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**GETTING BACK
IN THE RACE**

THE CURE FOR BACKSLIDING

Joel R. Beeke

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To Lois Mol,
loyal and faithful friend.
“I thank my God upon every
remembrance of you.” (Philippians 1:3)
– Joel R. Beeke

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“This book is a masterpiece, and I do not say that lightly. Since Octavius Winslow wrote his magnificent book, *Personal Declension and Revival of Religion in the Soul* in 1841, not much has seen the light of day on the vital subject of backsliding, to which every believer is prone and from which every child of God needs deliverance. This excellent work, so helpfully spiced with quotations from the Puritans, needs to be read over and over again. I heartily commend it.”

Martin Holdt, Pastor, Emmanuel Baptist Church,
Johannesburg, South Africa; editor *Reformation Africa South*

“Solidly written in the vein of older classics on this subject by authors like Richard Sibbes and Andrew Fuller, this new work by Dr. Beeke provides a helpful approach to what is a perennial problem for the church. For inevitably there are wounded in the spiritual war in which we are engaged, and this work outlines the best means of bringing balm and healing to their souls. Highly recommended.”

Michael Haykin, author; Professor of Church History and Biblical Spirituality; Director, The Andrew Fuller Center for Baptist Studies, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

“*Getting Back in the Race* is a thorough treatment of the difficult subject of backsliding. It bears all the classic hallmarks of Joel Beeke’s writings: it is thoroughly scriptural, warmly pastoral, saturated with the best of Puritan wisdom, and relevant for all Christians. Any of us may drop out of the race; Joel Beeke will help us prevent that happening by showing why it does happen and how it can be overcome. May this book help us to stay the course all the way to the finishing line!”

Iain D. Campbell, Minister, Point Free Church; 2012
Moderator, Free Church of Scotland General Assembly

“The strength and beauty of *Getting Back in the Race* is that Joel Beeke’s characteristic clarity, biblical fidelity, and unflinching

care as to detail and pastoral wisdom is obvious on every page. This book is an honest and sometimes chilling exposition of the seriousness of backsliding; at the same time, it unfailingly breathes the air of grace and hope. Timely and judicious, a book to read, re-read.”

Derek W. H. Thomas, Minister of Preaching and Teaching, First Presbyterian Church, Columbia, SC; Distinguished Visiting Professor of Systematic and Historical Theology, Reformed Theological Seminary; Editorial Director, Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals

“Don’t settle for being a spiritual shrimp,’ argues Dr. Beeke. The pity is that too many modern Christians are opting for shrimp-ishly small degrees of grace. Indwelling sin drags the careless believer down into guilty backsliding. This book is a prescription for the believer who feels his guilt. Here is medicine from the Bible ornamented with choice quotations from the great Puritans. These are healing fountains for backslidden saints.”

Maurice Roberts, Minister of Greyfriars Congregation, Inverness, Scotland; former editor, *Banner of Truth* magazine

“Once again, Christian believers young and old are indebted to Joel Beeke. Dr. Beeke writes on a subject we hear much too little about, backsliding, and does so with biblical clarity, theological insight, yet always with a pastor’s heart. Only too easily can even well-taught Christians find their hearts growing cold and their zeal for Christ’s honor flagging. Dr. Beeke, like the spiritual physician he is, exposes to us the reasons why backsliding happens and how God in his grace maps out for us the way back to spiritual health. This is a book for all Christians, certainly not only for those who are in the sad state of backsliding. Prevention is always better than cure. Relevant biblical passages abound and choice quotes from the history of the church illuminate the text. This is a book every Christian should read and every pastor commend.”

Reverend Ian Hamilton, Minister, Cambridge Presbyterian Church, Cambridge, England

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Introduction

RUNNING WITH ENDURANCE

At the height of World War II, the enemy Axis powers controlled all of Europe from France westward, plus portions of Africa, Asia, and China. The Russian Allies were under siege in Moscow and had already lost Kiev. It seemed the unthinkable was happening: the exhausted Allies were losing their war against a merciless foe.

In October 1941 the English Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, spoke to his countrymen, and indeed to the entire free world. The substance of his message was clear: “Never, never, never give up!” Churchill called his people to persevere, and persevere they did unto victory, four long years later.

As in military conflict, so in the ongoing war that is the Christian life: perseverance like that of a marathon runner is a necessity — even, and especially, in the face of what seem to be daunting odds. Of course, in one sense this spiritual war is not to be compared to World War II,

for the stakes are far higher. This is a war of which another Englishman, William Gurnall (1616–1679), said, “the cruelest [war] which ever was fought by men, will be found but sport and child’s play to this. Alas, what is the killing of bodies to the destroying of souls?”¹ For this is nothing less than the warfare between Satan and the saints of God. It is a war of eternal consequence.

In this war too, we hear our Commander in Chief call us to follow him to the end and never, never, never give up. That’s a tough assignment: following Christ is, in fact, more than a marathon. It’s more like an “Ironman,” the spiritual equivalent of swimming two and a half miles, biking 112 miles, and running 26 miles without a break. Christians—all Christians—must go the distance against great odds.

How do we do that? How do we keep up the pace? It’s one thing to begin the Christian life, but quite another to persevere in it. It’s one thing to repent and believe the gospel, but quite another to go on repenting and go on believing. The miracle of Pentecost in Acts 2:4 is great, but in some ways, Acts 2:42 is even greater: “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.” My father often said to me, “Remember, it’s relatively easy to begin ministry in the church; the challenge is to maintain it—to persevere in zeal for it.”

Haven’t you, too, discovered that in some ways it can be harder to go on believing as a Christian than to become one in the first place? Haven’t you, too, found it hard to persevere in faith when trouble or opposition arises, or

when faced with the demands of daily life in such a world as this? Perhaps even now you are fearful. Perhaps you are afraid that you will fall into a defeatist attitude, saying, “I can never measure up to the demands of discipleship, so what’s the use of trying? The poverty of my faith and my weakness in the face of temptation is terribly discouraging. How can I go on believing that ‘God is light’ even in the darkest night? How can I persevere in paying the high cost of faithfulness, enduring affliction and opposition and loss for the gospel’s sake?”

Every Christian faces numerous discouragements in striving to follow Christ. Our knees go weak and our hands hang down when we face personal failure, when others let us down, or when providence denies our desires. Disappointment can lead to discouragement, and discouragement may end in doubt, fear, and even despair. We feel weak and tired, emotionally and spiritually, and we are tempted to throw in the towel. Why should we persist in confessing a faith that is despised and hated in the world? It all seems pointless and hopeless. We say with Asaph, “Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain” (Psalm 73:13).

But we must press on, firm in the confidence that we run alongside other believers, that we run a well-trodden course, and that we run with God’s inexhaustible assistance and support. J. C. Ryle (1816–1900) said, “We have a race to run,” and went on to explain that every true Christian must endure great opposition:

Without there will be fightings, within there will be fears; there will be snares to be avoided, and

temptations to be resisted; there will be your own treacherous hearts, often cold and dead and dry and dull; there will be friends who will give you unscriptural advice, and relations who will even war against your soul; in short, there will be stumbling-blocks on every side, there will be occasion for all your diligence and watchfulness and godly jealousy and prayer, you will soon find that to be a real Christian is no light matter.²

But the Lord does not call us to go where he has not gone before. We are called to endure what Christ endured before us, to follow the course he has already taken.

Hebrews 12:1–2 says,

Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

There's the key: "looking unto Jesus." The more we fix our eyes on the glory of the one who died and rose and now sits at God's right hand, the more we will press on to meet him. John Bunyan (1628–1688), himself no stranger to hardship, said, "When men do come to see the things of another world, what a God, what a Christ, what a heaven, and what an eternal glory there is to be enjoyed; also, when they see that it is possible for them to have a share in

it, I tell you it will make them run through thick and thin to enjoy it.”³

But when we lose sight of Christ because of our sin, or Satan’s lies, we grow tired and weak. We begin to lose our bearings, drift out of the way, or else give up too soon. Let’s take a lesson from American swimmer Florence Chadwick (1918–1995). While I am not the first to tell her story, it is well worth recounting here. In her prime, she swam the English Channel in record time. But when she attempted to swim the 26 miles from Catalina Island to the coast of California, a thick fog set in after fifteen hours in the water. She could no longer see her goal, so she grew discouraged. Finally, an hour later, she asked to be pulled out by the people in boats accompanying her. Imagine her dismay when she discovered that she was only one mile from her goal! Two months later she tried again, and the same fog set in. But this time she fixed in her mind an image of the shore ahead of her, and pressed on to reach her goal.

When sin or unbelief or false teaching make it hard to see Jesus, Christians grow discouraged, become weak in faith, and may begin to turn away from the Lord. Like a swimmer in the fog, our own sins constantly block our view of the glorious goal, so we are tempted to abandon the pursuit entirely. This turning away from Christ is often called backsliding: a drawing back from God, from our profession of faith, and from our commitment to follow Christ. To backslide is to relapse into unbelief, sin, and spiritual numbness. Backsliding is an act of disloyalty and a form of rebellion. It can happen to an individual, a

family, a church, even a whole denomination. Backsliding can leave people in a weakened spiritual condition for years before they recover. It can even lead to final apostasy, giving up and walking away from the Lord forever.

The purpose of this book is to awaken Christians to the reality of backsliding, to help us recognize it when it starts, to show where it may lead, and to empower believers—those who are in the grip of backsliding, or those in a position to help the afflicted—to get back into the race by the grace of God. We will first analyze the spiritual disease of backsliding, then proceed to the divine cure.⁴

This book will also introduce you to the vast body of helpful literature on backsliding and spiritual experience in general. Christian writers of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries gave considerable attention to the problem of backsliding. Many of their books continue to be printed today. Strangely, treatment of this topic has become quite rare among recent authors. Therefore, I hope to introduce you to some of the old writers of the Reformed and Puritan traditions who handle spiritual experience with biblical wisdom. Follow the footnotes of this book like bridges to other valuable books.

I encourage you to read this book with prayer. Pray that the Holy Spirit would illuminate your mind to see the truth, and bring your heart captive to love for the truth. Pray also for your church and other Christians, that God would heal all our backsliding (Hosea 14:4).

I believe in both the preservation of the saints by God

and the perseverance of the saints before God. True, our perseverance is a fruit of God's preservation, but that perseverance is still ours, a fight we must fight and a race we must run. It doesn't happen objectively outside of us; it happens subjectively, by grace, within us and through us. Trusting in God, looking to Christ, and relying on the help of the Holy Spirit in using the spiritual disciplines, we must run the race and we must finish the course. We are no mere spectators, nor can we remain on the sidelines. Every Christian is a runner.

We must continue on patiently, ploddingly, believing in the Lord — not only in times of prosperity, but also in times of adversity. May God use this book to strengthen you and keep you running in the race until you reach the goal, obtain the prize, and receive your crown from the hand of Christ in glory!

One

RUNNERS STUMBLING

Discerning Backsliding

Picture a runner in a long-distance, cross-country race. Off the mark, things look great. He sets a strong pace, feels good, and can see victory ahead. But as the race progresses he grows over-confident and careless. He stops paying attention to the terrain. Instead he dreams about the shouts of admiration when he crosses the finish line in record time. After running strongly for a while, he fails to see a dip in the path and falls. In an instant he finds himself on the ground, knees bloodied and head throbbing, his face in the dirt. He feels confused, discouraged, and embarrassed. So he lies there, unsure whether to give up or keep going.

This is a difficult situation, and a moment of crisis. The runner has reason to feel ashamed of himself. *But he need not give up.* He can finish the race, and finish it well. So can you, if you are a backslidden Christian who has fallen into sin through your own weakness and carelessness. By the grace of God, I will do all I can in the following pages to show you how to position yourself

to receive from God the understanding, the humility, and the courage to get back in the race. And if you are currently running strong in the Lord, I trust this book can serve you in two ways: to equip you to help others get up and keep going, and to prepare yourself (God forbid) for the possibility of your own backsliding in the future.

What Is Backsliding?

Backsliding is a season of increasing sin and decreasing obedience in those who profess to be Christians. *Not every sin is backsliding.* Christians must sadly expect their lives to consist of a continual cycle of sinning and repenting of sin by faith in Christ crucified (1 John 1:9–2:2). In backsliding, however, this cycle of repentance is broken and spiritual ground is lost. Wilhelmus à Brakel (1635–1711) described backsliding as “spiritual winter” in one’s life, “the very opposite of growth.”⁵ Andrew Fuller (1754–1815) defined backsliding among professing Christians as “their having sinned, and not repented of their deeds.”⁶ Edward Reynolds (1599–1676) called it “a repenting of repentance.”⁷ The longer one persists in backsliding, the less right one has to claim to be a true Christian (1 John 2:3–4), for repentance is of the essence of true Christianity (Acts 2:38, 20:21; 26:18, 20).

All throughout the Bible, we are warned about backsliding.⁸ The Lord used His prophets Hosea and Jeremiah more than any others to admonish Israel and the church of all ages of this evil.⁹ The prophetic rebuke of backsliding revealed Israel’s turning away from the Lord as nothing less than adultery against her divine husband:

God's wife engaged in spiritual prostitution with rival lovers (Jeremiah 3, Hosea 4).

Backsliding from Christ is thus a serious matter. It dishonors God, disregards Christ as Savior, grieves the Spirit, tramples God's law underfoot, and abuses the gospel. In other words, to backslide means to depart from the Word and the ways of the Lord. Nevertheless, in every age it has been, and remains, a sin as common as it is terrible.

Bent to Backsliding

Although the apostle James did not use the word "backslide," he addressed the same adulterous love of the world among the churches (James 4:1–10). Only a couple of decades after Christ ascended into heaven and poured out the Holy Spirit, churches and Christians were backsliding! And this tendency was nothing new. In words recorded some 700 years earlier, we hear the Lord lamenting, "my people are bent to backsliding from me" (Hosea 11:7). The word "people" here refers to God's people in general—what we would call today the visible church. It thus includes those who profess faith but have no true heart for the Lord. Of these, Jeremiah Burroughs (c. 1600–1646) wrote, "There is a principle of apostasy in them. . . . God's ways have been unsuitable to them, and therefore they have found them hard and tedious."¹⁰

Notice how Hosea 11:7 says "bent," not just "bendable." Ebenezer Erskine (1680–1754) wrote, "There is not only an easiness and ductility [flexibility] in the heart of man to sin, but a strong propensity and inclination."¹¹ Scripture and history alike bear it out: the church

has a strong inclination to backslide. Like a man standing on an icy hill by a sharp drop, one misstep can begin a slide towards destruction.

But backsliding is certainly not limited to unbelievers, to hypocrites in the church, or to the church in general (a mixture of Christians and those who profess faith but do not possess it). The same tendency exists for those who are God's true runners in the race. These can backslide too, missing out on heavenly rewards they might have otherwise obtained.

Consider this analogy of how easily we can slip into backsliding. Going into the 10,000 meter event in the 2010 Olympics, Sven Kramer of the Netherlands was positioned well to win his second speed skating gold medal. In fact, when the race came, he completed the course in record time. Tragically, however, he had disqualified himself by skating in the wrong lane for part of the race, following the mistaken advice of his coach. Any athlete can tell you that your performance means nothing unless you follow the rules. That's why Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 2:5 that if a man competes in the games, he will not receive the victor's crown unless he competes according to the rules. If we are "skating in the wrong lane," that is, backsliding in our obedience to God's commands, it does not matter how well we think we are doing or how much admiration others may have for us. We must run in God's ways—according to his will, not our own.

As we run our daily race, sinfully crossing over the lines God has set for us can happen almost effortlessly. William S. Plumer (1802–1880) said,

It is easy for us to backslide from God. We go astray from the womb, speaking lies. It is as natural for us to do wrong as for the sparks to ascend. In our voyage heavenward, wind and tide are against us. If we do nothing to overcome their action, they will carry us away. We can go to hell without intending to do so, without putting forth any efforts to that effect. But to go to heaven requires prayer, self-denial, vigilance, violence, running, wrestling, fighting.¹²

Plumer is right: this Christian life is a war, not against men, but against ourselves, the system of the world, and the devil.

If backsliding occurred even once in our lives as Christians, it would be unspeakably grievous and heinous. God has loved us with an everlasting love, forgiven all our sins, embraced us as his children, and blessed us with every spiritual blessing. To backslide even once merely in thought would be more than sufficient reason, in human reckoning, for God to withdraw his love from us. But the real state of things is worse—much worse. Hosea says we are bent—inclined, directed, habituated—to backsliding, despite the immeasurable depth of God’s love. If left to ourselves, we will continually backslide from the Lord. Is this not as true of you as it is of me?

Just as sin is not made less awful or less offensive to God by its prevalence, so our shared bent to backsliding does not render that bent a trivial matter. God surely *does* promise that wherever he begins the good work of salvation, he will bring it to completion (Philippians 1:6).

But this does not allow us to be passive and apathetic in the face of our backsliding tendencies. Thomas Vincent (1634–1678) warned that God preserves his people through their motives and their efforts to use the means of grace God provides. We must avail ourselves of the grace that God grants us.

Furthermore, God’s preservation does not guarantee that we will avoid sad falls. Vincent warned his hearers: “Though God will not allow you totally to fall from grace if the good work is in truth begun in you, yet, without great heed, you may fall into great decay of grace; your graces may languish and so be ready to die (Revelation 3:2).”¹³ What might that look like practically? Vincent continued, “You may fall foully into sin” so that you shame the name of Christ, wound your conscience, grieve the Spirit, hurt the church, interrupt your fellowship with God, lose your assurance of salvation, and fall under God’s discipline.¹⁴ Frightful, yes, but all of it true.

Taking Stock

Perhaps there was a time in your life when you would not have believed these words of Hosea 11:7—a time when, in the flush of first love, prayer was your daily breath and the Word of God your daily food. At that time, the word “backsliding” was foreign to your vocabulary. Sin was sin, grace was grace, God was God, and Christ was Christ. You would have waded through hell itself to get to Jesus Christ.¹⁵ The Lord could say of you, “I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land

that was not sown” (Jeremiah 2:2). Like Joseph you dreaded the thought of sinning against God (Genesis 39:9).

But how is your spiritual life now? Do you have a different understanding? Perhaps you must say, “It is all true; I am prone to backslide. I am inclined to wander from the narrow path, to go astray like a lost sheep, to return to a life I thought I’d left behind forever. ‘For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing’ (Romans 7:18). My only hope remains Psalm 40:2, for ‘*He* brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings.’”

How do God’s people fall into the ever-deepening rut and horrible pit of backsliding? How does the sin of backsliding extend its deadly influence through their entire spiritual and natural lives? What marks should I look for in myself to know if I am backsliding? These are all crucial questions.

Signs of Sliding into a Spiritual Rut

God’s people let themselves drift. We fall into backsliding gradually, a process unfolding over time. This is no surprise, for apart from the grace of God we remain children of Adam our entire lives. We can never shake off our old nature completely; it clings to us with the tendrils of countless sinful tendencies.

The life of God’s child is illustrated in a frequent scene in rural Michigan during the winter weeks of heavy snow.

The lanes and smaller roads, many of them unpaved, become muddy and nearly impassable. Looking down these after a snow, at first only one set of tracks appears. As each subsequent vehicle follows the same tracks, the ruts grow increasingly deeper, until someone finally becomes stuck and can go no further.

Similarly, God's children are prone to follow the tracks of their muddy human nature, following those tracks wherever they lead. The further they go, the deeper they sink into the ruts, step by step, one thing leading to another, until they get stuck. What are these ruts believers are so inclined to fall into? I can enumerate at least these six:

1. Coldness in prayer
2. Indifference under the Word
3. Growing inner corruptions
4. The love of the world
5. Declining love for believers
6. Man-centered hopes

I will present much of what follows in the second person, as if I am speaking directly to a backslidden saint. I do this not to accuse or condemn you, the reader—the main point of this book is that grace and healing through Christ is freely available!—but to give you opportunity to more easily see yourself in whatever sections may apply. Few things are more important in the Christian life than to recognize when backsliding has set in.

Coldness in prayer. Formerly, it was a delight to your soul to anticipate going to pray. You longed to be alone

with the Lord, to speak with him, and to pour out your heart before him with all your needs, confessions, and vows. You spread out every matter before the Lord as if he knew nothing about it, yet with a deep consciousness that he always knows your circumstances and your needs better than you do.

Gradually, however, your zeal in prayer begins to fade away. Before you realize it, your prayers become more a matter of words than heart. Alexander Ross says, “A man may pray with his lips and yet not pray with an intense desire of the soul.”¹⁶ Form and coldness increasingly replace love and urgency. The Lord warned of this danger in Isaiah 29:13, saying “this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me.”

Before long, morning prayer is all but given up; you no longer feel it is critical to call on God to begin your day rightly. Prayer at bedtime shortens, and wandering thoughts during prayer multiply. Prayer throughout the day largely vanishes. James 4:2 begins to describe you: “ye have not, because ye ask not.” God formed you to declare his praise, but now he says to you, “thou hast not called upon me, O Jacob; but thou hast been weary of me, O Israel” (Isaiah 43:22). Fuller warned, “If religious duties are attended to rather from custom or conscience than love, we must either never have known what true religion is, or in a great degree have lost the spirit of it.”¹⁷

Formality and deadness conquer power and access. Omitting prayer may seem more reverent than actually praying. Your head is still bowed, and words are still

uttered, but where is the love, urgency, necessity, and sense of dependency? Where are the heartfelt petitions for husband, wife, children, friends, colleagues, church, and nation? If the Lord gives us honesty and spiritual sight, we will see that what we have is nothing but prayerless praying, our former liberty in prayer having departed from us.

Prayerlessness arises from unbelief. The visible beauty of the world seems more important to us than anything else while the invisible, heavenly beauty of God seems less real. We lose sight of our Husband's glory and our hearts go out after cheap substitutes, false gods of our own choosing who promise much but deliver nothing. True prayer goes to the Lord as a thirsty man goes to a clear, cool river in order to drink; unbelief abandons the fountain of living water for broken cisterns that hold no water (Jeremiah 2:13).

Indifference under the Word. As you draw back from your Lord you find your affections toward God cooling. This especially shows itself in indifference towards God's Word, which can eventually lead you to lose all concern for truth. Losing your appetite for God's living and life-giving Word reveals a lack of spiritual health and forecasts further decline, for the Bible says, "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby" (1 Peter 2:2). It is not enough to attend preaching; one must *desire* the Word.

You do not neglect church attendance, but neither do you cherish it; the heart is not in it as before. The public means of grace substitute for a close and secret walk with God. Physically, you enter the sanctuary, but spiritually,

the soul takes up its abode only in the outer courts of the temple; you can no longer bring your soul beyond the vestibule. No wonder that the minister's preaching does not seem to be so heart-searching as before; no wonder that worship services becomes more of a burden than a delight.

Backsliding may not immediately produce scandalous sins; it may begin with a cold heart. John Angell James (1785–1859) wrote, “There is no immorality; no open sin; but an utter decay of religious affections. The whole amount of piety that is left is cold, heartless, dead formality.”¹⁸ The trouble starts so quietly with the affections alone: that subtlety is its chief danger. John Newton (1725–1807) said, “Christians are often not aware how soon they may decline in their religious affections.”¹⁹

Perhaps you still read the Bible dutifully and even regularly, but where is the spiritual relish with which you read the Word in former times? It seems but a memory that once you could say, “How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth!” (Psalm 119:103). Where is the former burning desire to be alone with the Word of God, even if it did nothing but convict you of sin? Where are all the holy precepts, precious promises, pointed rebukes, and instructive lessons that once abounded on its sacred pages? A dry heart finds the Bible dry as well. Your tears are too few to water the spiritual seeds in your soul. In desperation, you resort to texts that moved you before, yet to no avail. You fail to revive old manna, long since spoiled (Exodus 16:19–20).

It may even be that, like King Asa, your good begin-

nings have been marred by trusting in man instead of the Lord, and now you are angry at the very men who faithfully preach God's Word to you (2 Chronicles 16:10). God's hand may be upon your conscience for some sin, but you refuse to confess it and forsake it, so the Word shines upon you like the hot sun in a summer drought (Psalm 32:3-4). Beware lest you become like "children that will not hear the law of the LORD," as described in Isaiah 30:9-10, "Which say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits." Is it possible that the very reason you see the preacher as your enemy is because he tells you the truth (Galatians 4:16)?

Dryness under the Word also implies backsliding from him who is the living and eternal Word. The center and heart of all the means of grace, Jesus Christ, seems to depart. He was once the substance of your life, the source of your sanctification, and the mark towards which you always pressed, but now he silently withdraws himself. You no longer carry your guilt to his blood for covering and cleansing. Instead of blaming yourself, you more often blame the Lord, finding fault with his ministers, the officers of the church, and your fellow church members. Talking about religion and church affairs becomes a substitute for having Christ in the heart.

Soon, indifference produces its close companion on the road of backsliding: ignorance. "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (Hosea 4:6). Jeremiah lamented with tears that the Lord said of Israel, "they know not me," and "they refuse to know me" (Jeremiah

9:3, 6). You fill your mind with the things of the world and the cares of this life while neglecting the truths of God.

As backsliding sets in among a people collectively, they willfully despise the church's confessed teachings, which results in the loss of confessional truth. The church, created by God to be the pillar of the truth (1 Timothy 3:15), descends into ignorance, confusion, vain disputations, and false teaching.

Growing inner corruptions. The secret sins of the heart begin to multiply as you neglect to put them to death. Your earnest prayer is no longer, "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Psalm 139:23–24). Instead you cover the evidence of your sin, hiding from God and blaming others, as Adam did: "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree" (Genesis 3:12). You once said only "I did eat," but now it becomes anyone's fault but your own—even the Lord's fault. You may not dare to say this with your mouth, but it is revealed in the practice of your life. You once lived submissive to God's sovereignty when there was any conflict between self and God: "Everything the Lord does is right and everything I do contrary to his will is wrong." But now you bend toward self and away from the Lord.

Such excuses encourage hypocrisy. Gradually, you become more interested in merely learning the language of God's people rather than experiencing for yourself the underlying realities. When you do talk of the Lord and his ways, self begins to creep in more and more, at first half-

ashamed, but then losing any shame whatsoever. You may say the right things, but only to win the admiration of others. Deep in your heart, self-exaltation becomes your motivation. Spiritual pride replaces lowliness of mind.

A *double life* begins to emerge of which you may be only half-conscious. You fail to heed Christ's word to "cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also," and instead become more like whitewashed tombs, beautiful on the outside but inwardly full of uncleanness (Matthew 23:26–27). Zeal for God's cause and honor burns low, while what man thinks of you glows white-hot. You begin to try convincing others that you are living *for* God rather than trying to live *with* God.

A double life, in turn, leads to the multiplication of *secret sins*. Sins you thought long gone in grace are resurrected with even more power than before. And what is worse, you hardly tremble before sin's power. You may not run after sin as you did before regeneration, but now sin runs after you. And as your resistance against sin grows weaker, you welcome its approach. Offending God does not remain the overriding burden of sin; instead, the punishment of sin, or perhaps its offense to men, becomes your primary motive for resisting temptation. You may still confess sin as sin and make vows to change, but you do both acts as an empty show of piety. Your confession comes without repentance, and you do not follow your vows with change. You speak against sin but accommodate it in practice and, on occasion, even fuel sin, in spite of your conscience (Romans 13:14).

It may be that you comfort yourself with your outward morality and form of religion, claiming that you are “not as other men are” (Luke 18:11). But God sees the heart. His warning pierces deeper than behavior: “The backslider *in heart* shall be filled with his own ways” (Proverbs 14:14, emphasis added). We reap what we sow in this life. The backslider shall “be filled with sin, either in this world or the next, when he feels its painful consequences, and finds that God has marked all his steps, and will not acquit him from any of his iniquities [absent his repentance].”²⁰

The danger is that your *self-examination* becomes less frequent, less thorough, and less prayerful. Consequently, hand-in-hand with an evaporating spiritual life, the Pharisee who is within us all comes to the forefront. Gradually, you become an inflated (“puffed up”) saint with a much smaller Savior whose work, in your eyes, steadily diminishes in importance.

Presumption follows hard on the heels of decreasing self-examination. In spite of God’s silence and your own failure to withstand trials, temptations, and weaknesses in your own strength, you continue to presume that all is well. Even the chastising and warning hand of God’s providence passes by unheeded (Micah 6:9, Luke 13:1–5).

The love of the world. One sign of backsliding, and often the first sign others can notice, is an increase in worldliness. In everyday life, in conversation, and even in dress and fashion, the spirit of the world begins to take hold of you. The distinction between godliness and worldliness becomes increasingly difficult for you to

discern, and the tendency to accommodate the ways of the world seems ever greater, never less. Instead of being a chaste spouse devoted to your Lord, you begin to flirt with the world. James warns, “Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God” (James 4:4).

Instead of walking toward godliness and away from worldliness, you and the world begin to have more and more in common. Your motivations and inclinations begin to shift. At one time your possessions, entertainments, pursuits, and companions found their purpose and focus in Christ’s kingdom, but increasingly you become allied with the world. As this happens, the world increasingly fills your days and subverts your heart. John Owen (1616–1683) said, “When the world fills our thoughts, it will entangle our affections.”²¹ The world consumes your heart, contrary to the stern commands and warnings of 1 John 2:15–16:

Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.

Is this not what Hosea warned against when the Spirit directed him to write: “Ephraim, he hath mixed himself among the people” (Hosea 7:8)? Burroughs said, “It is a very dangerous thing to be mixed with a wicked society.”²²

Lot chose to dwell in the plains of Sodom and

Gomorrah because, as a well-watered land, it looked beautiful: “even as the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt” (Genesis 13:10). It was not long before he “pitched his tent towards Sodom” (verse 12). In the end, he found himself moving into that wicked city — not with his heart only, but now putting his feet into a place where he had no business being. This is not a comment about cities but about how backsliding can progress in the lives of God’s people. Like Lot, you may be vexed by the world (2 Peter 2:7) but still drawn to its vanities and ideas.

Worldliness grasps God’s good creations and uses them in an idolatrous or perverse manner. God’s gifts become masters instead of servants:

- Money becomes your love rather than your servant in your love for Christ.
- Politics becomes your basis for hope (or despair) when you should work for justice, hoping in Christ’s appearing rather than in the results of the next election.
- Music and the arts capture your mind with sensual stimulation, steal your time with worthless entertainment, or corrupt your heart with wicked content instead of serving as creative media for God’s glory.
- Friends and relationships become your heaven rather than helping you along to heaven.
- Clothing ceases to serve as modest covering, protection, and adornment of your body and instead consumes your money in a bid to impress your neighbors, display your sophistication, gain attention, or express your sensuality.

Backsliding can progress so far that even the world will begin noticing your worldliness, perhaps with expressions of approval that you are not so “overly religious” anymore. Sometimes, even worldly people can be surprised at what a backsliding child of God will now do or allow.

Declining love for believers. Backsliding can advance so far that *brotherly love*, one of the most basic marks of saving grace (1 John 3:14), seems to all but disappear within you. You disagree over nominal matters with fellow believers, unwilling to set down your preferences for their sakes, and those disagreements grow into large fights. James 4:1 says, “From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?” Worldliness in church members foments wars within the church. Plumer said, “As piety thus dies in the soul, charity diminishes, and censoriousness takes its place.”²³

Your own self-promotion and self-protection can smother any thought of self-sacrifice or service to others. As this takes place collectively, God’s people become strangers to one another instead of fellow pilgrims. Conflicts, troubles, disputes, and selfishness multiply. Ebenezer Erskine said, “Backsliders are commonly backbiters.”²⁴ Of course, you convince yourself that the conflict is over truth, or some matter of consequence, but deep in your conscience you know it is really only a thinly disguised personality conflict or “turf war.” Otherwise, how did you get along so well before? Instead of covering one another’s faults, you now gladly take opportunities to talk against one another and defend yourselves.

People of God, can't we all say with shame that we run more *against* one another than *with* one another, as John ran with Peter? Isn't there more suspecting, mistrusting, and despising of others than love? Who among us knows how to forgive, to forbear, to suffer long, and even to suffer wrong at the hands of our brethren? Christ declared that "to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little" (Luke 7:47). Do we so undervalue the worth of our own salvation (2 Peter 1:9)?

Man-centered hopes. Into the vacuum created by God's departing glory rushes man's love for strife and vainglory (Philippians 2:3a). Satan moves from questioning, "hath God said?" to asserting, "ye shall be as gods" (Genesis 3:1, 5). People become the center of the church, so people become the subject of all talk. People are either idolized or criticized, and God and his Word are set aside. Conversation increasingly centers on preachers and leaders, and you set yourselves up as judges of one another. One minister is good; another, fair; a third, no good at all. "You have an over-critical spirit respecting preaching."²⁵ You measure man by man instead of by God's Word. Thus you fall under the censure of Paul in 1 Corinthians 3:3-4, "For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal?"

You find yourself not only comparing preachers to one another, but also comparing yourself to other believers. You trust the opinion of other believers on matters of doctrine and even the state of your own soul,

not consulting God in his Word or through prayer. This is no new temptation, for God warned against this kind of man-centeredness throughout the prophets. Consider Jeremiah 17:5–6:

Thus saith the LORD; Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the LORD. For he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh; but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land and not inhabited.

Man-centeredness is an awful curse on the church and a dreadful blasphemy of God's name, the fruit of spiritual deadness. You can have no personal blessing unless the Lord breaks it down!

Backsliding produces false assurance and feeble hope. Attaching God's name to man's activities may make you feel assured of his blessing, but this is to live in a fool's paradise of self-deception. If your hope is that feeble, you have probably aimed too low, having put your trust in men—yourself or others—rather than in God. God's people have sought false hope before, and God has frustrated those efforts, as Isaiah 31:1, 3 describes:

Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help; and stay on horses, and trust in chariots, because they are many; and in horsemen, because they are very strong; but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel, neither seek the LORD! . . . Now the Egyptians

are men, and not God; and their horses flesh, and not spirit. When the LORD shall stretch out his hand, both he that helpeth shall fall, and he that is holpen [helped] shall fall down, and they all shall fail together.

Oh, for Christians who reject man-centered hope and live with a holy expectation in God and a proper sense of their own unworthiness! Holy expectation is built on the Word and worked by the Spirit. It looks beyond self and man. It sees that although our sins pile up to heaven, Christ's substitutionary righteousness ascends still higher, to the very throne of God, with his Father's stamp of approval. "Let Israel hope in the LORD: for with the LORD there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption. And he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities" (Psalm 130:6-7).

On that basis, holy expectation intercedes at the throne of grace, pleading that the great triune God of heaven and earth would pour out his blessings. Holy expectation cannot coexist with worldliness, unbelief, indifference, and ignorance. It abhors backsliding and seeks the honor of God, the conversion of sinners, and the welfare of the church.

The church's only hope—our only hope—is in God, for God alone can reverse the damage done by backsliding. Only God can revive the backsliding of a single believer or an entire church. Pray that God would remember us in Christ Jesus, send forth his indispensable Spirit, and revive both our churches and us. May sons and daughters again be born in Zion, and may the old nature be crucified,

the world despised, Satan resisted, and interceders at the throne of grace multiplied. May God himself receive his rightful place among us by divine conquest, so that Christ will become all in all for us (Colossians 3:11) and we might become increasingly conformed to his image as the firstborn among many brethren (Romans 8:29).

The Bitter Results of Backsliding

We have established that we are “bent to backsliding,” and we have discussed signs of backsliding. But what are the results of such sinfulness? Where will it lead? Allow me to mention just four bitter fruits.

Injury to God’s holy and worthy name. When David committed adultery and murder, and then covered it up, God rebuked him, saying, “Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the LORD, to do evil in his sight? . . . thou hast despised me. . . . because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme” (2 Samuel 12:9, 10, 14). How men will mock at Christ when they hear that those bearing his name acted shamefully!

The worst thing about backsliding is that it casts discredit on the name of the God who has given us so much grace. How it should wound God’s people daily: “I am a backslider against him who gave himself up to death, who for six long, torturous hours hung upon a cross while mockers stood before him, saying, ‘Come down if thou be the Christ.’” The life of a backslider is an insult to Christ’s love displayed for us at the cross.

Our own suffering. Backsliding causes a believer inwardly to experience more deadness than life, more rebellion than reconciliation, and more false peace than real peace.

There are times when conscience awakens and begins to roar (Psalm 32:3–4; 38:3–4), for God disciplines his children, but we should not underestimate his power to afflict us for our own good (Hebrews 12:4–11). That is, sometimes God’s discipline appears more harsh than kind. Brakel wrote,

Are you brazen toward the Lord? . . . Consider that God will not put up with your sulking. “He is wise in heart, and mighty in strength: who hath hardened himself against him, and hath prospered?” (Job 9:4). God may come and make life so bitter for you, that for the remainder of your life you will lament that you have been so rancorous toward the Lord. Therefore, take care that you regress no further.²⁶

If unchecked, backsliding leads to apostasy and damnation. For all sin tends to hell, and therefore must be dealt with severely. Our Lord said in Matthew 5:30, “And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.” John Angell James expanded on this ethic with this counsel: “Do not attempt while the sinful practice is continued, to gain any comfort of mind by the supposition that you are a true Christian still, and shall one day be

restored to God by penitence and faith.”²⁷ Fuller similarly warned, “So long as sin remains upon the conscience unlamented, we are in danger of eternal damnation.”²⁸

This is not to deny the perseverance of the elect, for election produces holiness (Ephesians 1:4). The security of the elect must never be separated from their perseverance in repentance as well as in faith. “Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity” (2 Timothy 2:19). If you want to find peace in the doctrine of election, you must repent and pursue holiness, and show yourself elect. As long as you rest in sin, you are on a trajectory towards hell.

The sin and apostasy of our children. It is not uncommon for children to follow their parents in sin “unto the third and fourth generation” (Exodus 20:5). It sometimes is even the case that when a believer backslides by clinging to a cherished sin for a time, his children grasp hold of his favorite sin or idol and carry it all the way to hell. Lot was vexed by the wickedness of Sodom (2 Peter 2:7), but his attachment to that unholy city made him lose his wife and his daughters to worldliness and wantonness (Genesis 19). David repented of his sins, but his adultery and murder were followed by his son Amnon raping his half-sister Tamar; another son, Absalom, became a deceiver, usurper, and traitor to David’s own throne. Shall we pray for our children’s salvation with our mouths but point them to damnation with our actions?

The decay of the church. Bad company corrupts

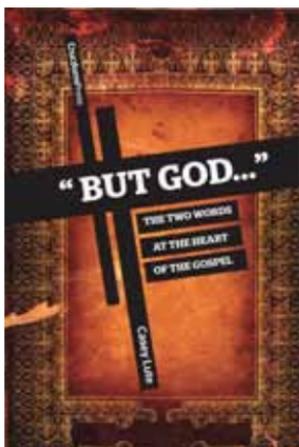
good morals (1 Corinthians 15:33). One person within the church whose heart is turning away from the Lord is like “a root bearing gall and wormwood” (Deuteronomy 29:18, Hebrews 12:15). Using a similar metaphor, Paul warned that there comes a time when the church must remove such influences from the body to prevent further corruption (see 1 Corinthians 5:6b–7).

Even a godly man like Barnabas could be led astray into hypocrisy if Peter stumbled (Galatians 2:13). Do you want to be the cause of others stumbling? One slow-moving truck can back up traffic; one accident on the highway can create a traffic jam stretching for miles. You are not an island, standing alone. Your progress towards Christ or backsliding from him affects many others.

Conclusion

Do you know what the greatest evil of such backsliding is? *We do not feel any guilt for it.* We complain about spiritual dryness, the darkness of the times, the sad condition of the church and of God’s people, but what does the Lord say of such complaints? They are nothing more than empty words in his ears if we do not repent of our role in causing the deadness and darkness: “I hearkened and heard, but they spake not aright: no man repented him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done? Everyone turned to his course, as the horse rusheth into the battle” (Jeremiah 8:6). Where are the Jeremiahs today who can say with heart and soul, “For the hurt of the daughter of my people am I hurt; I am black; astonishment hath taken hold on me” (Jeremiah 8:21)?

Can you say as God's child that your backsliding has cut bitter furrows in your life—furrows of pain and sorrow in the depths of your soul? Does it cut your soul into a thousand pieces before the Lord? Does it make you to cry out in spiritual anguish, "O Lord, what a fool, what a backsliding wretch I am! If only I could tear out my heart and cast it far from me! I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes!" Join with Jeremiah in saying, "Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!" (Jeremiah 9:1). Only when godly sorrow brings you to such a point can you take the first step toward the healing of your backsliding.



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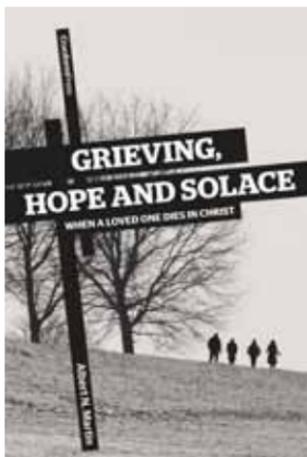
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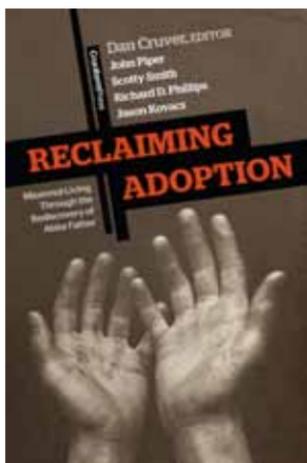
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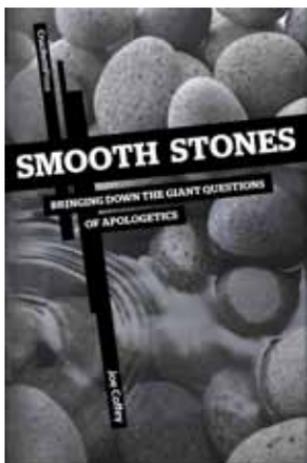
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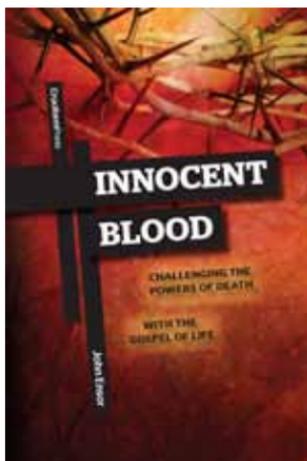
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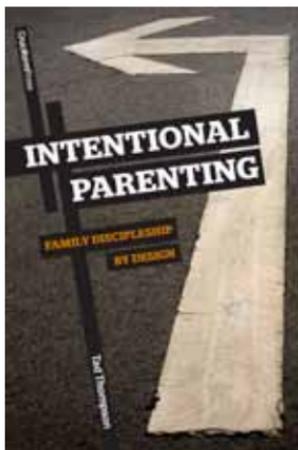
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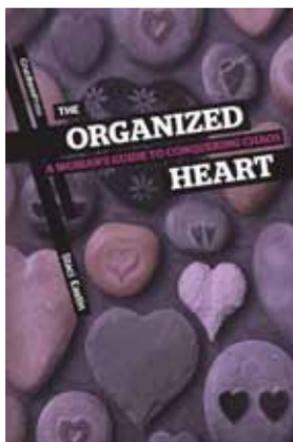
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You don't need more rules, the latest technique, or a new gadget.

This book will show you a different, better way. A way grounded in the grace of God.

"Staci Eastin packs a gracious punch, full of insights about our disorganized hearts and lives, immediately followed by the balm of gospel-shaped hopes. This book is ideal for accountability partners and small groups."

Carolyn McCulley, blogger, filmmaker, author of Radical Womanhood and Did I Kiss Marriage Goodbye?

"Unless we understand the spiritual dimension of productivity, our techniques will ultimately backfire. Find that dimension here. Encouraging and uplifting rather than guilt-driven, this book can help women who want to be more organized but know that adding a new method is not enough."

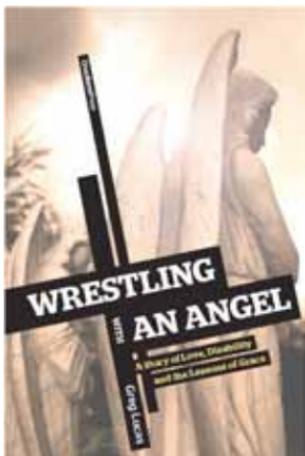
Matt Perman, Director of Strategy at Desiring God, blogger, author of the forthcoming book, What's Best Next: How the Gospel Transforms the Way You Get Things Done

"Organizing a home can be an insurmountable challenge for a woman. The Organized Heart makes a unique connection between idols of the heart and the ability to run a well-managed home. This is not a how-to. Eastin looks at sin as the root problem of disorganization. She offers a fresh new approach and one I recommend, especially to those of us who have tried all the other self-help models and failed."

Aileen Challies, Mom of three, and wife of blogger, author, and pastor Tim Challies

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[Wrestling with an Angel](#)

A Story of Love, Disability
and the Lessons of Grace

by Greg Lucas

The riveting, inspiring true story that readers have called “a touchstone book of my life,” and “alternately hilarious and heartbreaking,” a book that “turns the diamond of grace in such a way that you see facets you never really noticed before.”

“C.S. Lewis wrote that he paradoxically loved *The Lord of the Rings* because it ‘broke his heart’— and Greg Lucas’ writing does the same for me.”

Justin Taylor, Managing Editor, ESV Study Bible

“Witty... stunning... striking... humorous and heartfelt. *Wrestling with an Angel* provides a fresh, honest look at one father’s struggle to embrace God in the midst of his son’s disability. Can sheer laughter and weeping gracefully coexist in a world of so much affliction? Greg knows all about it. I highly recommend this wonderfully personal book!”

Joni Eareckson Tada, Joni and Friends International

“You will laugh; you will cry. You will feel sick; you will feel inspired. You will be repulsed by the ugliness of sin; you will be overwhelmed by the love of God. Greg Lucas takes us on an unforgettable ride as he extracts the most beautiful insights into grace from the most painful experiences of life.”

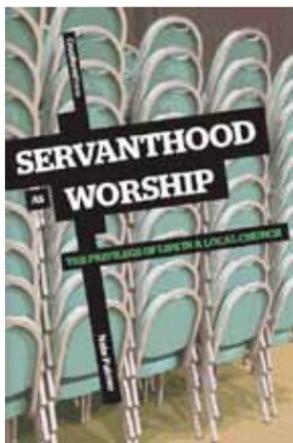
David P. Murray, Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary

“Greg Lucas is a captivating storyteller. When he writes about life with Jake, I recognize God’s grace and loving persistence in my life. I want more!”

Noël Piper, author, and wife of pastor and author John Piper

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[Servanthood as Worship](#)

The Privilege of Life in a Local Church

by Nate Palmer

We [serve] because he first [served] us. - 1 John 1:19 [sort of]

What ever happened to servanthood? Here is a biblical presentation of our calling to serve in the church, motivated by the grace that is ours in the gospel.

“In an age where the church can be likened to Cinderella – beautiful, but largely ignored and forgotten – Nate Palmer’s brief book forces us to rethink both the church and our relationship to her. In an age where egocentrism ensures we sing, ‘O say, can you see – what’s in it for me?’ on a weekly basis, Palmer forces us to say instead, ‘How can I best serve the church?’ Looking at the needs of others rather than one’s own is possibly the most serious deficiency in the church today. Reading this book will help redress the deficiency. I heartily recommend it.”

***Derek W.H. Thomas, Professor of Theology
Reformed Theological Seminary (Jackson)***

“Think of these pages as a handbook. It contains a sustainable, practical vision for serving in the local church that is powered by grace. Along the way, you’ll get a mini theological education.”

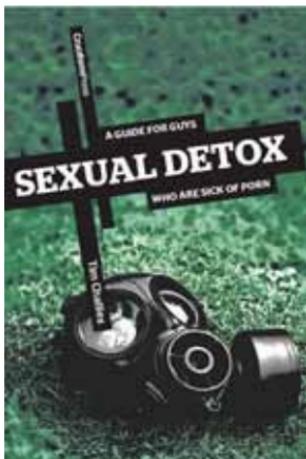
Justin Buzzard, pastor, San Francisco Bay Area, Buzzard Blog

“In our media-crazed, me-first culture, the art of the basin and the towel has been shoved off onto those who get paid to serve – certainly a call to serve in humility can’t be God’s will for all of us, or could it? Nate Palmer gets at the heart of our resistance. I strongly recommend this book.”

Elyse Fitzpatrick, author of Because He Loves Me

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[Sexual Detox](#)

A Guide for Guys Who Are Sick of Porn

by Tim Challies

“In an age when sex is worshiped as a god, a little book like this can go a long way to helping men overcome sexual addiction.”

**-Pastor Mark Driscoll
Mars Hill Church
Acts 29**

“Online pornography is not just a problem for Christian men; it is THE problem. Many men, young and old, in our churches need *Sexual Detox*. Challies offers practical, doable and, above all, gospel-centered hope for men. I want every man I serve and all the guys on our staff to read this book.”

Tedd Tripp, Pastor, and author of *Shepherding a Child's Heart*

“Tim Challies strikes just the right balance in this necessary work. His assessment of the sexual epidemic in our culture is sober but not without hope. His advice is practical but avoids a checklist mentality. His discussion of sexual sin is frank without being inappropriate. This book will be a valuable resource.”

Kevin DeYoung, Pastor and author

“Thank God for using Tim to articulate simply and unashamedly the truth about sex amidst a culture of permissiveness. Read it and believe it.”

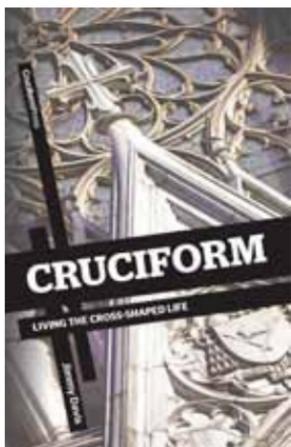
Ben Zobrist, Tampa Bay Rays

“*Sexual Detox* is just what we need. It is clear, honest, and biblical, written with a tone that is knowing but kind, exhortative but gracious, realistic but determined. We have been given by Tim Challies a terrific resource for fighting sin and exalting Christ.

Owen Strachan, Boyce College

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[Cruciform](#)

Living the Cross-Shaped Life

by Jimmy Davis

This is the shape of the gospel.

“Jimmy Davis loves the cross. This little book will open your heart up to see how the cross is the center of all of life. Well done.”

– **Paul Miller, Director of seeJesus.net, author of *A Praying Life***

“Jimmy Davis shows us how to cut through the fog of contemporary Christian thinking to recover the Savior’s plan for our lives.”

T.M. Moore, Dean, Chuck Colson’s Centurions Program

“Jimmy shows from personal experience how a lack of passion and purpose, focus and fervor, compassion and conviction, is always due to distance from the now-power of the gospel. I pray that through this book you will rediscover the beauty and brilliance of the gospel in brand new ways.”

Tullian Tchividjian, Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church

“*Cruciform* is a theologically grounded and redemptively freeing picture of a life spent boasting in the cross of Jesus.”

Scotty Smith, Christ Community Church

“

This book will be a help to everyone struggling with ‘Why, God?’ I believe every person planning for, and serving, in a place of Christian ministry should read this book.”

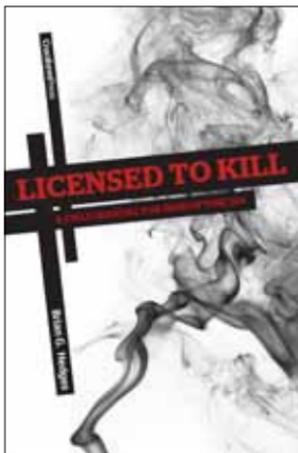
Dr. Brian Richardson, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

“This is a terrific book for those breakfast discipleship groups. It is the next one I am going to use.”

Dr. William E. Brown, President, Cedarville University

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[Licensed to Kill](#)

A Field Manual for Mortifying Sin

by Brian G. Hedges

**Your soul is a war zone.
Know your enemy.
Learn to fight.**

“A faithful, smart, Word-centered guide.”

- **Wes Ward, Revive Our Hearts**

“Are there things you hate that you end up doing anyway? Have you tried to stop sinning in certain areas of your life, only to face defeat over and over again? If you’re ready to get serious about sin patterns in your life—ready to put sin to death instead of trying to manage it—this book outlines the only strategy that works. This is a book I will return to and regularly recommend to others.”

Bob Lepine, Co-Host, FamilyLife Today

“Brian Hedges shows the importance of fighting the sin that so easily entangles us and robs us of our freedom, by fleeing to the finished work of Christ every day. Well done!”

Tullian Tchividjian, Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church; author, Jesus + Nothing = Everything

“Rather than aiming at simple moral reformation, *Licensed to Kill* aims at our spiritual transformation. Like any good field manual, this one focuses on the most critical information regarding our enemy, and gives practical instruction concerning the stalking and killing of sin. This is a theologically solid and helpfully illustrated book that holds out the gospel confidence of sin’s ultimate demise.”

Joe Thorn, pastor and author, Note to Self: The Discipline of Preaching to Yourself

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