

Introduction

MY STORY

WITHOUT WARNING A SUBTLE BUT NAGGING voice perched upon my shoulder and whispered, “Look what you’ve done!” This redirected my mind’s eye to just about every regretful moment, all the way back to potty training.

Suddenly I saw myself at five years old, shoplifting a piece of chocolate taffy from the grocery store candy bin... then, slightly older, taking a Louisville Slugger to the neighbor girl’s stomach, knocking the wind out of her for no good reason (as if there’s ever a good reason to do something like that!). I flashed back to the church service when I psyched out the usher, making the man believe that my clenched fist had money for the offering, when instead all I dropped in was a wad of nothing.

Though in these several instances the sounds of dad’s belt clearing belt loops paid my penance, there was no infraction too small or too distant for the devil to bring back to my remembrance.

So much more condemning, however, were the poignant reminders of the secret sins of my adult life—of course, the jealousy, unforgiveness, and occasional temper; but especially

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all the lust I had allowed into my eyes, ears, and mind. Visions of shameful desires and the places those had led all bounced back and forth through my memory like dirty laundry in a never-ending “tumble” cycle.

Throughout the years my most heinous sins had to remain under wraps or be spoken of only in generalities, so that the “I’ve-got-it-all-together” façade of a budding preacher wouldn’t be tarnished. Truthfully, though, I saw myself too often held captive to the flesh and its whims. So when the devil launched the second fiery whisper, “God can’t use you!”, I began to believe it myself.

“You’re a hypocrite!” replayed through my mind. My passion ever since I was sixteen years old was and is to encourage people toward a deep relationship with God. I revel to share about the transformational power of God that I’ve personally witnessed break addictions and disease. Still, I questioned, “How can I talk about these things and urge others into a Spirit-filled life if I’m not living it perfectly myself?”

By now the moment was ripe for Satan to uncover the final page of his playbook: “Shut it all down!” The ministry. The website. The social network posts. The ambitions to preach to the world. “Walk away. Hang it up. You’re too far gone. You’ve messed up one too many times. You can’t live a life worthy of God’s service, much less of the miracle-working power you pray to flow through you.”

Throughout the following week my mind was the battlefield in a severe demonic war intended to shut me up. Those three assaults—“Look what you’ve done! God can’t use you! Shut it all down!”—plagued me and, on more than one occasion, beat me to tears.

My Story Is Your Story

I've met too many people with similar stories to mine. Perhaps it's surprising to you (or not!), but many are fellows in ministry. They are youth leaders, small group facilitators, worship leaders, or senior pastors, secretly held captive by sin and shame. They greatly desire godliness and want to serve God in powerful ways, yet they can't seem to break the sin cycle. Like the apostle Paul, they confess they continually fall to the very things they hate (Rom. 7:15), and the devil never fails to arrive with nagging reminders of their failures.

Others are victims of the sins of yesterday; their pasts are checkered with unspeakable things, and guilt and shame convince them they'll never be good enough for God.

The stories of many people contain a little of both.

Perhaps you too can relate. Maybe even now there's a voice whispering in your ear, "Put the book down. Don't waste your time. God's moved on to someone less messed up. He can't use you."

The Key to Victory

As I'll unfold throughout this book, in the midst of my spiritual warfare God showed me the key to ending this all. It wasn't another song, souped-up sermon, or resource. Some newfangled religious gimmick wasn't going to do it anymore. No, I had to go back to the basics. It was time for me to face the crux of Christianity—the old, rugged cross.

I must admit, when God revealed to me that the cross was the answer, I was a little let down. I'd known about the cross for years, I thought. Jesus suffered, died, and rose again. This is Christianity 101. What more is there to know? "Give me something deeper," I begged. I wanted a vision in the Spirit of some sensational strategy that no one had ever heard.

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But throughout my week of intense battle I realized that while I *knew about* the cross, I didn't truly *know* the cross. So the Holy Spirit led me there, on an intimate journey to the foot of Calvary, where I beheld Jesus in His place of victory as I never had before. In this moment I felt firsthand what Paul meant when he boasted that our record of wrongs was nailed to the cross. I vividly experienced why he said that it's at Calvary where Satan is ultimately dethroned and silenced in our lives.

...erasing the record that stood against us with its legal demands. He set this aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it.

—COLOSSIANS 2:14–15

I didn't need some super-spiritual, new strategy. *The cross is the strategy!* God showed me that the cross was His plan established all along to rescue you and me from sin and shame and give us a life of victory. It should never become too familiar. In fact, every answer and solution to the situations we face are found there—not new—but always fresh.

When I finally encountered the cross in its entire splendor, its nails unleashed me. Since that day I've never felt so much freedom. I've never had so much boldness. I arose from my weeping and shaking as one no longer influenced by the voice of Satan, but with a resurrected voice of my own—determined to tell my story.

Let's Go

Framed around my story, this book will lead you to the same place the Lord led me. We'll journey together down that road to Calvary to behold Jesus in His place of victory. I promise it

will be unlike any encounter you've had before. Then you'll discover how to live in this place, where the things that the devil meant for your defeat actually defeat him instead.

Come along. Join me on this journey to finally silence Satan and *live* victoriously.