

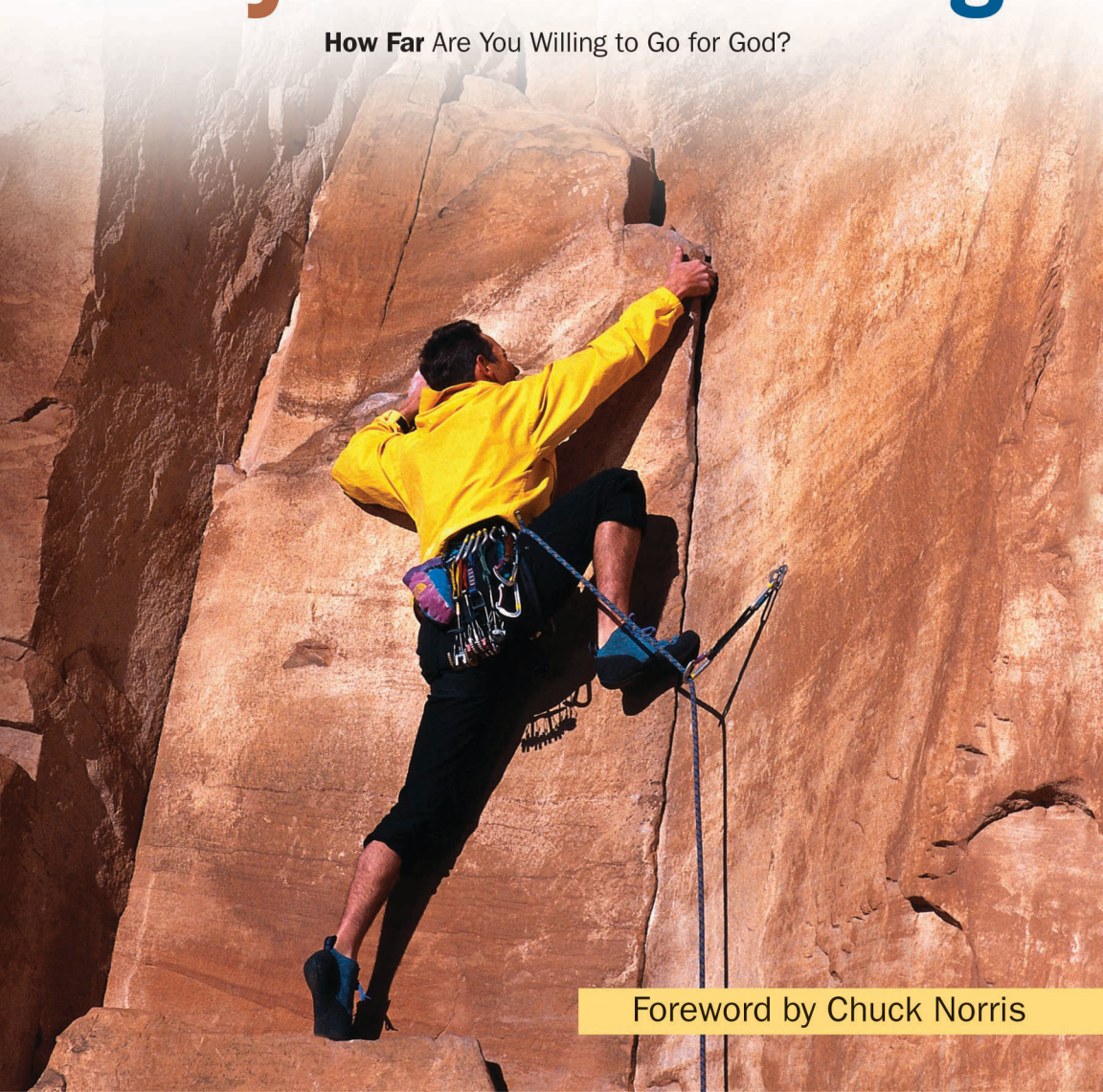
the
everyman
series

spiritual growth

Stephen Arterburn
Fred Stoeker with Mike Yorkey

every man's challenge

How Far Are You Willing to Go for God?



Foreword by Chuck Norris

Stephen Arterburn
Fred Stoeker with Mike Yorkey

every man's challenge

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WATERBROOK
P R E S S

EVERY MAN'S CHALLENGE
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To my loving Father,
who teaches me to say no to ungodliness as I wait for my blessed hope.



To Brenda,
I do so love being married to you. What a smile!



To Laura and Rebecca,
my cherished daughters and my very worthy sisters in the Lord.
Oh, how I love your laughter!

contents

Foreword by Chuck Norris	ix
Acknowledgments	xi
Introduction	1
Part I: Life on the Other Side of Sexual Purity	11
1. Friend of the Seeker	13
2. Red Flags	19
3. Being Normal	23
4. Onboard Terrorist	27
Part II: Choosing Obedience and Transformation	33
5. The Spiritual Front and the Fleshly Front	35
6. Go Ahead and Knock It Off	40
7. Kevin's Battle	44
8. Heavy Metal	48
9. The Death of Temptation	52
10. The Birth of His Trust	57
11. A Man of the Word	62
12. He Obeyed	70
Part III: A Fresh View of Sin	73
13. Calling Sin, Sin	79
14. Calling Faux, Faux	84
15. Personal Convictions	88
16. Contextual Sin	93
17. Painting Pictures	98

Part IV: Sophistication Versus Sanctification	105
18. Sophistication I	107
19. Sophistication II	113
20. Trampling Her Bed	117
21. Desires and Appetites	123
22. Sex with the Tent	126
Part V: Spiritual Intimacy Blooms	133
23. Anchoring Our Victory	137
24. Prayer's Starting Gun	140
25. The Ten Prayer Chillers I	145
26. The Ten Prayer Chillers II	149
27. When Prayer Became Good	152
28. A Band of Brothers Going AWOL	158
29. You Own the Field	163
Part VI: A Fresh View of Marriage	169
30. Are You Listening?	173
31. Nagging Is Her Job	177
32. It's Not About You	181
33. Storm Warning	186
34. Plank in the Eye	189
Part VII: Intimate Parenthood	193
35. You Are a Proverb	197
36. There Will Be a Day	201
37. How Far Will You Go for God?	205
38. Daring Devos	210
39. Dad on Parade	215
40. Loving God	220

foreword

What the world needs is . . .

Go ahead. Fill in the blank. We hear all sorts of suggestions nowadays: We need a new kind of gizmo...a bigger, better, faster, less expensive whatever. Some say the world needs more love, and no doubt that it does. Some claim the world is longing for peace, and who could argue with that?

Personally, I believe that the world is looking for a few good men. Not simply men in uniform who will defend our country's freedom or respond in emergencies, but men who will live every day clothed with noble character, integrity, and a willingness to lay down their lives for what is right. Men who can laugh, love, and lead; men who are tough enough to stand against evil; men who are tender enough to listen and to learn; men who are strong enough to weep unashamedly.

Growing up as a boy in a small rural town in Oklahoma, I spent many of my Saturday afternoons at the movies watching men like John Wayne, Gene Autry, and Roy Rogers. Those cowboy heroes offered a lot to a young boy longing for a male role model to emulate. Their behavior in the films was governed by the "Code of the West": loyalty, friendship, and integrity. Their celluloid images provided me with positive examples of proper and moral behavior. Truth is, apart from my mother and Granny, my only role models were the cowboy heroes I saw on the screen. Unfortunately, my own father was a negative role model, the kind of person I didn't want to be, a bad example to be avoided.

But each time I walked out of the theater, I felt encouraged by the belief that men of character actually existed. I determined that I would grow up one day to be like my cowboy heroes. They were courageous, unselfish, unswerving in their faith and commitments, and did what was right even when the risk was great. Years later I would recall those Western

heroes when I developed the kind of character I wanted to play as an actor, first in the movies, and then for eight years in the television series *Walker, Texas Ranger*.

In *Every Man's Challenge*, the authors encourage men to pursue those same kinds of qualities. In no-nonsense language, they cut through the clutter and get right to the heart of the issues facing men today. More important, the book offers practical, down-to-earth principles that will help you not only overcome temptations common to all men but develop a relationship with God that will overflow to everyone around you.

You may be shocked or even offended by what you discover within these pages. But I guarantee that, above all, you will be challenged.

—CHUCK NORRIS
actor, producer, and author of
Against All Odds: My Story

i n t r o d u c t i o n

I felt the electric anticipation as Dave Roeber stepped toward the pulpit that Sunday evening. His presence prompted long-dormant passions to bubble inside me, not because of his great evangelist heart, but because he was a Vietnam vet, one of a vast army of American heroes from my childhood days. I grew up adoring soldiers and playing army in my bedroom and around the neighborhood. When I grew older I pored over newspapers for every scrap of military news I could find.

Funny thing, though. As much as I respected and revered those in uniform who served our country, I had never heard a combat veteran speak publicly about his experiences. When I learned that Dave Roeber would be speaking at my church, however, I circled the date on the calendar. I wasn't going to miss out on this!

When Dave stepped to the pulpit and turned to face us, my emotions were doused by the reality of what that ugly conflict had done to his body: Dave's disfigurements—heavy skin grafts on the right side of his face and a mouth that was slightly askew—were gut-wrenching to look at. When he set his heavily grafted right hand on the pulpit, however, joy radiated from every skin-grafted cell in his body. My emotions soared as Dave began peeling his story layer by rich layer.

Dave began by describing how he was raised in a godly home, and as high-school graduation loomed in the late sixties, he fervently believed the Lord was calling him into some type of ministry position. Then he received a fateful draft notice in the mail: Uncle Sam was beckoning him to the army. There was a war in Southeast Asia, and tens of thousands of able-bodied young men, eighteen and up, were told they had to go.

Dave wasn't the draft-dodger type. He underwent special-warfare training at the Amphibious Training Center in Coronado, just across the bay

from San Diego, and followed that up with more instruction in Northern California at Mare Island's Naval Inshore Operations Training Center. He was trained for riverine warfare, providing transport and standby fire support for Special Forces like the Navy SEALs. Part of the elite Brown Water, Black Berets in the U.S. Navy, Dave and his fellow soldiers were called PBRs, letters that stood for *proud*, *brave*, and *reliable* because of their fierce, dedicated service. As you might expect from someone who was a passionate Christian, Dave threw his whole heart into his combat training.

When Dave arrived in Vietnam he encountered much more than a war zone. Pornography was everywhere, and R and R for his buddies was a whirlwind of bars, booze, and brothels. The army personnel swore like, well, sailors on leave.

Committing his heart to God, Dave promised to continue seeking after Him and carrying on his devotions and prayer time no matter what. Though Dave expected no one to join him, the last thing he expected was that he would come under friendly fire for taking that stand.

When he read his Bible at night, he was often mocked in the barracks. When he knelt to pray beside his bed, spit rained down on him from the upper bunks. Two men in his unit were especially abusive, pestering him endlessly for his faith. But Dave walked resolutely before God—proud, brave, and reliable.

One bright morning his unit scurried through their work on several rickety river docks deep in the jungle. Suddenly they came under withering fire from the Vietcong. Amid the chaos soldiers scrambled to find cover and direct fire on the enemy.

The rat-a-tat sounds of machine-gun fire and exploding grenades shattered the calm. Dave grabbed a white phosphorous grenade and pulled the pin. Phosphorous grenades aren't your standard-issue grenade. Phosphorous burns with hellish intensity, and water can't put it out. When the burning shrapnel of this horrible weapon pierces the skin, the phosphorous often burns and smolders painfully inside the wound for days.

Dave scampered to put himself in position to lob the grenade at the enemy, but before he could toss it, the grenade exploded six inches from his head, blowing away part of his face and his right hand. Phosphorous splattered across his wounds in scorching, blistering fury. One of the men who had spit on him watched in horror as Dave stumbled in agony and fell into the river, knowing full well the water would not cool his wounds. He watched frantically for Dave to surface again.

Meanwhile, writhing in silent screams beneath the surface, Dave strained for a foothold on the river's bottom as his face burned further away. Launching himself from the muddy bottom with all his might, he burst through the surface, gulped some air, and screamed, "Jesus, I still love You!"

As Dave fell back beneath the waves, the watching soldier was stricken deeply, scrambling instantly to his knees to give his heart to the Lord in the midst of that fierce firefight.

What a witness! Tears flowed from my eyes when I heard his story. *What if that had been me? Would I have responded like that? Would I still have praised God while experiencing excruciating pain?*

In a sense Dave experienced a spiritual pop quiz that fateful morning in Vietnam. You remember pop quizzes from high school: They are a diabolical truth serum used by evil teachers to expose your knowledge (or lack of it) of material you should have studied. You find out how you're doing in class. If the grades are posted, *everyone* finds out how you're doing.

God loves pop quizzes too, but He doesn't use them to test our knowledge. Instead, He tests our character. We get to see what we're really made of, and often those around us get to see it too.

That's what happened in Dave Roever's case, and I have to say, he passed with flying colors, helping to save another man's soul in the process.

I'd been thinking about pop quizzes at the time because I'd just finished a series in a Sunday-morning marriage class that I taught with Brenda. That morning I had shared a pop-quiz story that had happened to me early in

our marriage. To set the scene, two years of staggering in-law problems had taken its toll, and our marriage was quickly wilting away.

One Valentine's Day I went to a Hallmark store to buy a card. That's what husbands are supposed to do, right? While rummaging through the card rack, I was hit by one of God's pop quizzes.

Fingering through dozens of cards, I read the texts. One by one I returned them to the rack. I judged them to be too mushy, too contrived, or too romantic. Little by little, panic settled in as I sensed the inevitable. I could not find one Valentine card in the store that I could give Brenda with any measure of sincerity. Our romance was dead, and our marriage was on life support.

Head down, I scurried from the store, recognizing the depth of our loss. My grade on the quiz? Sickening!

But while I flunked that time, my eyes had been opened, and I knew where I stood. I had some character work to do, and it was time to start "studying" my wife.

Still, such quizzes pale next to Dave Roever's. Dave's torturing quiz touched my deepest chords of sympathy, but I considered him lucky, too. He took the ultimate pop quiz and aced it. Most of us never even get to take the quiz.

I mulled over Dave's quiz many times during the next two years. *How would I have done? Man, I'd like to know!* While I didn't relish the thought of pulling the pin on a phosphorous grenade, I wanted to pass some kind of test. I knew in my heart that I'd rather take that test and fail than never be tested at all. One November morning I rolled out of bed to shower and shave, not knowing that examination day was upon me.

I'll never forget that afternoon when the crisp air and sparkling blue sky arched over Iowa. I was tooling along West Des Moines' Eighth Avenue to deliver a package to a client. For some forgotten reason, I was driving Brenda's midnight blue Chevy station wagon that day, the one with the country-squire wood panels that made her feel like Mrs. Brady. But I dearly

loved that car, and as with any guy driving a great car on a gorgeous afternoon, everything seemed right in the world. Business was good, and my third child, Rebecca, had just been born two weeks earlier. She was the cutest little Gerber baby on the planet.

Heading south, I approached a familiar intersection: Quality Ford on the left and Jimmy's All-American Café on the right. I glanced down at the speedometer—thirty-five miles per hour—perfect, right on the nose. Things were smooth as a quiet lake on a sweltering midsummer eve.

Suddenly a brand-new, full-sized pickup swerved in front of me. I don't know how he missed seeing me, but he did. Everything happened in a flash. My right foot hit the brake at the instant of impact, locking my knee just in time for the full jamming impact. My shoulder strap failed to catch, and as my upper body flew forward, my left thumb caught the steering wheel, cracking the bone and snapping the ligaments that held it in place. My chest slammed into the steering wheel, which folded like a cheap accordion against the dash. We had collided nearly head-on, and the impact was equivalent to hitting a brick wall at sixty-five miles per hour.

Slumping back against my seat in a stunned, listless daze, I murmured a swear word. Almost at once, sirens whined in the distance. I was amazed at the superhuman response time. "Man, these guys are good," I said to myself.

The light began to fade to gray, and my spirit began to slip away. I felt the moorings of my soul letting go, like the ropes of a great ship loosening and slipping from the pilings of a dock. Everything was so peaceful, so easy, so natural. I remember feeling quite surprised that I felt no trace of doubt. I knew exactly where I was heading—to heaven—and I had no fear. Rolling my head back in that peaceful moment, I remember thinking, *Death isn't such a big deal at all. It's really kind of nice.*

But then, for no apparent reason, my spirit cried out. I began to pray, *Lord, I've done nothing for You yet. I want so much to stay here and do something for You. And, Lord, I want to raise my kids for You and make sure they are okay. They are so young, and I have so much to teach them. I want so badly*

to know them, and I love Brenda, and she'll be so alone, and now that we have everything working between us, I want to know her and love her and be the husband You wanted me to be.

My prayers intensified. *Please, Lord, I want to live and serve You here. I don't want to come to heaven empty-handed, with nothing to give You. This all feels so wonderful right now, and I really do want to see You, but I'm not ready to go. Please give me a chance to get You something. Please let me live.*

As quickly as they had begun to slip, the moorings began to tighten again. A new and different peace settled over me. Having long ago memorized a number of hymns during my battle for sexual purity, I now began to praise Him, softly singing hymns in worship.

A female paramedic ripped the door open and, surveying the scene, knew there was no time to lose. She later said that she *knew* I'd never make it to the hospital alive. She'd seen this same situation many times before: My face was ashen gray from the massive internal bleeding in the chest cavity. A check of my blood pressure did nothing to dissuade her. She and other paramedics worked frantically as we sped away, and I heard her call ahead to alert the trauma surgeons. They would have to open my chest immediately upon my arrival at the hospital.

I simply lay there softly singing hymns under my breath and in total peace. The paramedics quickly rolled me into the emergency room. A witness had called Brenda from the accident scene, so she arrived at about the same time I did. A chaplain met her at the door...the same chaplain who'd already put an arm around a young wife earlier that day and told her that her husband didn't make it. He fully expected he'd have to do the same with Brenda.

Pam Behnke, Brenda's best friend, also arrived to lend support. As head of the heart unit at the hospital, she knew the surgeons and had heard the paramedics' fears. She wanted to be there when the chaplain broke the news.

I don't remember much from those first moments in the emergency room. My most vivid memory is staring into the bright lights of the ceiling

when suddenly the stricken face of my dear friend Dave Johnson poked into view. He was so scared. He's such a man's man, and I'd never seen him like that. I remember Brenda hovering so tenderly over me with terror in her eyes. Pam stood by, of course. My pastor, Ray Henderson, came by. Everyone was frightened.

But the moorings held fast. The Lord had heard my prayer, and there would be no surgery. A severe blow to the chest can cause a temporary severe drop in blood pressure and traumatic shock, but in my case, there was no internal bleeding. Two hours later I walked out of the hospital under my own power.

I still had a busted thumb that would have to be taken care of. Several days later doctors inserted a pin and wrapped my hand in a cast. The coughs and sneezes that wracked my bruised ribs drove me batty, but I wasn't complaining: I had lived through a life-and-death test.

Looking back, did I ace this exam like Dave Roeover? Heavens, no! He beat me hands-down. Remember my reaction to the sudden crash? I muttered a swearword. That hardly ranks with "Jesus, I still love You!" Evidently swearing had not been totally eliminated after eight years of being a Christian.

But that's secondary to what I really learned from the accident. If I were wondering what I was really made of as a Christian deep down, now I knew.

I knew that I loved my wife and kids enough to give up the peace of heaven for their sake, and I knew more than ever that I wanted them to grow up in the knowledge of Christ.

That's what pop quizzes and big final exams do: They tell you what you're made of when the chips are down. They challenge you and prove you.

I can't arrange life's twists and turns to test you—only God can do that. But I can share scriptures that will challenge you like pop quizzes straight from God.

Every Man's Challenge has forty "quizzes" comprised of scriptures, stories, and quiz questions to help you to grow in your sanctification in Christ over forty days. My coauthor, Steve Arterburn, and I hope you pass every one.

Why forty days? Spans of forty days have been monumental throughout the course of history. The purifying rains of Noah fell for forty days. The Law of God was illuminated to Moses over forty days at Sinai. The inspection of the Promised Land by Israeli spies lasted forty days. After the giant Goliath mocked God's armies for forty days, David rose up and slew the enemy. Our Lord Himself was tested forty days in the wilderness, and after the Resurrection, Jesus revealed Himself regularly to His disciples for forty days before ascending to heaven's throne.

I pray that these forty days of inspection will purify you and freshly illuminate God's laws in you so that you will rise up in victory and slay the enemy like David.

I've heard it said that simply recognizing a flaw in your life brings you halfway to victory, but I disagree. I believe that it's our *commitment to obedience* that brings us halfway to victory. If we are committed to obey Christ, then we are at least halfway home, because God has provided us the rest of what we will need for victory:

His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. (2 Peter 1:3-4)

So more than anything, *Every Man's Challenge* will be testing your commitment to obedience. Obedience means everything in a victorious walk in Christ, but failing to yield our will in obedience to Christ stalls our sanctification in this life.

Obedience is the beginning of valor, and we want you to be a man of valor, ready to stand and fight for the truth. We were created to be real men, walking in the image of God.

But when I look around these days, I don't think we're walking too well, and I can assure you that many, many women don't think we're walking very well either. One woman recently sent me this e-mail:

I am not thinking too highly of men this evening. Do you see very many of them honestly change for the better? I know so many women who have finally given up, letting their husbands do whatever they want. That is not how I want to end up. Otherwise, why be married?

Why does it seem like God allows men to do whatever they please? Women pray for their husbands for years. Why is there so little response? What is the answer?

Is this a rare e-mail? Nope. I get so many of these that it has become a shameful indictment of us as men. Why *is* there so little response in our hearts to our women and children? to God and His Word? What *is* the answer?

It is time to examine ourselves and get with the program:

Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test? (2 Corinthians 13:5)

I'm concerned that we as men are too often satisfied to avoid examination and to stay as we are. Studies show that 83 percent of men will do anything to avoid dealing with problems in their marriages.

We haven't answered God's challenge. Real men don't make their wives pray for them in desperation for years. They change. Real men don't show so little response to their wives' desires. They change. Real men feel horrible when they discover that they've driven their wives to a point where they've simply given up and quit trying. We have no right to stay like this.

Man to man, I challenge you to take some time to examine yourself. You might take these tests alone in the quiet of the morning, or you might

take them with a friend in a weekly accountability setting, taking turns asking each other the quiz questions. You might even take the tests as part of a men's small-group study, as many have done with other books in the Every Man series.

However you choose to use *Every Man's Challenge*, the "exam" begins with sections on sin and sexual purity and then moves to an inspection of your family relationships as husband and father. Does that mean this book is only for married guys? Not on your life! If you are single, have no fear. For one thing, if you are not married now, there is a good chance you will be married somewhere down the line. It is never too early to consider your ways and change. But even if you never marry, God's instructions regarding love and selflessness in marriage are easily relevant to other relationships in life.

Along with the exam, *Every Man's Challenge* paints a picture of what the Christian life looks like on the other side of sexual purity. If you've read *Every Man's Battle* and have engaged in the battle, you should be seeking further changes that reflect this step of obedience, changes that will cement your victory over sexual sin.

Just where are you heading on the road of sexual purity? Where *should* you be heading? These are good questions, and that's why *Every Man's Challenge* begins with sexual purity. Not that we'll be rehashing material from *Every Man's Battle*, because we won't. Instead, we'll examine the lessons from the perspective of what we've learned in this battle. We will be discussing how we might apply these lessons in the other areas in our lives.

Maybe you've never really battled with sexual impurity, and you're wondering if you can relate to the material. You have nothing to worry about. You will still be challenged by the picture of what is possible in Christ and what He expects of us.

God's Word is your mirror. When you step before it and look at what you've become, what do you see? You'll find out in the coming pages.

life on the other side of sexual purity

The apostles taught that true salvation should always have the same effect upon believers: It should encourage a conscious rejection of ungodliness and lead to holier living. A profession of Christ must be accompanied by a choice of godly living:

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good. (Titus 2:11-14)

John went so far as to say:

We know [absolutely] that anyone born of God does not [deliberately and knowingly] practice committing sin. (1 John 5:18, AMP)

Just where are you in this transformation in Christ? Your sexual purity is one measure. After all, sexual purity is normal for a Christian man. In that sense, are you normal?

If you aren't, you must engage in a transforming battle for sexual purity. As men commit their lives to this battle, we're often asked, "What is life like on the other side of purity? What's it like to be normal in Christ?" Many markers of personal change will emerge as you pass through this battle's crucible, changes with spiritual effects that stretch far beyond your sexuality into every corner of your life.

The first marker is that you'll be more certain of the following truth than ever before: You're as close to the Lord as you want to be. Before the battle you *suspected* that your sexual sin was hurting your intimacy with God. On the other side of the battle, you will be absolutely *certain* that harbored sin creates distance from God. You will be certain, too, that you yourself play a vital role in your own sanctification through your daily decisions.

Your hatred of sin will grow. You may have suspected that you were paying a dear price for your sin before the battle, but you were largely blind to the incalculable losses you were incurring in your life. Now that you are enjoying the freedom on the other side of purity and reveling in its blessings, you know for certain the full price of sin, that it's a silent, grotesquecrippler preventing you from walking normally and uprightly in God's image as you were created to do. On the other side, you'll have a deeper urgency to see that all forms of sin are discussed openly and exposed clearly to both the saved and seeker alike so that all might walk normally in His image.

Your hatred of Satan will grow too, as you realize more than ever before that you must personally resist him. Through God's grace and power, you must wrest control of your life from Satan's influences if you are to stand normally in the truth.

friend of the seeker

Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy and say to them, even to the [spiritual] shepherds, Thus says the Lord God: Woe to the [spiritual] shepherds of Israel who feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the sheep?... The diseased and weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the hurt and crippled you have not bandaged, those gone astray you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought to find.

EZEKIEL 34:2,4, AMP

This is God's eternal, chilling warning to His shepherds, and since Christ has made us "a kingdom and priests" (Revelation 5:10), surely God expects each of us to pay close attention to this warning as well. We must think over these words carefully, because never has sin been more rampant in America than it is today, and the percentage of folks in our pews with little Christian heritage is growing rapidly.

When Brenda and I began teaching premarriage classes in the mid-eighties, most of the couples were what we called "normal Brad-and-Joni-types"—both partners were clearly committed to purity and Christian ways in the way they lived. By the time we quit teaching premarriage classes a

mere twelve years later, I would say that one-third of the couples had lived together prior to marriage and two-thirds had already slept together.

I'll never forget my pastor's exclaiming in frustration, "How can so many people in this church be living this way!"

Good question, and if I had to hazard a guess, I'd say it's because more and more young people are growing up in broken homes where they never hear what God teaches in the Bible. But I also wonder if we haven't gotten scared? As congregations, are we so afraid of hurting our attendance figures that we've stopped telling the hard truth on Sunday mornings in church and Sunday school? As individuals, have we stopped living and telling the truth on the other days of the week for fear of losing our friends and offending our kids? We've left the weak and crippled to limp hopelessly on in their sin, unaware that they aren't walking normally.

As an illustration, for a while I lived in the San Francisco Bay Area, where I liked to hang out on North Broadway, the downtown's adult-theater district (these were the days before I became a believer). I liked ambling by the doorways so I could get a good look at the barely clad busty women standing in the doorways. Whenever they called out, "Hey, big boy, ya wanna come in and play?" they scared me to death. I might have been up to my neck in porn, but I didn't want to know *what* I might find behind those doorway curtains.

But let me ask you something: Can you guess what those women of the night were wearing as they stood in the doorways? Do you suppose that they looked like Caroline Ingalls of *Little House on the Prairie*, with long sleeves to the wrists, collar to the neck, and skirt to the pavement?

Heavens no, they wanted to get your motor running! They were dressed in little spaghetti-strap dresses with hiked-up hemlines, giving you an eye-ful of every curve on their bodies.

Recently, in our church, I was quickstepping off to Sunday school. As I came around a corner, I nearly ran head-on into a girl I knew from the youth group. Everything happened so fast. We each braked hard, jolting to

a stop and ending up face to face, about two inches apart. She was shorter than me, and when I looked down to apologize, I audibly gasped. Guess what she was wearing? One of those spaghetti-strap dresses, just like the ones I'd left behind in San Francisco.

In amazement, but without a trace of judgment, a thought slammed through my head: *Are our daughters dressing like whores and strippers now?* I meant no harm, but because of my background, that was the first thought that popped through my astonished brain. She didn't even know that what she was doing was wrong. As parents, why aren't we telling the truth? Why aren't we teaching our kids not to dress seductively these days?

Linda grew up in the church and recently approached her youth pastor with a question. "I've been giving oral sex to different boys at our parties for quite a while now. I don't know why, but I just thought I should ask you about it. Is that wrong for me to do?"

Stumbling a bit, the youth pastor asked, "Were these your boyfriends?"

"No, I wasn't dating any of them," she responded. "It's just a casual thing. All the guys know me for it, and that's why they come to the parties. Now they expect it. I feel quite a bit of pressure to keep giving them what they want, because I've become quite popular because of it. Still, I thought maybe I should ask you about it, just to make sure it was okay."

Where were her parents? Her Sunday-school teachers? Her youth-group leaders?

Where are you? We all *know* we should teach some standards of dress and purity in both our homes and our churches, but too often we dawdle and hem and haw and never quite get around to it. We want to be friendly to everyone, and we wouldn't dream of hurting anyone's feelings. But could it be that we've become so friendly that we've forgotten to be their friend?

What is a real friend? A friend tells you the truth about your behavior, even when it's not easy to do. A friend is someone who tells you that you aren't walking normally and, what's more, that you'll never walk normally until you shape up.

We've put in coffee carts and welcome centers to be warm and inviting when the weak and the crippled stagger through our church doors. How can we be so cruel as to hide the truth from them behind these same coffee carts and welcome centers so they never hear it?

I've got nothing against coffee and a relaxed atmosphere at church—I like it. And I'm aware that people are looking for love and acceptance. We all want that.

But it isn't loving to give them only what they want. We must also give them what they need—the truth. When we don't, our church bodies hemorrhage into massive internal bleeding.

We gave a copy of *Every Man's Marriage* to a good Christian friend active in her church and respected as a conservative school-board member in a district across town. After reading several chapters, she burst into tears and stopped reading. "As I read along, the beauty of this picture of marriage only reminded me of what I'd never have with my husband," she explained. "I couldn't stand the pain of reading it any longer."

That's what I mean by internal bleeding. We have all these happy, friendly churches with happy-looking people happily doing work for God, and yet, beneath the surface, nothing is making sense. Husbands aren't sacrificing for holiness and right living, wives are giving up, and behind every whitewashed wall are dead-men's bones.

To be a friend we must define holiness clearly so that we can all walk normally. We did this in *Every Young Man's Battle*, which prompted Kelli to write us this note:

I read your book *Every Young Man's Battle* and have never heard Christians talk so openly about sex. I grew up in church and was always taught that intercourse before marriage was wrong, but that was it. Once a year we went through the True Love Waits program, signed the card, and then didn't talk about it again until the following year. My father even took me out on a date once and gave me a

“purity” ring to remind me not to have intercourse, but no one told me that all the other stuff was wrong too. As I think back, I can’t help feeling that if half the talks about abstinence in our youth group were about foreplay and total purity instead, I wouldn’t have ever gone far enough with a boy to have to worry about intercourse. *Thank you for the truth.*

We are a kingdom and priests. We must each rise up bravely and tell the truth about sin to our kids and to our friends, because only the truth will bring back the straying and strengthen the weak and crippled. People long for the truth, like Kelli. They don’t want to limp along. They want to walk normally. They just need someone to tell them.

Yet somewhere along the way, we decided to stop defining holiness too clearly because we didn’t want to seem too different from other people, scared of what people might think and scared that we might hurt our relationships at home. Now we have our wish—we don’t look much different at all, and we’re too often limping along in the same fog as the lost.

Our girls don’t know the modest from the sensual or that petting and oral sex are wrong. Our divorce rates equal those of our unsaved friends, and our marriages no more picture Christ’s relationship to the church than theirs do. Christian men are just as addicted to pornography as those outside our churches.

Are you strengthening the weak, binding up the crippled, and bringing back the strays? Are you even strengthening yourself, or are you still sucking spiritual milk from baby bottles? The meat of God’s Word is necessary for strength, no matter how tough it can be to bite off and chew. Jesus was the Word in flesh, and the life of the Son is in the Word. An encounter with the meat of God’s Word, then, is an encounter with Jesus, our Healer and our standard for living. Every touch from His life in the truth of His Word has one purpose, to bring your life up to the normal, higher heights in Him.

There is no healing without hard truth, no matter how nice things look on the outside during the week and no matter how good the coffee smells on Sunday morning. The broken bones must be set, and the torn cartilage repaired, by the truth, or the crippled will never walk normally again.

Quiz

Are you afraid to give your family what it needs because it might make them look too different? Or because it might hurt your relationship with them?

Do you have an active plan for teaching standards to your kids, or are you dawdling?

red flags

What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people."

"Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty."

Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.

2 CORINTHIANS 6:16–7:1

If you still have a hint of sexual immorality in your life (see Ephesians 5:3), some of these red flags could be flapping around in your backyard:

- **Do you tell off-color jokes? Do you like coming up with double entendres and making wordplays with double-sided sexual meaning?**
- **Do you channel-surf hoping to glimpse something racy on television? Do you catch yourself watching voyeuristic shows like *ELIMIDATE*?**

- If a certain woman at your office calls in sick, do you feel a bit down in the dumps?
- Did your last hiring decision have more to do with her body than her résumé?
- Are you finding your wife to be less sexually satisfying?
- Have you told your wife that she is too overweight to turn you on?
- Do you have sexual interests or behaviors that you can't share with your wife?
- Do you linger over lingerie ads in the newspaper?
- Do you watch women's figure skating or women's beach volleyball on television, although you have little interest in these sports?
- Do you turn on exercise shows just so you can enjoy those closeups of participants' breasts, rear ends, and inner thighs?
- Do you rent videos or go to movies where you can watch other people having sex?
- Do you admire the cute girl passing by, whistling to yourself and saying, "Nice rear"?
- Do you flirt—and know you're doing it?
- Do you communicate deeply with a person of the opposite sex in an Internet chat room?
- When you are making love with your wife, does another face flash across your mind?
- Do you daydream about other women?
- Do you dream about hot scenes with other women at night?
- Do you think about old girlfriends when things aren't going so well at home?

Maybe you chafed and got defensive or angry as you read through this list. Maybe you aren't angry. Maybe you're just appalled. Or perhaps you disagree with the entire premise, like Greg. We received this e-mail from his wife, Cheri:

Though he has read *Every Man's Battle*, my husband, Greg, has bought into the lie that “all men look” because they are visual. He says it is impossible for a *real* man not to look at a babe in a string bikini. He threatened me with divorce if I didn't stop nagging him about this. He also said that if I'm looking for a man who doesn't notice other women, then I'm going to be looking for a long time.

Impossible for a “real” man not to look?

Hmmm. I don't know what that means, but I know one thing—it's not impossible for a *normal* man to live this way.

What do you mean? you're thinking. *Are you saying that I'm abnormal because I like to look at the female body?*

No, I'm not saying that. God is saying that. God doesn't measure normal in relation to the *world*. He measures it in relation to the *Word*, using words like *sin*, which means “missing the mark.”

We're talking about the mark set by Jesus. Jesus was the Word in flesh, so He is our mark. When God speaks of normal, He speaks along these lines: *Jesus is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. He is the most normal person ever to walk on planet Earth. You are a Christian, my child. Are you walking normally like My Son, Jesus?*

As Christian men we must measure from this mark. Why? Because becoming normal is what Christianity is all about. If we don't become normal like Jesus, we trample and hurt those around us, especially those we have pledged to love the most. Cheri is clearly pained by her husband's roving-eye behavior:

I am sick to my stomach to think that for the rest of my life, I will be robbed from having fullness from my marriage. This bothers me so much. Greg is so sick of being reminded of how I feel about it, but

he does it even more! Can you imagine? Everywhere I go with my husband I know I can't keep his attention...*nowhere!*

Greg may think he's a real man, but it never matters what we think. The real question is: Are you normal according to the Word of God?

Quiz

Are you more sexually pure today than you were a year ago?
five years ago?

Are you zealous to perfect your holiness?