

RANDY
ALCORN



The
PURITY
PRINCIPLE

GOD'S GUARDRAILS
on LIFE'S DANGEROUS ROADS



LIFECCHANGE BOOKS

The
PURITY
PRINCIPLE



L I F E C H A N G E B O O K S

RANDY
ALCORN

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To my brothers and sisters who are now
overcomers for Jesus, having turned away from
lesser and fraudulent pleasures to joyfully
embrace pleasures both greater and true.

*“In thy presence is fulness of joy;
at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.”*

PSALM 16:11, KJV

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Chapter 1



FORFEITING WHAT COULD HAVE BEEN

Eric stormed into my office and flopped into a chair. “I’m really mad at God.”

Having grown up in a strong church family, he’d met and married a Christian girl. Now he was the picture of misery.

“Okay...so why are you mad at God?”

“Because,” he said, “last week I committed adultery.”

Long pause. Finally I said, “I can see why God would be mad at you. But why are *you* mad at *God*?”

Eric explained that for several months he’d felt a strong, mutual attraction with a woman at his office. He’d prayed earnestly that God would keep him from immorality.

“Did you ask your wife to pray for you?” I said. “Did

you stay away from the woman?”

“Well...no. We went out for lunch almost every day.”

Slowly I started pushing a big book across my desk. Eric watched, uncomprehending, as the book inched closer and closer to the edge. I prayed aloud, “O Lord, please keep this book from falling!”

I kept pushing and praying. God didn't suspend the law of gravity. The book went right over the edge, smacking the floor.

“I'm mad at God,” I said to Eric. “I asked Him to keep my book from falling...but He let me down!”

THE CHOICES THAT RUIN US

To this day, I can still hear the sound of that book hitting the floor. It was a picture of Eric's life. Young, gifted, and blessed with a wife and little girl, Eric brimmed with potential.

His story didn't end that day. Eventually he became a sexual predator, molesting his own daughter. He's been in prison for years now, repentant but suffering the consequences of inching his life toward the edge until gravity took over.

How many of us Christians hope God will guard us from calamity and misery, while every day we make small, seemingly inconsequential immoral choices that inch us toward bigger immoralities? (A survey taken at a Promise Keepers gathering of 1,500 Christian men revealed that half

of them had viewed pornography the previous week.)

Tiffany and Kyle also grew up in the church. When the youth pastor warned against premarital sex, they had trouble taking him seriously. Their movies, television, and music focused on sex. One night after youth group, Tiffany gave in to Kyle. It was painful, nauseating...nothing like in the movies. Afterward she felt horrible. Kyle was mad at her because she wasn't supposed to let it happen.

Tiffany started sleeping around, trying to find a guy who'd love her. She never did—they just used her and moved on. She quit going to church. One day she discovered she was pregnant. A friend drove her to an abortion clinic. Now she's plagued by dreams about the child she killed.

Tiffany could turn to Christ. He would forgive her. But her heart is so broken and calloused now, she doesn't believe it. She's attempted suicide. She's on drugs, a street prostitute. She's been raped. Recently she had another abortion. Her eyes are dead. So is her hope.

Kyle? He's lost interest in spiritual things. He's at college now, an atheist. He's had sex with several girls. He feels empty but experiments with anything he thinks might bring him happiness.

Lucinda, a Christian, decided her husband wasn't romantic enough. A decent, hardworking, church-going guy, he just didn't live up to the Prince Charming images of

Hollywood. She got involved with another man, eventually marrying him. Years later, after bringing unspeakable grief to her family and herself, she came back to Christ. “I wish I had my first husband back,” she admitted. “But now it’s too late.” Yes, God has forgiven Lucinda and still has plans for her. And yet...she has paid a fearful price.

The prophet Jonah, in the digestive tract of a great fish beneath the Mediterranean Sea, made this observation: “Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs” (Jonah 2:8).

An idol is something more than a grotesque statue with big lips and a ruby in its navel. It’s a God-substitute. It’s something—anything—that we value higher than God. In order to cling to such an idol, we make a trade.

Our sexual behavior reveals who or what rules our lives (see Romans 1:18–29). Sexual sin is idolatry because it puts our desires in the place of God.

Those who turn from God to embrace a God-substitute suffer terrible loss. Why? Because they were made to find joy in God, not the substitute. They swap God’s present and future blessing for something they can immediately see, taste, or feel. But that something *never* satisfies.

I’ve done it. So have you. To one degree or another, every sinner trades what they have—and could have had—for a lie. Sometimes the lies get bigger and the stakes get higher. We keep inching our lives toward destruction. To

fulfill some hormonal surge, some secret fantasy, we willingly trade our future.

It's a terrible trade. A deal with the devil, who never keeps his bargains.

Every day, Christian men and women forfeit future happiness for the sake of temporary sexual stimulation. Like drug addicts, we go from fix to fix, trading the contentment of righteous living for the quick hits that always leave us empty, craving more.

That's what Eric did.

He forfeited a wife who loved him...a daughter who would have adored him...the respect of his family, friends, coworkers, and church. A walk with Christ.

In the end, he forfeited his freedom.

With every little glance that fuels our lust, we push ourselves closer to the edge, where gravity will take over and bring our lives crashing down.

What will we lose? What will we forfeit that could have, *would* have been ours?

Where would Tiffany be now if she'd kept herself pure? Instead of a prostitute haunted by rapes and abortions, Tiffany could be a light for Jesus, standing up for Him on a college campus, filled with joy and hope for the future. Kyle might be that too—*if only*.

What about Lucinda? She also forfeited what was hers—and could have been hers. Who knows what God's

grace might have included. *A clear conscience and a priceless sense of peace? Warm, satisfying years of companionship? The respect and affection of children and grandchildren? An enduring influence on young women watching her example? A ministry touching scores of lives? Rewards—exceeding all imagination—in the life to come?*

Yes, God has forgiven her. Absolutely. But the consequences of her choices remain.

Some readers, choking on consequences, feel hopeless and defeated. Many have given up on purity. Others have never tried. We all need foresight to see where today's choices will leave us tomorrow.

Once lost, some opportunities are never regained. We can't live in the "might-have-beens"—except to admit their reality, and then, by God's grace, move on.

In C. S. Lewis's *Prince Caspian*, after disregarding his instructions to follow him, Lucy tried to ask Aslan what might have happened if she had obeyed his voice sooner, following him instead of making excuses. The Great Lion replied, "To know what *would* have happened, child?... No. Nobody is ever told that."

Chapter 2



ENLIGHTENED SELF-INTEREST

Here's what's striking about Eric, Lucinda, Tiffany and Kyle. *They all thought they were acting in their own best interests when they followed their lusts.* If we could have obtained an honest interview with any of them just before they trashed their purity, they would have said, "This is for *me*. This is for *my* happiness."

Yet it wasn't.

Not even close.

It never is.

In fact, they didn't just hurt others. Without intending to, they acted against their own self-interests.

What they did wasn't just wrong. *It was stupid.*

Since the time we were young teenagers, many of us