

GRACE
THAT
BREAKS
THE
CHAINS

NEIL T. ANDERSON
RICH MILLER
PAUL TRAVIS



HARVEST HOUSE PUBLISHERS
EUGENE, OREGON

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the New American Standard Bible[®], © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. (www.Lockman.org)

Verses marked NIV are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version[®], NIV[®]. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.[®] Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Verses marked MSG are taken from The Message. Copyright © by Eugene H. Peterson 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002. Used by permission of NavPress Publishing Group.

Verses marked NKJV are taken from the New King James Version[®]. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Verses marked KJV are taken from the King James Version of the Bible.

Verses marked NLT are taken from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2007 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

Verses marked NCV are taken from the New Century Version[®]. Copyright © 2005 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Cover by Dugan Design Group, Bloomington, Minnesota

Cover photos © Dimitar Marinov / Fotolia; iStock / Jega

This book contains stories in which the authors have changed people's names and minor details of their situations in order to protect their privacy. Such individuals have granted the authors and the publisher the right to use their names, stories, and/or facts of their lives.

GRACE THAT BREAKS THE CHAINS

Copyright © 2003 by Neil T. Anderson, Rich Miller, Paul Travis

Published by Harvest House Publishers

Eugene, Oregon 97402

www.harvesthousepublishers.com

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Anderson, Neil T., 1942-

[Breaking the bondage of legalism]

Grace that breaks the chains / Neil T. Anderson, Rich Miller, Paul Travis.

pages cm

Rev. ed. of: Breaking the bondage of legalism. c2003.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-0-7369-5575-1 (pbk.)

ISBN 978-0-7369-5576-8 (eBook)

1. Spiritual warfare. I. Title.

BV4509.5.A5232 2014

241.5—dc23

201304354

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, digital, photocopy, recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Printed in the United States of America

14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 / LB-CD / 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

*How can we ever give thanks enough
to our loving heavenly Father
for giving us the gift of our
wonderful wives—Joanne, Shirley, and Joyce?
In addition to all that they are and do every day,
they also stood with us steadfastly in prayer, love,
encouragement, and service as we researched
and wrote this book.
It was not easy for them.*

*It is a very small token of our great love for them,
but we dedicate this book to these three precious ladies,
to the praise of God's glorious grace in Christ Jesus.
—Neil, Rich, and Paul*

Acknowledgments

First, we want to thank our friends at Harvest House Publishers for their love for Jesus and for us. They have all been a great encouragement through the process of birthing this book. We want to especially thank Paul Gossard for his kindness, patience, and efficiency in editing. He is a true servant.

We also want to thank our dear friend Sally Jenkins for her special support and meaningful suggestions, most of which are included in this book.

We are also deeply grateful for David and Vickie Dort, who were waiting with a cup of cold water at each “mile marker” of this marathon project. Their encouragement and prayers gave us strength to keep going and to finish strong.

Finally, we want to say “thank you” to the many people who shared their journeys out of legalism with us. Though there was not room in the book for everyone’s story, each one touched us personally. We trust that this book will shine light on your path as you continue moving from law into grace . . . from performance into freedom in Christ.



CONTENTS

From Rules to Relationship	7
--------------------------------------	---

Part 1: The Lies That Bind

1. The Law Kills	23
2. In the Grip of Guilt	41
3. It's a Shame	65
4. Fueling Fear	87
5. The Power of Pride	105
6. Enemies of Freedom	125

Part 2: The Yoke That Frees

7. Grace to You!	151
8. The New You	175
9. Living like Jesus	193
10. Bittersweet Pain	213
11. Breaking the Chains	235
12. New-Kingdom Living	265

Appendix: About the Survey “Christian Beliefs About Spiritual Life and the Church”	287
---	-----

Notes	289
-----------------	-----

From Rules to Relationship

The National Prisoner of War Museum located at the Andersonville National Historic Site in Georgia is a monument to pain and suffering. My (Rich's) trip there was sobering. My friends and I mostly walked around in silence, reflecting on the nightmare of life and death in that place. Only this nightmare was real. Having watched the film *Andersonville*, I was somewhat acquainted with the horrors of this Civil War prison. But that had been in the safety of my living room. There was something deeply disturbing about being there in person.¹

During the 14 months of its operation, the Andersonville military prison (which was designed for 10,000 men at a maximum) saw nearly 50,000 Union soldiers incarcerated there during the war. At one point, 33,000 were crammed into the 27-acre camp. As a result of poor medical care, malnutrition, lack of sanitation, overcrowding, and exposure to the elements, more than 13,000 men perished there.

A surgeon testifying at the postwar trial of camp commandant Henry Wirz said, "The haggard, distressed countenances of these miserable, complaining, dejected, living skeletons...formed a picture of helpless, hopeless misery which it would be impossible to portray by words or by brush."

The horrific conditions within the camp brought out both the best and the worst in the prisoners. Some reached out with love and mercy. But others betrayed one another, stealing from each other, even killing fellow soldiers.

After an hour or so of walking through the camp and reading the stories of what took place there, I started feeling physically ill (as did my companions). We got in our cars, prayed, and left quickly. Though our bodies felt better almost immediately, the memories have been much slower to fade.

As cruel and heartless as physical bondage can be, spiritual bondage is worse. And for that reason, in this book we want to throw open the doors of another kind of prisoner-of-war camp—one that is not so physically repulsive, but which is spiritually deadly. It is a “camp” where joy is stolen, faith is sometimes killed, and hope is often destroyed.

It is called *legalism*.

Only one thing—one Person, really—can free people from legalism’s camp. That’s why we’ve titled this book *Grace That Breaks the Chains*. Although that phrase is clear enough, the full meaning of the word *legalism* may not be clear to you yet, so we’ll explore it further in chapter 1. However, the book’s subtitle—*Freedom from Guilt, Shame, and Trying Too Hard*—probably strikes the strongest chord of recognition in your heart. It may very well be why you’re reading this book. Who doesn’t want to be free from guilt and shame? Who doesn’t want freedom from trying, trying, trying to live the Christian life...and never having it work out?

This subtitle reminds us of the epitaph on the tombstone of a certain newspaper journalist: “I tried my best, but it wasn’t good enough.” And unfortunately, that could be the heart cry of countless believers in Christ across this nation—a silent heart cry that only God hears. Maybe that’s the condition you find yourself in today. Perhaps it’s a loved one of yours who is suffering. If so, we want to bring you hope. First of all, we want to tell you that you are not alone...not by a long shot. On the pages of this book you will read the stories of many different people who have suffered in a variety of ways from legalistic systems.

Our Shocking Findings

In preparation for the writing of this book, we contracted with the George Barna Research Group to conduct a nationwide survey of adults. We were trying to find out how widespread legalism is in the American church. This survey, “Christian Beliefs about Spiritual Life and the Church,” asked people to respond to six different statements (presented in random order) with “strongly agree,” “somewhat agree,” “somewhat disagree,” “strongly disagree,” or “don’t know.” Sadly, it verified statistically what we had already suspected: Christians in America are seriously infected with the spiritual disease of legalism.

Trying Hard...

One of the six survey statements was, *The Christian life is well summed-up as “trying hard to do what God commands.”* How would you respond to that statement? Is that what the Christian life is all about—doing our best and trying hard to keep God’s commandments? You may be vigorously nodding your head right now. If so, you would be in the majority, for 57 percent of respondents strongly agreed and 25 percent somewhat agreed (for a total of 82 percent in agreement).

There is only one problem with that statement’s summary of the Christian life: *It is very wrong.*

Shocked? The Christian life is not, and never has been, a human effort to obey God’s commands in the Bible. That deception, as you’ll see from reading this book, is a very popular form of legalism—a performance-based Christianity that opposes the truth that apart from Christ we can do “nothing” (John 15:5).

The other serious misunderstanding this survey statement brings to the surface is this: For most believers, apparently, the Christian life is much more about *doing* than *being*. For them this life involves a striving to avoid sin and do right more than pursuing an intimate, personal relationship with God. And, sadly, only 16 percent of those who responded thought there was enough wrong with the first survey statement to say they disagreed. But would not the Christian life be much better summed up as *a personal faith-relationship with God the Father*

through abiding in His Son, Jesus Christ, and walking in loving obedience to His Word through the person and power of the Holy Spirit? The Christian life is first and foremost a relationship, not rules!

...But Not Measuring Up

In light of the response we received from the first statement, it should not be surprising that a majority of respondents (58 percent) said they agreed (28 percent strongly, 30 percent somewhat) with the second statement we want to look at: *I feel like I don't measure up to God's expectations of me.*

If the Christian life is “trying hard to do what God commands” (as a majority believe), the results of the second statement show us that people don't feel like they're doing a very good job of it. But what would we expect? Just knowing what God expects us to do doesn't give us the power to do it. Certainly, the law makes clear the power of sin over us—but it provides us no power to overcome that sin (see Romans 7:8-11)!

It is obvious that many believers in Christ are living with some degree of guilt. Striving hard but not measuring up. Some are very likely struggling with their concept of God, believing that He is scrutinizing their every move with a constant scowl of disapproval and thinking, *When will they ever get their act together?*

Rigid Rules, Strict Standards

Where are believers in Christ getting this message that the Christian life is summarized by “trying hard to do what God commands”? Research reveals that the burden of responsibility lies primarily on the church. The third survey statement was, *Rigid rules and strict standards are an important part of the life and teaching of my church.*

We worded this one carefully, even using words that people normally shy away from—*rigid, strict*—in order to give congregations the benefit of the doubt. Still, despite that effort, 39 percent of those who responded said they strongly agreed with that statement, and 27 percent said they somewhat agreed. *We were stunned.*

This means that two-thirds of Christians surveyed (from a broad spectrum demographically and denominationally) view their churches

as being heavily into rules and standards. That is not good news for modern man!

We recognize, of course, that many churches are doing well in communicating the gospel of grace, both to unbelievers and to believers. People in these congregations are generally healthy because they are being nurtured on God's grace and truth in Christ. But the evidence still stands. Either most churches are not truly preaching and teaching grace...or the people in the pews are just not getting it.

About this time you might be *really* nodding your head in agreement. Or maybe you are about to throw this book and these survey results in the fireplace. Before we tell you the second half of the survey results, which does have some good news, we want to assure you that the researchers' efforts to ascertain the truth were painstaking. The results are indeed valid. (If you'd like to know more on how the survey was conducted, see the information in the appendix.) One thing we would like to note here, however, is that the cooperation rate during the survey was 81 percent. This is unusually high (the industry norm is about 60 percent), so it significantly raises the confidence we may place in the resulting statistics.

Love and Acceptance

Now for some better news. The fourth survey statement we'd like to consider is, *People at my church are unconditionally loved and accepted regardless of how they look or what they do*. Seventy-seven percent gave their church high marks in this regard, and that is encouraging.* It should concern us though, that nearly one out of five (19 percent) who responded do not view their churches as doing a very good job of welcoming people who are different. Philip Yancey speaks to this in his autobiographical book, *Soul Survivor*:

One church I attended during my formative years in Georgia of the 1960s presented a hermetically sealed view of the

* According to the demographic data, those who have been divorced, older people (ages 56 and up), Southerners, and weekly attenders were well-pleased with this aspect of their church life. Busters (age 18-36), nonwhites, and Midwesterners were not so favorably disposed.

world. A sign out front proudly proclaimed our identity with words radiating from a many-pointed star: “New Testament, Blood-bought, Born-again, Premillennial, Dispensational, Fundamental...” Our little group of two hundred people had a corner on truth, God’s truth, and everyone who disagreed with us was surely teetering on the edge of hell.²

Churches like this one (and they’re still around today) are not just broadcasting what they believe—but they are stiff-arming the people in the rest of the world who believe differently. But Jesus said, “By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35).

Years later, Yancey attended the “burial service” of that church (which was, ironically, selling its building to an African–American congregation):

During the expanded service, a procession of people stood and testified how they had met God through this church. Listening to them, I imagined a procession of those not present, people like my brother, who had turned away from God in large part because of this church. I now viewed its contentious spirit with pity, whereas in adolescence it had pressed life and faith out of me. The church had now lost any power over me; its stinger held no more venom. But I kept reminding myself that I had nearly abandoned the Christian faith in reaction against this church, and I felt deep sympathy for those who had.³

Give Jesus One More Chance

We feel the same sympathy that Philip Yancey does. We earnestly desire to see those who have turned their backs on Christ and the church to glance over their shoulders just one more time...to believe somehow that the winsome Person found in the pages of the Gospels still lives on in His church today. In this book we will expose and diagnose the bondage of legalism, but our ultimate purpose is to point

people caught in legalism to the Lord Jesus Christ, the One who came filled with grace and truth.

Our Lord and His apostle to the Gentiles, Paul, reserved their strongest, harshest indictments for the hypocrites who were perpetuating and proliferating religious legalistic systems. Jesus spoke, and Paul wrote passionately, to defend and rescue those who were ensnared by them.

In this book we have prayed and sought to be hard-hitting in revealing the spiritual wasteland of legalism. But conversely, we have prayed and sought to be gentle and caring toward those people wounded by legalistic systems. And most of all, we have sought to direct people to Christ.

This was a challenging book for us to write. While decrying the sin of self-righteousness, it is so easy to become self-righteous. And it is easy to cross the line and become judgmental while preaching against judgmentalism.

I (Rich) can be very quick to point out the sin in those around me. But when, for instance, I am angry at my children for being messy, am I as quick to recognize my own harsh and critical spirit with them?

After all, which is worse? Sinful behavior on the part of someone who may not even be a believer... or a proud, critical spirit on the part of someone who is? We so often love to wag a gnarly finger at sins we can see, but it is “sin under the skin” that is most repugnant to God. Not until we are willing to repent of our legalism and weep over another person’s sinful condition are we ready to intercede for them in prayer.

That’s why I’m so glad that Paul Travis, a “recovering fundamentalist” (Neil’s term), has graciously allowed his testimony to pepper significant portions of this book. More than that, however, his heart for those trapped in legalism beats on every page. He genuinely hurts for even the staunchest legalists (even though he has been hurt *by* them), and his concern is genuine, his compassion real, his humility disarming.

Look for the Unshakable

As challenging as it was for us to write this book, it may be even more disturbing for you to *read* it. No, there’s nothing harmful in here—this is a book about healing spiritual wounds. But if you have

lived under the yoke of slavery to legalism, there will be some parts of this book you will find unsettling. And that can be a very good thing if it brings you to a new experience of freedom and grace in Christ.

The writer of Hebrews warned that in latter times “[God] has promised, saying, ‘Yet once more I will shake not only the earth, but also the heaven.’ This expression, ‘Yet once more,’ denotes the removing of those things which can be shaken, as of created things, so that those things which cannot be shaken may remain” (Hebrews 12:26-27). But by God’s grace, once those “shaky” things are removed, what we’re left with is unshakable—the kingdom of God (verse 28). And we trust God that, deep down, that is what you truly want.

Where We’re Headed

The first half of this book, which we call “The Lies That Bind,” is diagnostic. In it we are seeking to expose the lies of legalism so we can understand how they keep us from experiencing the joy of our salvation.

Chapter 1 opens with part of the life story of Paul Travis, using it as a launching point to define and describe what *legalism* is, so that we are all on the same page. We seriously doubt that many people would proudly proclaim, “I am a card-carrying legalist,” but as we have seen already from the Barna survey, legalism is rampant in the church. You may be surprised at how subtle it can be!

In chapters 2 and 3 we talk about the twin issues of *guilt* and *shame*. Guilt is the sense that you have *done* something wrong. Shame is the sense that *you* are the something that is wrong. There is a place for guilt and shame, but all too often people wallow in false guilt and false shame that have been spawned by legalistic systems.

Chapters 4 and 5 take a close look at *fear* and *pride*—both of which, paradoxically, can be the fruit as well as the root of legalism. In chapter 6 we conclude the first part of the book by considering the *enemies of freedom*, both in the Bible and in twenty-first-century America.

Starting Out Toward Freedom

The second half of this book is reparative. Having diagnosed the illness and its symptoms and causes, how can we see the virus of legalism

eradicated in our lives, families, and churches? We call part two “The Yoke That Frees.”

Chapter 7 begins our journey into healing by looking at what Christ accomplished on the cross. This is good news—truly a *gospel of grace* that has freed us not only from legitimate guilt, but also from the law, attacks of false guilt, and the accusations of the evil one. We then call believers to rediscover the God who created pleasure and who wants us to enjoy it legitimately.

When shame is eating away at the very core of our being, our only hope for deliverance is a clear and unequivocal understanding of our new standing and *relationship with God through Christ*, which we explore in chapter 8. In Him, we are set free to walk in humility (not humiliation) and dignity (not dirt). As we gain a new realization of who we are—children of God, dwelling with Him in His house, His temple—we find that the shame that has acted as a “squatter” is served an eviction notice and beats a hasty exit!

Fear flees when faith grows, and chapter 9 provides the framework for a new walk of *dependence upon the Father*—the kind of dependence demonstrated in the life of the Lord Jesus. Found within that framework is a life of intimacy with God in prayer and new power in the Person of the Holy Spirit.

Chapter 10 explores one of the greatest wonders of God’s operation (surgery!) in our lives...the phenomenon of *brokenness*. God opposes the proud (James 4:6), but a broken and contrite heart He will never despise (Psalm 51:17). Pride and control are not easily taken away from our hearts, but through brokenness the haughty spirit that energizes legalistic systems can truly be crushed.

The Steps to Freedom in Christ have been powerfully used by our Lord Jesus to help set captives free all over the world. In a similar fashion, chapter 11 will walk you through a process designed to help *break the bondage of legalism* in your life. As tempting as it might be to turn right to that chapter and try for a quick fix, we strongly urge you not to do that. Each of our chapters builds on the previous one, and you will find much benefit in going through the entire book before walking through that process.

Chapter 12 answers the crucial question, “How then do I live in the kingdom of God?” We will consider three components of life in this new kingdom: a *new commandment*, a *new covenant*, and a *new commission*. We will also look at the purpose of God’s law and explain the difference between legalistic adherence to the law and new-covenant, Spirit-filled obedience. The difference is profound, and—as we saw in the first survey question—it is one that has largely been missed by the body of Christ.

The petition of our Lord Jesus in John 17—“that they may all be one”—remains a largely unanswered prayer to this day. So we conclude the final chapter with a call to cease firing at one another, lay down our weapons, climb out of our doctrinal bunkers, and move toward true unity in Christ.

More About What Christians Actually Experience

At this point, you may be wondering what the final two Barna Research survey statements were. We’ll use the consideration of these to wrap up our introduction and launch us into the main portion of the book.

Encouragement and Empowerment

The first of the remaining two statements said, *Attending church leaves me feeling encouraged and empowered to live the Christian life*. From some of the survey results we’ve already looked at, you might expect people to be down on their churches. But the exact opposite was true! More than 90 percent of those who responded gave their churches high marks on this one (with 71 percent strongly agreeing with the statement). Why is that? We would suggest several reasons.

One is that there are a significant number of churches that are conducting uplifting Sunday services. The Lord is blessing wonderfully! The worship is drawing people into the presence of God, the messages are edifying, the fellowship is encouraging. A lot of effort is going into making Sunday worship an enjoyable experience. And it is!

Some of these churches are truly preaching grace, and many of the

believers inside are “getting it.” But we cannot ignore the other results, which reveal that too many churches place a high premium on rigid rules and strict standards. Nor can we ignore the reality that somehow the excitement of Sunday morning is getting lost during the week, with people feeling like they’re not measuring up.

What’s the problem? A friend of mine who came out of a fundamental church offers this explanation:

I identify with the phenomenon you mentioned. I recall leaving church feeling like I could and should be able to “do it.” However, the way I felt on Monday morning was usually quite a different thing. (I wonder what results the poll would have gotten from a question about how people feel during the middle of the week.)

Indeed. We expect that many Christians, for the very reason that they feel spiritually deflated, dutifully troop off to midweek services in order to get pumped up again. Some of them, to be sure, are there because they *want* to be. But others are there because they feel they *have* to be.

The comment of another “recovering legalist” is insightful regarding this:

Those survey results are indeed interesting, though they are not surprising. You are right about the meaning of the seemingly mixed results. Many church services are pep rallies, and pastors are cheerleaders. For one hour each week, we allow ourselves to again be convinced that we (simply by willing it so and bootstrapping ourselves up) can live a dynamic Christian life and perform kingdom exploits. Somehow we don’t get taught how to depend on God.

The Question of Motivation

Our last statement brings another bittersweet revelation. It read, *I am motivated to serve God more out of a sense of guilt and obligation rather than joy and gratitude.* Most people (70 percent) disagreed with the statement (59 percent strongly), which ought to be very encouraging news to pastors and other Christian leaders.

The downside is that more than one-quarter of respondents agreed with it (15 percent strongly). That likely points to one of two things (and in some cases no doubt, both). Either people are serving God because they feel duty-bound to Him and are trying to gain His approval, or they are serving God because they are trying to please someone in the church (a pastor, a friend, a spouse, and so on). Either way, the motivation is wrong...and the blessing is gone.

Come to Him As He Really Is

Legalism is a killer, but grace is a healer. Legalism caused the apostle Paul to cry out, “Who has bewitched you?” to those who were trying to be perfected by the law (Galatians 3:1). And his pained words recorded in Galatians 4:15 are born out of a broken heart. In horror he asked, “You were very happy...but where is that joy now?” (NCV).

But grace proclaims loudly,

In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved (Ephesians 1:4-6).

If we can accomplish this one thing through our writing and your reading of this book, we want it to be this: We want to see your joy return—the joy of your salvation.

We want to reacquaint you with Joy Himself. We want you to revel in worship in the presence of the God who created gentle snowfalls, taste buds, fall colors, warm sunshine, beaches, romantic love, and yes, even sex. We want you to go beyond just “living the Christian life” to *knowing Christ*, the One who longs for our presence, wooing us with

the deepest, most holy, and most passionate love that mankind could ever experience...and that goes for us men, too!

Psalm 126 echoes our heart for you as we pray that the chains of legalism fall off and joy return:

When the LORD brought back the captive ones of Zion, we were like those who dream. Then our mouth was filled with laughter and our tongue with joyful shouting; then they said among the nations, “The LORD has done great things for them.” The LORD has done great things for us; we are glad.

Restore our captivity, O LORD, as the streams in the South. Those who sow in tears shall reap with joyful shouting. He who goes to and fro weeping, carrying his bag of seed, shall indeed come again with a shout of joy, bringing his sheaves with him.

Philip Yancey echoes those words: “If I had to define my own theme, it would be that of a person who absorbed some of the worst the church has to offer, yet still landed in the loving arms of God. Yes, I went through a period of rejection of the church and God, a conversion experience in reverse that felt like liberation for a time. I ended up, however, not an atheist, a refugee from the church, but as one of its advocates.”⁴

We believe there are many more “Philip Yanceys” out there who are on the knife-edge of faith. Perhaps you are one of them. We want you to know this: The Lord who has done great things for others wants to do the same for you.

He Gives Living Water

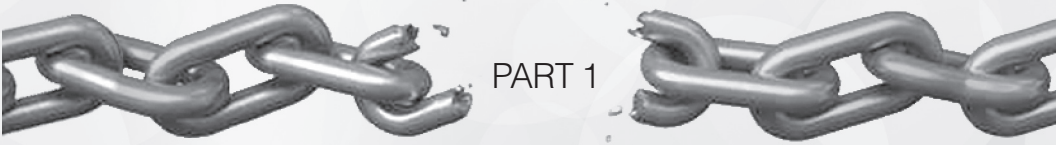
There is a place on the grounds of the Andersonville National Historic Site that is like an oasis in a desert. It is called “Providence Spring.” During a heavy rainstorm on August 14, 1864, a spring suddenly gushed up from a hillside just inside the walls of the camp. Several men claimed to have seen lightning strikes at that spot just before the spring burst forth. This was an answer to thousands of prayers, for the water in the stream that ran through the camp was filthy and diseased.

Prisoners first reached the spring (which was on off-limits ground) by tying cups to tent poles, but the guards later allowed the men to trough the water into the camp. The day after the rainstorm, John L. Maile of the Eighth Michigan Infantry wrote in his journal, “A spring of purest crystal water shot up in the air in a column and, falling in a fanlike spray, went babbling down the grade into the noxious brook. Looking across the dead-line [the place near the wall beyond which prisoners who ventured would be shot], we beheld with wondering eyes and grateful hearts the fountain spring.”

A pavilion was erected on the site in 1901. On it are engraved these words, “The prisoners’ cry of thirst rang up to heaven. God heard, and with His thunder cleft the earth, and poured His sweetest waters gushing here.”

That’s exactly why we wrote this book. We want you to know there is a spring of purest water waiting to quench your spiritual thirst. It is the fountain of living waters Himself. . . instead of the broken cisterns of legalism that can hold no water (see Jeremiah 2:13).

We pray and hope you will turn the page and begin the journey home.



PART 1

THE LIES THAT BIND

The Law Kills

Paul's Story

It was a Sunday morning in April 1988. The sun was just peeking over the horizon in the small Tennessee town where my wife, Linda, and I (Paul) were staying. We were investigating the possibility of my pastoring a church there.

The previous day had been a busy one and a good one for me. Church members had gathered at an evening cookout, and we'd enjoyed meeting them. They were good people. I also had had the chance to travel around and see the local sights. I was excited about the area. Linda, unfortunately, had only seen the seedier side of town and called the place "crummy." I was looking forward to doing some sight-seeing with her after I had preached at church that morning. I was certain she'd warm up to the area and become as excited about it as I was.

Unfortunately, a cruel intruder was about to disrupt my neatly controlled world.

"Are you okay?" I asked her as she turned to me in bed. She had been restless, tossing and turning all night.

"I haven't slept very well," she replied.

"Well, we can rest a while longer. They're on Central time here. It's still early."

I felt confident my words would reassure her and that we could get some more rest. After all, I always knew just what to say. That was part of who I was.

Still unable to sleep, Linda got out of bed, went into the bathroom, and shut the door. As I dozed, I could hear the water running. I figured she was showering, so I cleared my head and focused on my message for the morning.

Then I heard a thump in the bathroom.

She must have bumped her elbow in the shower or something. No big deal.

Needing to finalize my thoughts for the sermon, I sat up in bed and shifted back into message-preparation mode. This was my main shot at showing this congregation what I could do from the pulpit. Preaching was my passion, and I was eager to perform well.

But something wasn't right. The water in the bathroom was running too long.

I'd better check and make sure everything's okay.

"Linda! Linda! Are you all right?"

There was no response, even though she couldn't have been more than three feet away from me. The headboard of the bed was right up against the wall that separated the bedroom and bath.

I cracked open the bathroom door and saw the water running in the sink, but there was no sign of Linda. I opened the door a little more and could see that she wasn't in the shower either.

Where in the world is she? What's going on?

I could tell something was wrong, but I wasn't sure what. The water was splashing into the sink, but other than that, the room was strangely quiet.

Panicking now, I shoved the door open and found myself pushing against Linda's prone body. She had fallen facedown on the floor.

Lord, what's happening?

I was struck by a feeling of helplessness—something I had never allowed myself to feel. I had always been the strong one, the one who knew just what to do. But this was something that would turn out to be way beyond me.

My mind forced away the dread that was already demanding entrance into my life. Refusing to cave into the fear, I swung into action.

I lifted my wife's head slightly off the floor. Her face was pressed in. Horrified, I noticed it would not go back to normal. It was awful seeing her that way. It was like someone had punched me in the gut, knocking all the wind out of me.

Linda was clutching a washcloth. A green one. She had apparently been holding it against her face, trying to relieve some pain or discomfort. Then she had fallen. And that was the thump I had heard.

I've got to act fast. What can I do to save her?

I forced myself to think this way, even though, through the shock of the moment, one thing was clear to me. Her body was lifeless. And I felt like death, too.

I can't cry. I've got to do something. But there's nothing I can do! This is it. But it can't be true. It's not happening.

Sadness. Shock. Confusion. Denial. The whole scene took on a surreal fuzziness. I just stood there like a stone while waves of guilt broke over me.

I brought this on her. She didn't want to move here. This was all my idea and I've done something terrible. I should have checked on her right away when I heard that noise. Me and my last-minute sermon preparations. . .

She hadn't been feeling well a few days ago. Why didn't I. . .?

My mind went back to some events of the past week. They had bothered me at the time, but not enough to do anything about them. We had been over at our friends' house and had our blood pressure checked. We had all done it. . . all of us except Linda.

Did she know then that her blood pressure was high?

A few days before that incident, I had come back from a conference on the church bus. I had asked Linda to pick me up at church, but she had said she was not up to it. *What in the world could keep her from being able to just drive the car to the church and pick me up?* She said she thought she had the flu, but by her description it sounded more like an ulcer. At the time I had urged her to get it checked out by a doctor. Later, I found out that stomach pains can be a sign of heart trouble.

Snapping out of my inner nightmare for a moment, I yelled for

help from my close friend, in whose house we were staying. He immediately called 9-1-1, and within minutes Linda was at the hospital. DOA. A massive heart attack had taken her away from me. Apparently she had died instantly.

Out of Control

A confusing kaleidoscope of emotions enveloped me. This was all new territory to me. I had spent my entire life stuffing my feelings deep down where they couldn't do me or anyone else any harm.

A friend of mine had once said, "I've never seen Paul Travis out of control." Neither had I.

It was like I had a closet in my heart labeled "Painful Emotions" that I kept padlocked, with an armed guard protecting it. This unit was well trained to keep barred inside every feeling that could possibly cause me to lose control—anger, fear, confusion, sorrow, grief, helplessness, and hopelessness.

I was surprised to discover later that "the guards" had misinterpreted my orders. They had secretly kept *every* emotion locked inside. And so over time I had come to feel very little at all.

As I took in all that was going on, it was obvious that no locked door could contain my feelings any longer.

What will I do without her?

Fear, the emotion that I dreaded perhaps most of all, had burst out of its cage and was seeking to devour me. I tried as hard as I could to keep myself from feeling pain, but it wasn't working.

I've got to keep my feelings under control. That's the right thing to do. I've got to stay in control.

My eyes were tearing up, but I wouldn't let myself cry. I couldn't.

I stayed at my friends' house that morning during the worship service, saddened by Linda's death and my missing the chance to preach. The church, however, made other arrangements for the sermon that morning and assured me that everything had been taken care of.

Later on I held a Bible study with those who had dropped by to console me. As unbelievable as it may sound, I felt that I needed to preach the Word to those who came over. They listened intently as I performed well.