother. And he was dead, and he is alive.

The celebration is not a reward for the prodigal's behavior. It is a response to a resurrection. The father is not saying the far country did not matter. He is saying that the return from the dead matters more.

• • •

Now we must talk about what the parable does not say, because this is where honesty requires us to go beyond the story and into the harder reality.

The parable does not mention victims.

But addiction creates them. Every addict leaves a trail — broken trust, stolen money, shattered relationships, damaged children, and sometimes far worse. The prodigal in Jesus' story wasted his own inheritance. But in real life, addiction does not limit its damage to the addict. It reaches into every life it touches. The spouse who endured the lies. The children who grew up in chaos. The parents who emptied their savings trying to help. The friend who was betrayed. The stranger who was harmed by a decision the addict made under the influence or in pursuit of the next fix.

Forgiveness is a biblical command. The text is clear on that. But forgiveness does not erase consequences, and it does not mean that every relationship can be restored to what it was before the damage was done. Some trust, once broken, is rebuilt only in inches over years. Some relationships cannot be rebuilt at all — not because forgiveness has been withheld, but because the damage was too deep, or the other person is no longer willing or able to walk that road. The book must be honest about that.

David is the clearest example in all of Scripture.

After his sin with Bathsheba — after the adultery, after the murder of Uriah, after the cover-up — Nathan the prophet confronted him. And David confessed. We read his confession in Chapter 7 — the raw, undecorated prayer of Psalm 51, holding nothing back. And God's response, through Nathan, was immediate and complete:

"The LORD also has taken away your sin; you shall not die."

2 Samuel 12:13

Taken away. Not reduced. Not partially forgiven. Not forgiven on condition of future behavior. *Taken away*. David's sin was forgiven, fully and completely, by the God who has the authority to forgive.

And the consequences did not disappear.

The child born of the adultery died. The sword never departed from David's house. His own son Absalom would rise against him. His household was torn apart by violence and betrayal for the rest of his life. David was forgiven. David lived with the consequences of what he had done until the day he died.

And David knew it. In the very psalm where he confessed without excuse, he wrote:

"For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me."

Psalm 51:3

Ever before me. Not occasionally. Not when something triggers the memory. *Ever*. David carried the weight of what he had done for the rest of his life — not as unforgiven guilt, but as the permanent reality of consequences that forgiveness does not reverse.



This is where "How could you?" returns.

The family asked that question in the crisis of Chapter 1. It has not gone away. Forgiveness may have been given — freely, completely, the robe and the ring and the feast. But "How could you?" does not always disappear just because forgiveness has arrived. It lives in the quiet moments. It surfaces in the flash of a memory. It sits in the room during a holiday dinner when everyone is trying to act normal and no one quite can.

If you are the addict, you carry this question too. And here is the hardest part of carrying it: by the time you are capable of understanding why you did what you did, you are a different person than the one who did it. The mind has changed. The gaze has shifted. And that earlier version of yourself — the one who made those choices, who hurt those people, who threw everything away — is almost incomprehensible to you now. You look back and you cannot fully explain it, even to yourself. You know the progression. You know the steps. But the *why* — the deep why, the answer that would satisfy the question — you do not have it. And neither does the family.

"How could you?" is a question that may never have a sufficient answer. Not because you are hiding something, but because the person who could have answered it no longer exists. The man who stands in his place is the one asking the same question.

David carried it: *my sin is ever before me*. You will carry it. That is part of the cost of the choices you made. It is not punishment from God — the forgiveness is real. It is the weight of reality. And carrying it honestly — without hiding from it and without being crushed by it — is part of what the road looks like from here forward.

• • •

Paul the apostle, writing to the Corinthians about the man who had been removed and then repented — the same situation we examined in Chapter 5 — gave a warning that applies directly here:

"Sufficient for such a one is this punishment which was inflicted by the majority, so that on the contrary you should rather forgive and comfort him, otherwise such a one might be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow."

2 Corinthians 2:6-7

We unpacked *katapothē* in Chapter 5 — swallowed alive by grief. The warning stands: there is a real danger of making restoration so punitive that it crushes the person it is supposed to restore. Forgiveness that comes with an asterisk — forgiveness that says "I forgive you, but I will never let you forget" — is not the forgiveness the father in the parable modeled. The father did not hand the son the robe and then remind him every day that he had once fed pigs.

This is the tension the family must live in, and I will not pretend it is easy. Forgiveness is commanded. Trust must be earned. Consequences remain. "How could you?" may never fully resolve. And in the middle of all of that, the returning addict — if the turning is real — needs to know that the robe is real too. That the ring is real. That the welcome is not a performance any more than the repentance was.

James wrote:

"My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins."

James 5:19-20

A soul saved from death. A multitude of sins covered. That is what is at stake when the turning is real and the homecoming is genuine. The father in the parable understood the stakes. His son was dead, and was alive. Was lost, and was found. The robe and the ring were not rewards. They were a father saying: welcome home. You are still my son.

• • •

If you are the family, I know what this chapter asks of you. It asks you to run when everything in you wants to wait. It asks you to embrace when everything in you wants an explanation

first. It asks you to put the robe on someone who recently smelled like a pig field.

And it asks you to do all of that while carrying "How could you?" in your chest, while the older brother in the room wonders why there is a party, while the consequences of what happened are still unfolding in real time, and while a small voice in the back of your mind whispers that the last time you believed, it ended in ashes.

I cannot make that easy. No one can. But I can tell you what the text says: the father saw the son from a long way off. He had been watching. He felt it in his gut. And he ran.

He did not run because the son deserved it. He ran because the son was his.

. . .

If you are the one coming home, hear this.

The road is long. The shame is heavy. The speech you have rehearsed will probably fall apart before you finish it. You are not clean. You are not ready. You are not the person you were before you left.

But you are walking in the right direction. And the Father is watching the road.

Come home.

CHAPTER 9

The Long Road

Recovery is not a moment. It is a road made of mornings.

The Long Road

The dramatic chapters are behind us now — the phone call, the progression, the turning, the father who ran. Those are the moments people talk about, the ones that make for powerful stories and powerful sermons. But the road of recovery is not made of moments.

It is made of mornings.

You wake up. The ceiling above you is the same ceiling. The same walls. The same silence — or the same noise. The decision you made yesterday, or last week, or last month, is still real. But so is everything else. The triggers have not evaporated. The people you used to run with have not disappeared. The places that fed the habit are still standing on the same streets, at the same corners, in the same neighborhoods. The memories are still sharp.

Nothing around you has changed. Only you have changed — if you have.

This is where most books about addiction stop being useful. They build toward the turning point and treat it as the

ending — the dramatic climax, the music swelling, the credits rolling. But anyone who has actually walked this road knows the truth: the turning point is not the ending. The turning point is the beginning of the hardest part.

• • •

Freddie Anderson used to say something that Nancy Reagan's famous slogan never quite captured. The former First Lady promoted the idea that people needed to "just say no" to drugs and alcohol. Freddie would nod — and then add: "It isn't enough to just say no — you also have to get up and go."

Don't end up around that stuff to begin with. But if you do — if you find yourself standing on the same corner, sitting at the same table, walking through the same door — remove yourself. Immediately. Don't linger. Don't test your resolve. Don't prove to yourself how strong you are by seeing how close you can stand to the fire without getting burned. Get up and go.

That is practical wisdom, and it applies to every form of addiction this book addresses. The person enslaved to pornography cannot keep the same devices with the same unrestricted access in the same private settings and expect the outcome to be different. The person enslaved to gambling cannot take the same route past the same establishments and lean on willpower alone. The person enslaved to alcohol cannot

sit at the same bar with the same friends and order water indefinitely.

You have to get up and go. Because the road of recovery is not walked by standing still in the places that brought you down.

• • •

Scripture gave this principle a face long before Freddie did.

In Genesis 39, Joseph — a young man in a foreign land, a slave in Potiphar's household, with every reason to feel abandoned by God — faced a daily assault on his resolve. Potiphar's wife looked at him with desire and said, "Lie with me." Day after day she pressed him. Day after day he refused. But the day came when she did not merely ask — she grabbed his garment and demanded.

Joseph did not negotiate. He did not explain himself. He did not test his resolve by lingering in the conversation. Genesis 39:12 says he "left his garment in her hand and fled, and went outside." He left his coat behind. He did not stop to collect his things. He ran.

That is "get up and go" — in Scripture, two thousand years before Freddie said it.

But notice something the text does not say. It does not say Joseph decided in that moment to flee. The decision had already been made. Verse 9 tells you when it was made — before the moment of crisis, when Joseph said: "How then

could I do this great evil and sin against God?" Joseph had already established in his mind what he would do if the pressure became physical. When the moment came, there was no deliberation. There was only the door.

That is what the long road requires. The decision to flee must be made *before* the corner is turned, *before* the phone rings, *before* the old companion appears. If you wait until the moment to decide, the moment will decide for you.

The apostle Paul put it as a command: "Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart" (2 Timothy 2:22). The word is *pheugo* — flee, run, escape. Not *resist*. Not *endure*. Not *manage*. Flee. And notice what Paul places immediately after the fleeing: *pursue*. You run *from* something and *to* something. And you do it *with those who call on the Lord*. The fleeing is not into isolation. It is into the company of people who are running in the same direction.

Daniel's three friends understood this same principle — from the other side. When King Nebuchadnezzar commanded all the people of Babylon to fall down and worship the golden image he had built, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego did not bow. The king was furious. He offered them a second chance. And their answer should stop every person on the long road in their tracks:

"O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to give you an answer concerning this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But even if He does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up."

Daniel 3:16-18

"We do not need to give you an answer concerning this matter." They did not need time to think. They did not need to weigh the options. The king of the most powerful empire on earth was standing in front of them offering one more chance — and they said, in effect, *this was decided before we walked into this room.*

Joseph shows you what it looks like to flee. The three Hebrew men show you what it looks like to stand. Both had the same thing in common: the decision was made before the moment arrived. And that is the difference between the person who survives the long road and the person who does not. It is not willpower in the moment. It is the mind already changed, the gaze already fixed, the answer already settled — so that when the fire is heated seven times hotter, you already know what you are going to do.

• • •

But Freddie also knew that "get up and go" was only half of the solution. He also taught the second half: you cannot leave a house empty. You have to fill it.

Jesus told a parable that every person in recovery needs to hear. In Matthew 12, He described an unclean spirit that goes out of a man, wanders through waterless places seeking rest, and does not find it. So it says, "I will return to my house from which I came." And when it arrives:

"It finds it unoccupied, swept, and put in order."

Matthew 12:44

The Greek word translated "unoccupied" is *scholazonta* — empty, vacant, at leisure. The house had been cleaned. The floors were swept. Everything was in order. But it was *empty*. Nobody was living there.

So the unclean spirit goes and brings along seven others more wicked than itself, and they enter and settle in. And Jesus says:

"The last state of that man becomes worse than the first."

Matthew 12:45

Read that again. It is one of the most important warnings in all of Scripture for anyone walking the road of recovery: *the last state becomes worse than the first*.

The house was swept — the substance removed. The house was put in order — the outward life rearranged. New

address, maybe. New routine. New clothes. But the house was *vacant*. It was not enough to clean it out. Something — Someone — had to move in.

This is the difference Chapter 6 traced between *schēma* and *morphē*. The external rearrangement — the new environment, the new schedule, the clean house — that is *schēma*. It is the outward form. And it is not enough. Rehab without God is a swept house with a vacancy sign hanging on the door. The substance leaves, and if nothing fills the space it occupied, the void remains. And the void will be filled — one way or another. That is not a theory. That is Jesus' own warning.

The apostle Paul told the Ephesians exactly what must happen:

"That, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth."

Ephesians 4:22-24

There are two movements here, not one. *Lay aside* the old self — yes. But also *put on* the new self. The old man must be removed. The new man must take his place. And notice where the renewal happens: *in the spirit of your mind*. The Greek is *ananeousthai tō pneumati tou noos hymōn*. The word *ananeousthai* comes from *ana* — again — and *neos* — new.

Made new again. And *noos* is the same word we traced through Chapter 6 — *nous*, the faculty of moral reasoning, the mind that governs the direction of a person's life.

The renewal is not a change of scenery. It is a change of mind. And the new mind must be occupied — daily, deliberately, constantly — with the things of God.

• • •

For me, this is where the Bible studies came in.

After the turning I described in Chapter 7, I did not simply stop using drugs and start behaving. I began studying. Every Bible class I could attend, I attended. Every opportunity to be in the Word, I took. Not because someone told me it was a good idea and I thought I should try it. Because the void was real, and I knew — from decades of experience — that if it was not filled, it would fill itself.

The daily discipline of being in Scripture sustained the change that the decision alone could not have sustained. The house was not merely swept. It was occupied. And the more it was occupied — the more Scripture moved in and settled down and made itself at home — the less room there was for what had lived there before.

This is what Paul the apostle describes in Colossians 3:16: "Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you." *Richly* — not a verse here and there. Not a Sunday-morning glance and a weeklong absence. *Richly* — abundantly, fully, deeply. And the

word must *dwell* — *enoikeitō*, from *en* (in) and *oikeō* (to dwell, to make one's home in). The same language of habitation. The same picture as Matthew 12. Jesus warned about the house left empty. Paul tells you how to fill it: let the word of Christ move in and make its home there.

• • •

The associations must change, too. And they must stay changed.

Paul the apostle — in a letter to a church plagued by compromise — borrowed a line from the Greek poet Menander to make his point:

“Do not be deceived: *Bad company corrupts good morals.*”

1 Corinthians 15:33

The word for “company” is *homiliai* — associations, companionships, the people you spend your time with. The word for “corrupts” is *phtheirousin* — to ruin, to destroy, to cause to rot from the inside out. And “morals” is *ēthē* — habits, character, the settled pattern of a person's life.

Paul quoted a pagan playwright because the principle is so fundamental that even the world recognizes it: the people you walk with determine the direction you walk. Proverbs 13:20 said it centuries before Menander did — “He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm.” We traced that verse in Chapter 2, and it has not lost its

force. The associations that led to the progression must not survive the turning. That is not optional. That is not harsh. That is survival.

For the person in recovery, this means the old companions — the ones who introduced you to the substance, the ones who enabled it, the ones who are still using — cannot remain your daily company. Not because you are better than them. Not because you are judging them. Because you are not strong enough. And the person who thinks he is strong enough to walk those same streets with those same people and emerge untouched has already begun the slide toward the fall.

• • •

Which brings us to a warning Paul the apostle delivered in the same letter:

"Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall."

1 Corinthians 10:12

The Greek is precise. *Ho dokōn hestānai* — "the one who *thinks* he stands." *Dokōn* — from *dokeō*, to think, to suppose, to hold an opinion. It is an opinion about yourself. A self-assessment. And it may be dead wrong.

The moment you believe you have conquered the addiction — the moment you tell yourself you can handle it now,

you can be around it now, you have beaten it — that is the moment Peter says the adversary is watching most closely:

"Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour."

1 Peter 5:8

The word Peter uses for "sober" is *nēpsate* — from *nēphō*, which literally means to be free from the influence of intoxicants. Peter uses it as a spiritual command, but the literal meaning could not be more directly relevant for the person walking this road. Be clear-headed. Be unimpaired. And *grēgorēsate* — be watchful, be on guard, be wide awake. Because the adversary is not taking a day off just because you have decided to change.

He prowls. He watches. He waits for the unguarded moment. And the one he is looking for is the one who *thinks he stands* — the one whose confidence has replaced his vigilance, whose guard is down precisely because he believes the danger has passed.

The word "devour" is *katapiei* — from *katapinō*, to swallow down, to consume entirely. It is the same root Paul the apostle used in 2 Corinthians 2:7 when he warned that the repentant man in Corinth might be "swallowed up" by excessive sorrow. The devil's intent is total consumption — not a nibble, not a brush with the old life. Complete destruction.

Stay sober. Stay alert. The lion is real, and he does not lose interest.

• • •

And now a word that must be said honestly, because this book committed to honesty from the first page.

"How could you?"

That question was first asked in Chapter 1, when the family's world split in two. It surfaced again in Chapter 8, where we saw that by the time you are capable of understanding why you did what you did, you are a different person than the one who did it — and that earlier version of yourself is almost incomprehensible to you now.

But "How could you?" does not resolve in Chapter 8. It does not resolve in this chapter. It lives here — permanently — on the long road.

David knew this. After his sin with Bathsheba, after the murder of Uriah, after Nathan confronted him and God forgave him — completely and truly forgave him — David still wrote: "My sin is ever before me" (Psalm 51:3). Not because God was holding it over his head. God had taken the sin away (2 Samuel 12:13). But because the memory of what he had done was now part of who David was. The forgiveness was real. The weight was also real. Both were true at the same time.

The person who has genuinely turned — whose *metanoia* is real, whose mind has truly changed — will carry "How could

you?" for the rest of his life. Not as God's punishment. As the sober awareness of what his choices cost. The relationships damaged. The trust destroyed. The years lost. The people hurt — some of them in ways that cannot be repaired this side of eternity.

That is part of the road. Not a reason to stop walking. Part of it. And carrying it honestly — without hiding from it and without being crushed by it — is what the long road looks like from the inside.

• • •

For the family, the long road carries its own weight.

Forgiveness can be immediate — and it should be, because God commands it, and because unforgiveness destroys the one who holds it as surely as addiction destroys the addict. But trust is a different thing. Trust is not a decision made in a moment. Trust is rebuilt one kept promise at a time. One honest answer at a time. One day of consistency at a time. In inches, not miles.

You have been burned before. You have heard "I'm sorry" and watched it mean nothing. You have believed the promises and been devastated when the promises turned out to be performances. Chapter 7 drew the line between *metanoia* — genuine change of mind — and *metamelomai* — the feeling of regret that passes without producing real change. You have

lived through *metamelomai* more times than you can count. You have every right to be cautious.

So how do you walk this road with the person who has turned?

By watching the direction of travel — not the speeches. Remember, the father in Luke 15 saw his son "while he was still a long way off." He was not listening for the rehearsed apology. He was watching the direction the boy was walking. The words matter less than the trajectory. Watch the trajectory.

And by extending grace without abandoning wisdom. The boundary that love drew in Chapter 5 does not disappear because the turning has happened. The boundary may soften. It may adjust. It may gradually open as trust is rebuilt brick by brick. But it does not vanish overnight. Supporting someone in recovery is not the same as returning to the enabling that fed the problem. The two look different, they feel different, and the difference between them is often what keeps the person on the road.

• • •

Paul the apostle gave the church at Galatia a picture of what restoration looks like when it is done right:

"Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted."

Galatians 6:1

The word "restore" is *katartizete* — from *katartizō*, a word with a history that says more than any English translation can capture. It was used of surgeons setting a broken bone. It was used in Mark 1:19 of James and John mending their fishing nets — taking something torn and bringing it back to full function. Not punishing. Not discarding. Not marking it permanently as damaged goods. *Restoring*. The goal is a mended net that holds fish again. A bone that bears weight again. A person who is whole again.

But notice the two qualifications Paul attaches.

First: *in a spirit of gentleness* — *en pneumati prajētētos*. Not anger. Not condescension. Not "I knew this would happen." The person who restores a fallen brother does so with tenderness, knowing how fragile the mended place still is. A bone that has just been set cannot bear the same load it once did. It needs time. It needs care. It needs someone who understands that healing is not the same as being healed.

Second — and this is the one most people skip right past: *skopōn seauton* — "looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted." The word *skopōn* is from *skopeō* — to look at, to fix the attention on — the same root as *skopos*, the goal, the

mark that Paul uses in Philippians 3:14. Keep your eye on yourself. Because the moment you believe you are above falling is the very moment 1 Corinthians 10:12 is warning about. Restore your brother. But do not forget that you are made of the same clay.

. . .

And what about relapse?

This is the question the book owes an honest answer, because some people fall. Some people fall more than once. Some people make what appears to be a genuine turning and then, six months or two years or five years later, they are back where they started — or further gone than before.

The honesty is this: relapse does not always mean the turning was false. But it does mean the vigilance failed. The sober spirit of 1 Peter 5:8 was replaced by the overconfidence of 1 Corinthians 10:12. The house that had been occupied began to empty again — the Bible studies became less frequent, the prayer became rote, the associations drifted back, the old streets became familiar.

And sometimes — the harder truth — the turning was *metamelomai* and not *metanoia*. It was the sorrow of consequences, not the sorrow of sin. And when the consequences faded, so did the sorrow, and so did the change. That distinction from Chapter 7 is not academic. Families live it. They watch it happen. And it is devastating every time.

For the person who has relapsed: the question is not whether you fell. The question is whether you will get up. And the answer depends on the same thing it has always depended on — the mind. Paul the apostle, writing to the Philippians:

"Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."

Philippians 3:13-14

The phrase "reaching forward" is *epekteinomenos* — a word borrowed from the athletic games. It is the image of a runner who is not coasting, not jogging, not glancing over his shoulder at the ground he has already covered or the failures that lie behind him. He is *straining forward* — every part of him extended toward what is ahead. And "I press on" is *diōkō* — to pursue, to chase, to hunt with intent. This is not a casual stroll toward improvement. This is the deliberate, daily, relentless pursuit of the goal.

And the goal — *skopon*, the mark, the thing he is looking at — is the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. The fixed point. The gaze that will not wander.

If you have fallen, stop looking at the ground. Get up. Fix your eyes forward. And press on.

• • •

The writer of Hebrews said it in a way that gathers every thread of this chapter into a single breath:

"Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith."

Hebrews 12:1-2

Every encumbrance — *ogkon* — every weight. Not just sin, though sin is named separately. An *ogkon* is anything that slows you down, anything that drags on you — the associations that pull you backward, the places that trigger the craving, the pride that tells you that you can handle it now.

The sin that so easily entangles — *euperistaton* — from *eu* (easily) and *peristatos* (surrounding, standing around on every side). The sin that wraps itself around your feet like a vine, that trips you mid-stride, that was waiting in the path before you rounded the corner. For the person in recovery, you know exactly which sin that is. It has a name. And it has not stopped trying to entangle you just because you started running in a different direction.

Run with endurance — *di' hypomonēs*. *Hypomonē* comes from *hypo* (under) and *menō* (to remain). It is the quality of remaining under the load without quitting. Not sprinting and collapsing. Not a burst of motivation followed by a long

silence. Enduring. Day after day. Morning after morning. The long road walked one step at a time.

And then — the phrase that holds the entire race together, the phrase that holds this entire book together:

Aphorontes eis ton tēs pisteōs archēgon kai teleiōtēn Iēsoun.

"Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith."

Aphorontes — from *aphoraō* — and this word matters. It means to look *away* from everything else and fix the gaze on one thing. The prefix *apo* means "away from." It is not a glance. It is not a divided attention. It is the deliberate act of turning the eyes away from everything that competes for your focus and locking them on one fixed point.

That is the thesis of this book, stated one final time. The gaze. The fixed, deliberate, daily, sustained fixing of the eyes on Christ. Not on the addiction. Not on the guilt. Not on the circumstances. Not even on the progress. On Him.

He is the *archēgon* — the author, the pioneer, the one who has already walked the road ahead of you. And He is the *teleiōtēn* — the perfecter, the finisher, the one who will bring you to the end of it.

• • •

The road is long. The mornings are ordinary. The discipline is daily. The vigilance does not end this side of eternity.

But the Shepherd is already on the road. He was there before you started walking it. And the valley — as Chapter 1 promised you from the very beginning — has a *through*.

Keep your eyes fixed. Keep walking.

The road has a destination.

CHAPTER 10

The God Who Finds You

Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden.

The God Who Finds You

You have walked through nine chapters of honesty. Some of it was hard. Some of it hurt. None of it was easy, because none of this — not the addiction, not the consequences, not the road of recovery — is easy.

But you are still reading. You are still here. And that matters more than you know.

This chapter is different from the ones that came before it. The first nine chapters asked you to see the truth about addiction — the progression, the guilt, the isolation, the prison, the hard love, the changed mind, the turning, the forgiveness, and the long road. This chapter asks you a question.

Not about addiction. About you.

Where do you stand with God?

• • •

There is an invitation in the New Testament that sounds as if it were written for every person who has ever picked up a book like this one. Jesus said:

"Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

Matthew 11:28-30

Read those words slowly. *All who are weary and heavy-laden.*

That is the addict who has been carrying the weight of choices that destroyed years, damaged people, and left scars that will never fully disappear. That is the mother who drove her son to rehab and asked through tears, "Where did we go wrong?" That is the father who has not slept a full night in months because every ringing phone might be the call he is dreading. That is the wife who smiles on Sunday and falls apart on Monday. That is the brother, the sister, the friend, the child who has watched someone they love become someone they do not recognize.

Come to Me. Not "fix yourself and then come." Not "clean up your life and report back." Not "get strong enough and then I'll consider it." Come. As you are. Weary. Burdened. Heavy. Come.

But notice — the invitation is not to come and be left where you are. It is to come and find *rest*. The Greek word is

anapausō — from *ana* (again) and *pauō* (to cause to cease, to give rest). It is renewal. It is the stopping of the weight. It is the thing the substance promised and never delivered, the thing the next drink or the next hit or the next bet swore it would provide — and never could. Because what the soul needs, the flesh cannot supply.

Jesus is not offering a program. He is offering Himself.

• • •

In Chapter 2, we traced the theological engine of addiction through Romans 1 — the mind that drifts from God, the self that fills the vacuum, the substance that fills the emptiness the self creates. The issue was never the substance. The issue was the gaze. Where the mind was fixed.

In Chapter 6, we heard Freddie Anderson say what Paul the apostle had been saying across every letter he wrote: change the mind, change the man. And in Chapter 7, we traced the author's own turning — the moment when the mind, after decades of wandering, came back to what it had always known.

But here is the question this chapter must ask: *Come back to what?*

The turning of the mind is essential — without it, nothing changes. But the mind must turn *toward* something. The house in Matthew 12 had to be occupied, not merely swept. The gaze in Hebrews 12:2 had to be fixed on a specific Person, not just pointed in a vaguely better direction. The race in

Philippians 3:14 had a specific goal — the upward call of God *in Christ Jesus*.

In Christ Jesus.

That phrase — *in Christ* — is one of the most important phrases in all of the New Testament. And it leads us to the heart of this chapter.

• • •

Read this carefully:

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ."

Ephesians 1:3

Every spiritual blessing. Not some. Not most. *Every* spiritual blessing — forgiveness, redemption, adoption, the seal of the Holy Spirit, the hope of an inheritance — is found *in Christ*. Paul uses the phrase "in Christ" or "in Him" or "in the Beloved" repeatedly throughout Ephesians 1, and the picture is unmistakable: everything God offers is located in one place. In Christ. Outside of Christ, those blessings do not exist. Inside Christ, they are yours.

So the question becomes the most important question you will ever ask: *How does a person get into Christ?*

If every spiritual blessing is in Him, and you are not yet in Him, then the question of how to get into Him is not

academic. It is not denominational. It is not a matter of preference. It is the question on which everything else depends.

And the Bible answers it. In two places. In exactly the same way.

• • •

Paul the apostle, writing to the churches in Galatia:

"For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ."

Galatians 3:27

And writing to the church in Rome:

"Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?"

Romans 6:3

There it is. Two letters, two churches, two different occasions — and the same answer. Baptized *into* Christ. That is the door. That is how a person moves from outside of Christ, where none of those spiritual blessings exist, to inside of Christ, where every one of them resides.

The Greek preposition in both verses is *eis* — into, toward, unto. Not *en* (in, already inside). Not *peri* (about, concerning). *Eis* — movement from one location to another. The person who is baptized moves from outside of Christ into Christ.

From the domain where every spiritual blessing is absent to the domain where every spiritual blessing is present.

This is not a human invention. This is not a denominational tradition. This is the apostle Paul, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, telling two different churches in two different letters the same thing: you were baptized *into* Christ. That is how you got in.

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But baptism does not stand alone. It is not a ritual performed in isolation, disconnected from the heart. Baptism is the culmination of a journey — a journey that begins where every genuine turning begins: with the mind.

The New Testament records a pattern. Not a checklist — a pattern. And the pattern makes sense, because each step follows naturally from the one before it.

It begins with hearing the word. Romans 10:17 — "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ." You cannot believe what you have not heard. Someone must tell you. Something must be taught. The gospel must be proclaimed. That is what this book has been doing for nine chapters — not as a substitute for the gospel itself, but as a road that leads to it.

Then comes belief. Not mere agreement — not the intellectual acknowledgment that God exists. Even the demons believe that, and it does them no good (James 2:19). The belief

the New Testament calls for is the kind of trust that changes the direction of a life. Jesus Himself said:

"Unless you believe that I am He, you will die in your sins."

John 8:24

That is not a suggestion. It is a statement of reality. The faith Jesus demands is the faith that recognizes who He is — the Son of God, the Christ, the one with authority over sin and death — and stakes everything on that recognition.

Then comes repentance. We traced this thoroughly in Chapter 7. *Metanoia* — the change of mind that changes the direction of the life. Not *metamelomai*, the regret that passes. The permanent, deliberate turning of the mind toward God and away from the sin that held it captive.

On the day the church began, Peter told the crowd that had been "pierced to the heart" by the gospel:

"Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

Acts 2:38

Repentance and baptism. Together. For the forgiveness of sins. That is not Peter's opinion. That is the Holy Spirit speaking through Peter to people who had just realized the magnitude of what they had done — and were asking, "What shall we do?"

Then comes confession. Romans 10:9-10:

"That if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation."

Confession is public. It is the mouth agreeing with what the heart already believes. It is the moment you stop hiding what you know to be true and say it out loud: Jesus is Lord. Not a teacher. Not an example. Not a good man who said wise things. Lord. And you are willing to say so.

• • •

And then — baptism.

Jesus did not suggest baptism. He commanded it. In the final instructions He gave His apostles before ascending to the Father, He said:

"All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you."

Matthew 28:18-20

Notice the authority. "All authority has been given to Me." When Jesus commands, it is not a recommendation to consider. It is the directive of the one who holds all authority in

heaven and on earth. And what does He command? Make disciples. Baptize them. Teach them.

Mark records it with the same directness:

"He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned."

Mark 16:16

Believed and baptized — saved. The New Testament does not separate these. It does not treat baptism as optional, as symbolic, as something you get around to when it feels right. It places baptism alongside belief as the response of a person who has heard the gospel, believed it, and is ready to act on it.

And the action matters. Paul the apostle explained exactly what baptism is:

"Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life."

Romans 6:3-4

Buried with Him. Raised with Him. Baptism is a death, burial, and resurrection — the old man goes under the water, and the new man comes up. The old life is buried. The new life begins. This is not symbolism disconnected from reality. This is the moment of transfer — the moment a person moves from

outside of Christ to inside of Christ, from death to life, from what Paul called "the domain of darkness" into "the kingdom of His beloved Son" (Colossians 1:13).

And Ananias, when he came to Saul of Tarsus — the very man who would become the apostle Paul, the man who would write Romans and Galatians and Ephesians and Philippians and Colossians and every letter we have traced through this entire book — Ananias said to him:

"Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name."

Acts 22:16

Why do you delay?

That question was asked of a man who had already seen the risen Lord on the road to Damascus. Who had already been struck blind and spent three days in prayer without food or water. Who had already believed. Who had already repented. And still — *still* — Ananias said: "Why do you delay? Get up and be baptized and wash away your sins."

Belief alone had not washed away Saul's sins. Prayer alone had not washed away Saul's sins. Three days of fasting had not washed away Saul's sins. He had to get up. He had to be baptized. He had to call on the name of the Lord. And then — and not until then — his sins were washed away.

Why do you delay?

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I know what some are thinking, because I have heard it more times than I can count. "What about the thief on the cross? He was saved without baptism."

The thief on the cross received his promise from Jesus while Jesus was still alive. And that matters — more than most people realize. The writer of Hebrews explains:

"For where a covenant is, there must of necessity be the death of the one who made it. For a covenant is valid only when men are dead, for it is never in force while the one who made it lives."

Hebrews 9:16-17

A will — a testament — does not go into effect while the person who made it is still living. You do not inherit under a will while the testator is alive. The New Testament — the new covenant, the new will — was not in force while Jesus lived. It went into effect at His death. The thief on the cross lived and died under the old covenant. Jesus, while He walked the earth, had authority to forgive sins directly (Matthew 9:6) — and He exercised that authority with the thief.

But you and I do not live under the old covenant. We live under the new one. And the terms of the new covenant — belief, repentance, confession, baptism — are the terms Jesus Himself established, commanded, and sent His apostles into the world to preach. The thief is not your template. The thief lived under a different covenant. Your template is Acts 2. Your template is Acts 22:16. Your template is Romans 6. Your

question is the same question Ananias asked: Why do you delay?

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Now — having obeyed the gospel, having been baptized into Christ, having been raised to walk in newness of life — there remains one more thing. And it is not a small thing. It is the thing that determines whether the race ends well.

Remain faithful.

Jesus, speaking to the church in Smyrna — a church under persecution, a church facing suffering — said:

"Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life."

Revelation 2:10

The crown of life is not given to the one who started well. It is given to the one who remained faithful. *Until death*. Not until it became inconvenient. Not until the persecution got heavy. Not until the old temptations resurfaced and the fight became exhausting. Until death.

This is not a new idea in this book. Chapter 9 was built on this principle — the long road, the daily discipline, the endurance of Hebrews 12:1. But it needs to be said plainly here, because the gospel invitation is not the finish line. It is the starting line. The race begins at the water. And the race must

be run — with endurance, with vigilance, with the eyes fixed on Jesus — all the way to the end.

The person who obeys the gospel and then stops studying, stops praying, stops assembling with the saints, stops guarding against the old temptations — that person is the swept house of Matthew 12 all over again. The house was filled for a moment. Then it was allowed to empty. And the last state is worse than the first.

Do not let that be your story.

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I know what I am asking. I know it because I have lived it.

I was introduced to drugs at thirteen years old. I was arrested for robbery and murder at seventeen. I served thirty-three years in prison. I tried self-help books. I tried the wisdom of man. I tried to convince myself that God was not real, and I nearly succeeded — until the still, small voice in the back of my mind would not stop asking: "Are you sure about that?"

I was not sure. I had never been sure. And when I finally stopped running from what I had always known — when I came to myself, like the prodigal in the pig field — I realized that the foundation my parents had laid, the truth I had been taught as a child, the gospel I had heard and known and turned away from — it was still there. Waiting. The God I had ignored had not moved. He was exactly where He had always been.

I obeyed the gospel. I was baptized into Christ. And everything changed. Not gradually. Not incrementally. Everything. The man who walked into that prison at seventeen is not the man writing this book at sixty-five. The mind changed. The gaze was fixed. And everything followed.

That is not a boast. It is only by the grace of God that I am here now writing this to you. And I share this with you — whether you are the one struggling with addiction, or the family member who has been carrying this weight, or the friend who picked up this book because someone you love is in trouble — as evidence. Not that I am strong. I am not. But that God is faithful. He is.

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The void you have been trying to fill is real. The emptiness that drove the first choice, that fed the progression, that deepened with every step away from God — it was never going to be filled by a substance. It was never going to be filled by a program. It was never going to be filled by willpower, or self-improvement, or a change of address.

It was always meant to be filled by Him.

Every spiritual blessing is in Christ. Forgiveness is in Christ. Redemption is in Christ. Hope is in Christ. The new self of Ephesians 4, the renewed mind of Romans 12, the peace that surpasses comprehension of Philippians 4:7 — all of it, every bit of it, is found in one place.

And the door into that place — the only door the Bible gives you, in Romans 6:3 and Galatians 3:27 — is baptism into Christ.

The invitation is open. The door is open. The Father is watching the road, just as He watched for the prodigal, and He will run to meet you.

Why do you delay?

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"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me."

Psalm 23:4

The valley has a *through*. You are not stuck. The Shepherd has been walking with you since before you opened this book. And the road — the long road, the hard road, the road made of mornings — has a destination.

Come to Him. Obey Him. Remain faithful.

He is waiting.