



Eyes Wide Open

See and Live the Real You



Jud Wilhite
With Bill Taaffe

Praise for
Uncensored Grace
by Jud Wilhite and William Taaffe

“In *Uncensored Grace*, Jud Wilhite holds nothing back as he describes the life-changing power of God’s forgiveness as it’s encountered on the streets of Vegas. Wherever lives hurt, God’s grace is present with more than enough power to heal.”

—RICK WARREN, founding pastor of Saddleback Church
and author of *The Purpose Driven Life*

“What happens in Vegas just went public! *Uncensored* is full of surprises and twists. It will captivate and inspire you as it describes the difference Jesus can make in your life.”

—LEE STROBEL, author of *The Case for Christ*

“What God is up to in Vegas is nothing short of hardcore. Jud describes an extreme faith that is extremely amazing. With clarity and passion, *Uncensored Grace* offers a renewed sense of hope for whatever you are up against. Don’t miss this book.”

—STEPHEN BALDWIN, actor and author of *The Unusual Suspect*

“Jud Wilhite is a compelling new voice and model for a new way to be Christian in today’s culture.”

—GABE LYONS, founder of Fermi Project and cofounder
of Catalyst

“Reading *Uncensored Grace* will open your eyes to the wonders of God’s saving love. It will give you hope that, no matter where you are in your ‘process,’ God is at work—and He is for you.”

—CRAIG GROESCHEL, pastor of Lifechurch.tv, and author of *Chazown* and *Confessions of a Pastor*

“*Uncensored Grace* is filled with stories God must love!”

—JOHN ORTBERG, pastor at Menlo Park Presbyterian Church in California

“If you’ve given up dreams of ever finding a genuine fresh start in your life you ought to read this book. Real people. Real problems. Real hope. Get ready to be rocked by a fresh touch of amazing grace.”

—GENE APPEL, lead pastor, Willow Creek Community Church, South Barrington, Illinois

“*Uncensored Grace* brings the brutal truth and the message of redemptive grace front and center. I was deeply moved and so inspired by these powerful and provocative stories of God’s mercy. *Uncensored Grace* will transform your faith as you get a glimpse of how Jesus has set up shop on the streets of sin city.”

—MIKE FOSTER, president of Ethur.org and founder of XXXchurch

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INTRODUCTION

I've always been freakish about my eyes. If anything or anyone gets close to them, I flinch, duck, or awkwardly step away. I can't wear contacts. I can't even put eye drops directly into my eyes. Instead, I have to put the drops on my eyelids and blink them in. Pretty pathetic, I know. If my friends want to gross me out, all they have to do is reach up and touch their eyes, and I'm done. Let's just say LASIK surgery isn't in my future.

One of the most traumatizing movies I've ever seen is *Minority Report*, in which people in the future are subjected to iris scans wherever they go. Tom Cruise's character even secretly gets his eyes replaced by a surgeon in order to avoid detection. I'll never forget sitting in the theater watching that scene, one eye closed and the other barely open, begging director Steven Spielberg to stop.

Metaphorically, this book is about getting a new set of eyes to see differently.

Don't worry; there are no iris scans or black-market eye surgeons involved. But we will explore what it means to live with eyes wide open, to embrace God's view instead of our own.

Too many of us live with a distorted perspective of God. We see God as an all-powerful police officer aiming His speed gun at us. We believe that God loves; we just aren't convinced at the core of our being that He loves *us*. We think He's good, but we're acutely aware

We will explore what it means to live with eyes wide open, to embrace God's view instead of our own.

that *we* aren't. No matter how many messages we hear about grace, we wonder if we are forgiven. And we either jump on the performance treadmill to try and earn God's love, or we wallow in guilt and condemnation. Perhaps we run from the God thing altogether.

This distorted perspective also affects how we see ourselves. We look in the mirror, and instead of seeing one loved and forgiven by God, created in His image, empowered to influence the world for Him, we see something else. We see images from the past. Maybe it's the parent who was always critical of us, the schoolyard bully who picked on us, or the boss who laid us off still popping up in our memories. We play the destructive video clip over and over in our minds and come to the same conclusion: *I'm a failure...fat... insignificant...ugly...worthless...dumb...hopeless...unworthy... unloved...a nobody.*

If this sounds familiar to you, then I need to warn you about something: Distorted images are not only shaping your perspective but are also hindering your possibilities. If you see yourself as insignificant long enough, you'll start to act accordingly. If you see yourself as ugly or worthless, it will affect how you relate to your family and friends, your God, and your world. Rather than grow and change as you could, you'll be tempted to give in or give up or stay in a holding pattern of self-destructive behavior. Rather than make your own unique contribution in the world, you may pull back and settle for mediocrity. But this is not the real you.

Embracing God's perspective of you—living with eyes wide open—is so important because it allows you to become the person God created you to be. Not the you your critics claim you are. Not

the you who pretends to be perfect in order to satisfy others' expectations. Not the you who feels guilty before God about your past and who lives with chronic spiritual remorse. Not the you who looks in the mirror and sees a failure.

The real you emerges as you see differently, *biblically*. You see yourself in light of who God says you are in His written Word. This is the first part of the adventure, but it doesn't end there. Then you begin to live out of this recognition. You are empowered to make the changes in your life that God desires you to make and to influence your world more fully for Him.

This is what *Eyes Wide Open* is all about. So welcome—this message is for you.

I've been on a journey of God-discovery and self-discovery for the past twenty years as a follower of Jesus.

Eyes Wide Open began as I sat down with my journal and reflected on the most transforming principles that helped me move from being broken and hurting, with a distorted view of God and myself, to healing and growing as the real me.

The real you emerges as you see yourself in light of who God says you are in His written Word.

As I've taught these principles to thousands of people, I've been humbled by the response. Some of the most "together" people I know have admitted to going through incredible struggles to accept God's grace, to see themselves with their new identity in Christ, and to make an impact in the world as a result of that. One of the greatest joys of my life has been to see them look

at God and themselves with new eyes, freed to discover the person God designed them to be.

I'm excited to think about how this same message, conveyed through this book, can have the same transforming effect on *you*. An adventure of discovery and risk awaits you. I consider it a privilege to be your guide.

In the following pages, we'll look in much more depth at what it means to see and live with eyes wide open. For now, let me give you some glimpses of what you can expect.

- *Wide open to God.* Part 1 of this book looks at how God sees us and explores the awesome dimensions of His love and grace. We'll be challenged to move beyond clichés and feel-good spirituality and to internalize what it means to see God as a loving Father who is for us and has bound Himself to us by a spiritual agreement. Receiving His uncensored grace frees us to become the person He desires.
- *Wide open to identity.* Part 2 looks at the new identity the Bible declares we have. In the Christian community, we focus a lot on practical expressions of faith, such as prayer or service, but not enough on our position "in Christ" from which these practical expressions flow. So here we'll see how important our new identity is and discover that we are chosen and hidden in Christ. We'll learn the power of seeing ourselves as a priest, saint, and servant *now*, even if we don't always act as such.
- *Wide open to change.* Part 3 looks at how we come to express our new identity in everyday life. No matter where we're

starting from, we can morph into the person God desires. This transformation does not mean we will come to look less like our own selves and more like everyone else. It means, instead, that we will more fully become the unique creation God made us to be.

- *Wide open to influence.* Part 4 looks at the importance of fulfilling the role in the world that God calls us to. We aren't fully ourselves until we are making the impact God desires for us to make. By embracing His view of us and living out of that, we can affect culture for the good and bring a little heaven to earth.

In the adventure you're about to undertake, you'll learn to see yourself as God created you—the real you, without pretense or playacting. This doesn't mean you'll have it all worked out by the end. You may still feel like a mess (just as I do at times). But now, as someone has put it, you'll be *God's mess*. And He has wonderful things in store for you.

Choose to see yourself from God's point of view. Sure, you're flawed, but you're also deeply loved. You're on a journey, and you're being changed into the person God created you to be.

Ready now? Open your eyes.

Part 1

WIDE OPEN TO GOD

Chapter 1

SEEING GOD CLEARLY

I once lost my glasses while running late for an appointment. I'm nearsighted, so I can see okay up close with or without my glasses. But if I get twenty or thirty feet away, forget it.

So here I was, looking all over the house, trying to find my glasses. I looked in the bedroom. I looked downstairs in the kitchen. I looked in my study. I was getting frustrated and angry, and then I went around the corner and saw my wife, Lori.

"You have to help me," I told her. "I'm running late and I can't find my glasses."

She looked at me with a puzzled stare and said, "Jud, they're on your face. You are *wearing* your glasses."

All I could say was "Uh...I am?" (I also had a fleeting thought that I'll be headed to a rubber room one day soon!)

The amazing thing is that we are looking for what we already have, if only we had eyes to see it.

How foolish is that? I searched desperately for something right under, or rather *on*, my nose. But I'm not alone in this oddity.

We often look for what is right in front of us. We search for something to declare that our life has value. We look for someone to

love us no matter how many indiscretions we've committed or what a mess we've made of our lives. We seek respect, validation, and significance. We run on a speeding approval treadmill, but it's never enough. And the amazing thing is that we are looking for what we already have, if only we had eyes to see it.

For years after I came to faith in Jesus Christ, I struggled to believe that God cared about me. I felt as if I had done so many bad things in my life that God could never fully accept me. No matter what I did, a small, quiet voice would come back and say, *Oh, you are just a mess, Jud. You're never going to amount to anything.*

I jumped through all the right religious hoops and went above and beyond to prove things to myself and others. Yet I'd still hear these thoughts: *Who are you kidding? Get real, man. You have too much stuff in your past.*

I was very aware of my abysmal failure to live up to God's standards on my own. I was worn out from trying to be good enough. I had buried the person God made me to be in order to fit the mold of what I perceived a Christian was.

All of it was part of my search for acceptance. But it wasn't working. I loved God, but it felt as if I was always performing for Him. I felt like a fake and sensed that God was as weary of the performance as I was.

I became so frustrated that I finally sat down and prayed, *God, I quit. If we're going to have any kind of relationship, it is up to You. I can't do this anymore.* And I was serious.

Maybe you can relate. Many people walk around feeling like spiritual failures.

Like the guy who said he loved Jesus but couldn't be a Christian. What is *that* about? After all, one would presume that the definition of a Christian is somebody who loves Jesus.

So this guy was asked, "How would you define a Christian?"

He said, "A Christian is someone who has his stuff together."

Really?

You know what I feel like sometimes? Like those fifteen-year-old pickup trucks you sometimes see rolling down the highway, loaded to the max with paint buckets and ladders and rakes and toolboxes and junk and a roll of unsecured carpet about to fall off and hit some innocent car right in the grille.

Christians have their stuff together—r-i-i-g-h-t.

I don't even try to pretend I have my stuff together anymore. But back when I was still thinking that I had to make myself worthy of God's love, my frustration continued to grow. Then one day I heard a talk from the Bible, where it says, "This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins."¹

I saw the key to living with my eyes wide open. I surrendered my view of myself and embraced God's view of me.

After the talk, I hurried out the door and went to a quiet place. The impact of this Bible passage floored me. For the first time, God's love began to sink in with all its implications. Somehow, in that act of giving up

my personal quest for God's approval, I finally saw what had been there all along. And what I saw flipped my faith experience right-side up. It impacted every aspect of my relationships with others and changed my future. I saw the key to living with my eyes wide open. *I surrendered my view of myself and embraced God's view of me.*

I'd had it all backward. I was putting so much pressure on myself to earn God's love, but it was already there. While I had known this in my head, I had not accepted it in my heart.

The main thing is not my love for God but His love for me. And from that love I respond to God as one deeply flawed yet loved. I'm not looking to prove my worth. I'm not searching for acceptance. I'm responding from the worth God has already declared I have. And it isn't based on how I feel; it is based on His own promise and revelation in the Bible.

I don't have to act like someone else. Now I am free to become fully myself, the unique person God created me to be. My eyes opened wide.

How about you? Are you trying to perform so that God will love you? Are you working hard to keep all the plates spinning? Can you admit that it isn't working? Are you worn out and ready to quit?

I mean, do you believe deep down inside that God already loves you? Not your friend or your neighbor or the world in general, but *you*? Not your potential or your performance, not your achievements or your awards, not your title or your position, but *you*, right now, in the mess and mire of your life? Not in some trite sense, but in a deeply personal, real way?

Do you believe that God loves you when your prayers are weak? When your faith falters? When you lust after the guy or girl walking down the street? When you aren't sure of anything?

Do you believe that He loves you when you blatantly disregard His principles to serve a selfish desire?

Do you believe, deep inside, that there is nothing you could do to cause Him to love you less?

I'm not surprised at people's reactions when I ask these questions. Most often people look down, avoid eye contact, and voice either an unconvinced yes or a blatant no. Many fall back on the right churchy answer about God's

love—in theory at least. But when it comes to internalizing it, most seem to feel anything but loved.

Living with eyes wide open means you don't have to be better looking, lose weight, wear different clothes, or achieve one more thing in your career. You don't have to climb the ladder one more notch or accomplish another goal. You matter just as you are. You are an incredible spiritual being because that's how God created you.

Can you see it?

Living with eyes wide open means you don't have to be better looking, lose weight, wear different clothes, or achieve one more thing in your career. You matter just as you are.