

THATS NOT ME

MARK RUSSELL

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DEDICATION

To mom for your prayers up and down GA 400 when I was such a suicidal mess. It turns out you were right, God did indeed have the power to set me free.

To Lori for your willingness to listen to God. To kick me out of the house and be willing to divorce me if I didn't walk sober in the early days. Yet also, in the face of all the crap I put you through, to decide to believe that I was loving you the best I knew how at that time. Even when you could not see it. That decision got us through.

To Rick, Dan, & Lee Anne. Thanks for stepping out in faith to believe that God would cause the growth if you sowed the seeds of identity. My family is together because of your faithful obedience.

INTRODUCTION

I'm guessing if you're reading this, you've probably found yourself in some of the same situations that I found myself in. Maybe you're addicted to drugs or alcohol and you think there's no way you're ever going to get freedom. Maybe you're addicted to porn and you think you're never going to find freedom. Maybe you're addicted to other people's opinions about you and you believe that you will struggle all your life with these issues..

This book was written to tell you, that's a lie...it simply is not true.

You can experience total and complete freedom. And I don't mean one day or someday in eternity. I mean today. You can find total freedom from your addictions today, in this life.

A small note...as you'll discover in this book, I'm a committed follower of Jesus. But I'm also a regular dude from Georgia. I run a tree service and I'm raising four kids on a few acres with my wife, dog, chickens and peacocks. I've decided to be myself in writing this book. That means I wrote this book like the Georgia boy I am, not as a fancy writer. Hope that's OK with you.

So now that we got the book editors "supposed to's" taken care of, are you ready?

Let's do this!

ONE
THIS BOOK IS FOR YOU

You are beautiful. You are perfect. There will never be anyone, ever, quite like you. You're worth more than you can imagine.

A MANIFESTO

This book is a manifesto from me to you. It's a declaration of the freedom I've found in my war against addiction and self-hate. As much as anything, it's a testimony of my search for what I call *true spirituality*.

I'm guessing there's a decent chance that you have no idea how much you're worth.

I don't mean you're net worth or how much talent or potential you have. I mean how much you are worth, at your core, the real you, with or without any of the things that our society uses to measure

wealth. You are valuable. Not by the amount in your bank account. Not because of what you drive. Not based on who you date or what you can do or who you know. The truth is that you are more valuable than you can imagine because of who you are.

In 1989, a guy bought a cheap painting at a flea market for \$4. At the time, he had no idea that hidden behind the painting was an old copy of the Declaration of Independence, worth over \$2.5 million.

A priceless treasure was mistaken for something of far less value. That's exactly what happens with you and me. We are worth more than we could ever imagine, and yet somehow the voices around us and within us, convince us that we're worthless. I hope that this book will help you realize that you are worth a lot more than you think you are.

This simple, little book was written in hopes that it would find the people that need to read it. If you feel like you've screwed up your life. If you've been wounded by some of the people that were supposed to love you. If you've found yourself looking for love and acceptance and value in the stuff of life. If you've walked down the dark hallways of depression. If you've tried to numb the pain with drugs, alcohol, or sex. If any of that rings true, this book is for you.

And here's the thing. I'm not writing this book as a therapist or professional counselor or anything. I'm writing it as a guy who's walked through my own personal hell and come out on the other side. I want to tell you a little about my own story in hopes that it will encourage you. If God can rescue and redeem my story, I'm positive that can happen to you, too.

MY STORY BEGINS

I had a pretty happy childhood, at least until I was about 8 years old. I did all the normal kid things. I rode my BMX. I loved Atari video games. And I played soccer and baseball like every other kid my age. And then, my parents got divorced and my life began to fall apart. As a teenager, I struggled with serious depression. Having Asperger's but not knowing it, I was always the weird kid, and so super lonely. My dad introduced me to porn and my friends introduced me to alcohol and drugs all three of which helped to numb the pain.

In high school, I played sports, because the structure and discipline made me feel like I was worth something. But every sports season would come to an end and when it did, I would face the same question... *Who was I?* I felt lost and alone. As time went on, I began to slip deeper into

depression, eventually to the point that I began to think about suicide all the time.

There were moments when I would go to a high place like a bridge or building and I would fantasize about what it would be like to jump, and other times where I sat with a loaded gun, wanting to kill myself but too scared to pull the trigger. Life was really really hard and super lonely. The thoughts in my head were so messed up. Seriously, I wouldn't want anyone to ever know the twisted kinds of dark thoughts that filled my head as a teen. I just wanted to escape it all.

In college, a friend invited me to a Bible study and I went and had a pretty radical conversion experience. Thankfully after that, the thoughts of suicide, the darkness, and the deep depression left me. But I was still a slave to my addictions. The drugs, alcohol, and sex that got me through High School followed me, off and on, for the next twenty years, into my late thirties.

I tried to quit over and over. I went to every 12 step AA, NA, and even SA group that you could imagine as well as tons and tons of therapy for years and years trying to quit. I followed the steps. I said what I was supposed to say: "I'm an alcoholic. I'm a drug addict. I'm a sex addict." And in retrospect, while I love that those programs are helping so many people, for me,

confessing all of that stuff over myself made me question if I could ever find permanent freedom from the addictions.

Especially the porn.

After a while, I was exhausted and defeated from the fight of trying to quit, and eventually, I just figured that I'd always struggle with these things. But then, something happened that would change everything.

If you've ever struggled with addiction or depression. If you've ever felt like you messed up your life beyond repair. If you've ever looked at other "strong" people who seem like they have it all together and believed that you never will. If you've ever wondered if you could ever be truly loved, this book is for you. I've got some good news — there is amazing hope for you. I know because I found it. I know because I've discovered total and absolute freedom from addiction that I thought would never happen. And if it can happen to me, it can happen to you.

TWO
I DIED A HUNDRED TIMES

I could feel the blood running down my face and dripping off my chin. I'd been kicked, punched, beaten, whipped, and spat on. My sides were raw and bruised from the whipping. Every muscle in my body ached with pain. My arms felt like rubber and my legs were shaking.

I must have died a hundred times.

PLAYING THE PART

For more than 10 years, I played the part of Jesus, the starring role in a nationwide passion play called *The Thorn*. Night after night, I stood in front of thousands of people, first as the happy, smiling Jesus that healed people and danced with children. And then, as the bloody Jesus that hung on a cross, all alone looking up, wondering why

even God (His Father) seemed to have abandoned Him.

Sure, the blood was mostly food coloring and corn syrup and the nails were just an illusion, but I remember so many of those nights, as I played that part of being rejected by the world, abandoned by the father, there was a large part of me that was not acting but rather reenacting the loneliness and intense pain of rejection I lived growing up.

I never admitted it at the time, but secretly inside I was hoping that somehow by enduring just a little bit of what Jesus had endured, God (and people around me) would accept and love me more. Of course, I wouldn't have said it out loud, but I was inwardly hoping that playing the part of Jesus would somehow help me find peace and freedom from feeling like such a loser all my life. That somehow my deeds would help me "be" a better person. Ironically, playing that role was the pinnacle of *ACTING like Jesus* to BE a better person...something that I later found was the basis of my problem.

But it wasn't just in The Thorn that I did this. I'd been a "Christian" for 20 years and that entire time, I'd been trying to work to become something. I was trying to prove that I was good enough. I was posing as a good Christian in hopes

that maybe something would “*click*” and I’d actually be a good person like the other strong people that seemed to have it all together. Again, I would never have said it out loud, but inwardly I was doing everything I could to earn God’s love and the love of everyone around me.

I joined a Christian college in hopes that maybe I would learn how to be good enough. I signed up for the Christian equivalent of the Navy Seals thinking that if I worked hard enough and long enough at it, then maybe I’d be OK. I went on mission trips around the world. I fed hungry children in South America, did outreach in Nepal, and dragged sandbags and rocks to help rebuild Haiti. All of it for the opportunity to be counted as worthy of God’s love and the acceptance of others.

And none of it, I mean none of it, did anything to permanently fill the void of loneliness and sense of inadequacy. During all those years playing the part of Jesus, the part of a happy Christian, the part of a smiling missionary – the whole time, I was still addicted, off and on, to porn, drugs, alcohol, and self-hate. No matter how hard I tried to shake the sense of guilt and shame and “straighten out,” I simply couldn’t do it. Instead, I’d find myself slipping over and over again, back into bad habits.

And I know I'm not the only one out there who's felt like that. Why? Because it is human nature. Wanting love and acceptance is the way we are ALL created. The girl feels trapped in a cycle of shame. The addict keeps telling himself that he's never going to drink again, only to give up that same night. The Christian guy feels like a hypocrite because he keeps going back to his sex addiction. All wanting to fill an empty void, but missing the mark over and over.

THREE

ALL ABOUT IDENTITY

This book is all about identity. And that's really crazy because for most of my life, I never even knew what identity meant. After being "saved" for 20 years, I had never really considered it. Sure I had heard of the idea of identity in Christ, but I never really stopped to consider it. Maybe it was my Asperger's, maybe I was just busy, but to be honest, I always thought that even the word *identity* was sort of a religious word, a preacher's word. But as you'll soon see, this word I had previously written off as some sort of sermon buzz word turned out to be the most crucial part of my Christian walk, the base layer, the basis for all existence. Yeah. I had it pretty wrong, to begin with.

THE NATURAL MINDSET

Most of us have heard “Jesus loves you” or “Jesus died on the cross for your sins”. It sounds nice, but in reality, it is a bit abstract, isn't it?. I mean, have you ever wondered exactly how that works? How does believing that someone else dying on a cross affect someone else? How does this make the believer pure? Or for that matter, how does it affect the believer in any way?

If we never stop to think about it, it could keep us on the wide natural road that leads to destruction...

Matt 7:13-14 “Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.”

So what is the wide road? The natural one. The easy one that takes no thought. The one that makes sense on the surface. The simple one. The road that you can understand with your natural/unspiritual mind. If you have never seen it, perhaps it is the one you are on right now.

We have all sinned and fallen short. We recognize that we have areas that are lacking in our lives. The problem is that too many of us try to address those areas of lack in the natural mindset.

As an example of how the natural process works, have you ever done an analysis of your life in order to be better? Looking at the areas of weakness, identifying them, and looking at where you need to work in order to be a better person? On the natural level it is a great exercise, isn't it? Because the logic makes sense. It goes: "When I DO better at this or that, then I will BE a better person!" On the surface, this makes sense.

But to see the weakness in it, we need to ask that if this simple/natural principle worked so well, why haven't we all made ourselves perfect?

Asking it in this way helps us to understand how the work of Jesus actually functions and really it is what this entire book is about. The reality is that this natural mindset leads to death because it connects, or couples, my actions to affect or change my identity.

Or more simply stated, if I do this or that, I change who I am.

Or absurdly stripped down to the core: My actions create me, thus, I am my own creator.

Stripping it down in this way brings into focus that when we believe that our action can change who we are, coupling our actions to our identity, we are worshipping ourselves as creator god.

Trying to create yourself, to actualize and realize your perfect identity by what you do, trying to manifest *who you are* by what you do, is the exact opposite of believing and walking in the idea that Christ creates you.

So let's look at how Christ addresses this issue with the spiritual mindset.

THE SPIRITUAL MINDSET

Simply put, believing that Jesus lived a sinless life, died sinless, and rose from the dead sinless, allows us to identify with, and thus ***actually become one with His sinless nature***. Our belief in His sinlessness allows us to become one with his sinless identity. When we believe in his works, we are born again, sinless and perfect. Again, the act of believing in His sinlessness, makes us one in spirit with His sinlessness, and then we are able to walk in that sinless nature.

Establishing our righteousness via the natural mindset is difficult because it is up to us to be pure by our own works in our flesh. But the opposite is true when we let the works of Christ define us in our born again spirit. I.E. do the heavy lifting for us. In Matthew 11, reaching out to those tired of trying on their own in the natural, Jesus described the rest that we experience in believing His righteousness becomes our righteousness:

28 “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

When we believe who He makes us, we become perfect. He makes us perfect. Do you get that? When you believe that you are perfect because He is perfect, you will walk in that perfection. Instead of walking the natural way of *doing to be*, we believe that we ARE because He is, and then we act out of that perfect born again identity. This spiritual principle is what Jesus was really all about. This is the principle that allows us to transcend this sin of this world and the principle that makes us pure.

Another vivid example of this principle is seen in Revelation 14:13:

13 “Then I heard a voice from heaven say, “Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.” “Yes,” says the Spirit, “they will rest from

their labor, for their deeds will follow them.”

Check that out! It's awesome. When you die (to the natural flesh) and are born again in Christ, you die to the temptation that you can create yourself with your own works, and when you rest in him, when you are found in him, when you believe that his works make you worthy...Guess what? You will act like it! Your deeds in the flesh (the natural world) will follow your true born again spirit! Do you get it? That's the point. No more doing first in order to be, but instead, it's the other way around. When you understand that He makes you perfect, in your born again perfect spirit, you act out of that nature. You walk out of that nature. If you believe that you are perfect, you will walk perfectly by nature!

FOUR IDENTITY AMNESIA

I don't know about you, but for years, when I looked in the mirror, I saw someone I didn't like. I mean if I'm honest, I really, really disliked the person I was. I hated him. I couldn't figure out why anyone would love him or want to be with him. Probably a lot of this had to do with having Asperger's without knowing it. That will make you feel really different and really lonely. After I gave my life to Jesus in my late teens early twenties, some of that changed. I knew in my head that God saw me as valuable, but I didn't truly believe in my heart.

I did whatever I could to look good on the outside. I tried to dress so my friends thought I was cool. I flashed money whenever I could. As an adult, I even bought my dream car of ten years, a 2001 Acura NSX. You know, Spa Yellow

with the targa top? I wanted everyone to know that I'd finally "made it." I remember getting behind the wheel of that car and driving it around town, glancing around to see who was looking at me. For a few hours, it felt great. But it didn't last. The car didn't help — it hadn't actually changed anything. I was still worthless. Nothing, not even my dream car, would change me at my core. I still believed that I was less-than, that I was damaged, unworthy, and ultimately, unlovable.

But that couldn't have been further from the truth.

Do you remember that movie, *The Bourne Identity*? It starred Matt Damon and was about a guy who woke up with amnesia, having totally forgotten who he was. He didn't know his name, where he was from, or how he had ended up where he was. The movie is basically the story of Jason Bourne slowly remembering, or more accurately, *discovering* who he really was. In the movie, it wasn't until he understood and embraced who he really was, that things began to click into place.

You and I are a lot like Jason Bourne.

For so many of us, I'd say for most of us, we have forgotten who we are. Or we never really understood who we are — like we have a case of identity amnesia. We've woken up somewhere in the middle of our lives and have forgotten who we

are at our core. We've been lied to, deceived, and manipulated to believe that we're bad at our core. But unlike Jason Bourne, who wished he'd never discovered the truth when we discover the truth of who we really are, we will discover freedom like we've never imagined. When we discover, and actually believe, that we are loved and valuable, then we'll finally truly come alive for the first time.

In the movie, Jason Bourne does everything he can to prove his identity. In our case, there's no way to actually prove our worth. In fact, the very act of trying to prove our worth is the thing that takes us down. As soon as we start to measure our value based on all the good or bad things we've done, we're hosed, we lose.

When the real Jesus was hanging on the cross, he let us in on his feelings by crying out: "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" Here's the thing. If anyone understands what it's like to be tempted to believe we are alone, it's Jesus. There he was hanging on the cross and every single thing that surrounded him testified that there was no one there for him.... Think of it: The Pharisees pointing and mocking, his actual flesh dying, the pain he was experiencing. Literally every single bit of information from this natural world told one story: There is no one there for Him, that he was abandoned, but yet even in the

midst of all of that, He did not choose to walk in that temptation.

Instead, He chose to walk in faith as it says in Hebrews:

*“Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the **author and perfecter of our faith**, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your own blood.”*

Do you see that? Jesus BOTH authored AND perfected our faith to believe that even in the very worst, most intense, unimaginable devastation, that we can still disregard the story of shame this world wants to throw on us, and instead walk in our true identity as Gods kids seated with Christ in heaven..

Trusting the word of God and the value that God places on your life is the only way that you can truly find freedom in life.

FIVE
MAYBE SHE WILL HELP??

At 27, I married my dream girl. She's drop-dead gorgeous, she loves to fish and is a country girl through and through...I mean, come on! Marrying Lori was seriously one of the best decisions of my life. I can't imagine life without her and I thank God for her every day.

But the truth is, deep down I never thought I would make it. My parents didn't make it, and I didn't think I was going to make it either. I never had it modeled for me. I thought for sure, even though I wouldn't have said it, that my addiction was going to drag me down, leading to a divorce and that my life would end up in ruin. These dark thoughts, which were deep in my heart, plagued me. But they were not the things that I would say out loud. They would come up to the surface in the form of my addictions and behaviors every

time I acted out, pushing me closer to the destiny that I believed I was heading toward. A destiny powered by self-hate and the stranglehold of addiction. Funny to think back I was in ministry and playing Jesus in a passion play this whole time. Isn't that crazy?

I really should have been happy. I was married to the best woman in the world. I had a family, a house, and a small, growing business. I was involved in ministry and church. But I didn't know who I was. Sure, I knew my name. I knew all about my broken family history. I knew myself on the outside. But I didn't really know who I was deep down on the inside. I didn't know that once I discovered who I really was, that everything in my life would change in ways I'd only dreamed of.

If you're reading this book, there is a probability that you or someone you love is trapped in the same endless loop that I was trapped in. Trying to live a normal life. Then, getting tempted to dull the pain or feel alive through drink, drugs, sex, or whatever. And then, guilt and shame. Then, empty promises to yourself and everyone you love. Then, you stop...for an hour, or day or week. Until you fall back into "it" again. And then the loop continues. Over and over. And each time you tumble through the loop, the same narrative is reinforced. That you will always be like this. That you'll never change. That there's no real

hope for you. That at your very core, you're worthless. That you're not really worth it anyway.

And that's the big lie!

I had been a Christian for 20 years, but inside I was as hurt, sad, and lonely as ever in my life. I had married the most incredible woman in the world and still, I was in a really bad place. My business would take off, but then I would mess it all up through the inconsistent actions that came from my drug, alcohol, and porn addiction. I was drinking way too much and keeping myself medicated on Oxycontin, amphetamines, and porn. I was in a constant loop of guilt and shame. So in 2012, when I told my wife I'd been invited to go on a men's retreat in the mountains of Virginia, there was no hesitation in her voice, she was practically kicking me out of the door to go. (I really love her...)

SIX THE RETREAT

By this point in my life, I'd been to a ton of retreats. Christian retreats, youth retreats, and 12 step retreats. I had learned some things here and there, had great praise and worship sessions, and was baptized in a lake in the middle of Kansas. But did any of that really stick? Sure, it got me through and they were good experiences, but none of them had actually changed my life in the ways that this retreat in the mountains would. Why was that? I think about this a lot these days. Even now, I want to tell you this message so badly. Because my life has changed so ridiculously. I'm strong. I'm strong like the guys that I used to look up to and that took me by surprise. It wasn't that I thought that I would become strong if I chose to believe what God said about me, it just happened.

I used to look at the president or famous pastors, or even the friends around me, my buddy John or my buddy Dan, and I would look at them because (I thought) they had their stuff together. They looked like they had peace. And I knew that I didn't. I knew that I was hurt. I knew all of the darkness that was inside of me. I believed deep down inside I was worthless at my core. They didn't look like that. They didn't act like that. So was it my time? Was it the message of that Retreat? I'm not sure. If it was the message or if I was just finally at the end of my efforts. So tired of trying and exhausted, ready for a different angle. I hope it was the message. I hope it didn't have to do with the timing, because then maybe you might be able to hear the same message right here, right now through this book. I hope you can open your eyes and open your ears if you're tired of trying to do it on your own because I know this message is for you.

TWO WORDS

On the first night of the retreat, I was standing with my eyes closed during the song service. As I stood there trying to focus on God, I was picturing various things in my head and then this crazy image came into focus. Maybe it was some kind of vision, but I could see it as clear as day in my mind's eye. I was standing in front of a mirror,

with two words written on my shirt. It was weird because they were the kind of words I'd never use in my everyday life. But for some reason, those two words lingered for a few minutes. It was crazy, but after a while, I blew it off, worship ended and then the speaker got up and started preaching.

I was literally dozing off as the dude was rambling on in the blah blah blah of the millionth sermon I had heard in my life up to this point. Then, as he was ending his sermon, he told us that they wanted us to do a little activity. Sweet. *Anything to stop the blah blah blah boring preaching*, I thought to myself.

Then, they started putting out art supplies.

Ohhh no!!! I did a double-take in terror as I saw all the colored pencils. Not art! Anything but art! I had seen these types of activities at other retreats before and I knew what was coming next..

And that's when the horror struck. The guy said that if God had shown you something during praise and worship, to simply draw it out on paper. It's like he had literally read my mind. I suddenly flashed back to those two lame words that were in my head earlier.

PRECIOUS TREASURE!!!!

OH NOOOO!!!! I thought to myself.
 NOOOOOO!!!! Precious Treasure????? NO

WAY!!!! There's no WAY I'm writing those two words down in front of a bunch of guys!!!

Those two words sounded so feminine! They were NOT AT ALL the words that I would have picked for myself: something strong, cool words like *brave warrior* or *badass Christian Dude* or something.

But *Precious Treasure*? Heck no!!! But I saw what I saw, and I was trapped! In hindsight I believe it had to be like that. It had to be something so completely scary to claim in front of a bunch of men at a men's retreat!!!! Something that there was no way would have come from me, from my ego, something that in truth 100% turned off my ego completely. Precious treasure were words that I would never have picked myself.

There was no question about it, those were the words that I had seen. I saw what I saw. Was it right? Was it really the message for me that day? I didn't know, but what I did know is that my life and marriage was in shambles.

The last thing I wanted to do was draw out those two words. However as much as I wanted to leave that room, what I wanted more was freedom.

I had been under "leadership" in various schools and intern programs that stressed obedience to leadership, so I decided to play by their rules. By faith, because it sure wasn't by logic or my ego, I

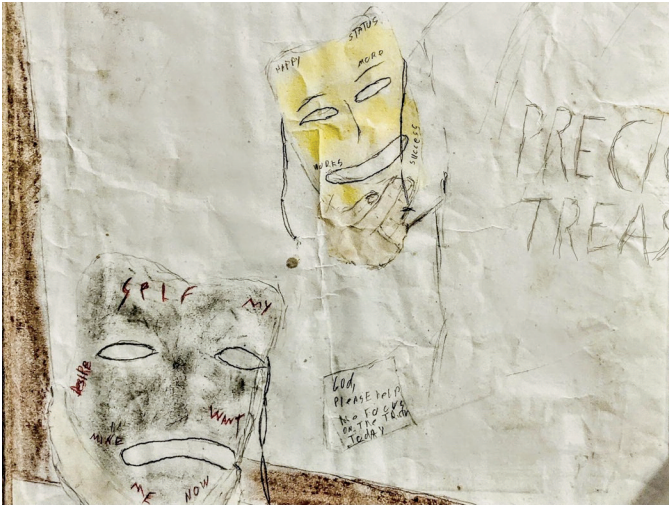
picked up that 20 ton colored pencil to draw out those two fateful words “Precious Treasure” that I had seen written on my shirt in the reflection of the mirror.

I had also seen something else. In my hand I had seen one of those old, weird theater masks. You know, the kind with the happy and sad face. But in my case, the happy face was facing outward and the sad face was facing inward, toward me. The happy face side of the mask was bright yellow, a happy color, and the sad face was black...like I'd felt my whole life.

That mask was the mask that I'd worn my whole life.

On the outside, I wanted everyone to believe that I was happy, that I was OK, that everything was fine. I was the outgoing skater kid, the upbeat Bible college student, the cool tree dude. But on the inside, I was filled with rage, depression, and shame. I wore a bright, shiny mask on the outside but the dark, sad mask was how I felt every time I put on a show for people. I believed that I was less-than. That I was less than my peers, my family, the people I respected most in life. More than anything else, I just wanted to be loved and OK and worth something. But on the inside, I believed that I was damaged beyond repair, that I was dark and bad and rotten at my core.

So I picked up the pen and drew what I saw.



My drawing of the two masks and the words:
PRECIOUS TREASURE

Precious Treasure

As scary as it was to say at first, That's me! That's who I am. That's the real me.

I'm not the broken, hurting, addicted, less-than person I'd always believed I was. It's just not who I am. And I don't mean that as just a nice, religious thing to say. I don't mean it as a self-help mantra or positive mental attitude kind of thing. What I have come to realize is that the real me, the actual make-up of who I am, the way I was designed by God from the very beginning — I am

a *Precious Treasure*. I was designed that way, I was that at creation, I am that as I walk through this life and I *will be that* after this life, on and on into eternity. In fact, I realize now that the most accurate definition of who I am, and who you are, is a Precious Treasure. It's a more accurate definition than anything else.

SEVEN UNDERSTANDING IDENTITY

Understanding the basis of your true identity is the very foundation of life. God is not an abstract idea and He has not created all things in chaos and then left them on their own. Your identity as a Precious Treasure, a child of God, a wonderful creation, is not just a good idea. It is a fact of life as much as oxygen and gravity and physics and creation itself. It's more perfect than the Fibonacci sequence. It's more certain than pi. Your identity is like the ultimate prime number. You are perfect, because God is perfect, and God does not make garbage.

NOT FOR WIMPS

I understand that the words *Precious Treasure*, *loved* and *valuable* sound weak. They sound like soft, airy-fairy words. You know, the kind of words that

belong in a love story rather than in a book for warriors. But here's the thing..I stuffure you, these aren't soft words. They aren't weak words. The exact opposite is the case. These words represent strength, action and, violence.

Jesus made clear that the greatest of among us was the least of these. The ones who went low. The ones who had no power in this world. These were the ones that he called spiritually strong.

Strength in weakness. To believe your true identity as perfect takes violence against the report of this world.

Who was the greatest prophet? John the Baptist. He was the first to point to Jesus. But yet he's the lowest and the strongest!

The way that Jesus calls us to walk is full of contradictions; strengths in weaknesses. So, this book is about bringing you to a place of weakness in yourself, so that you can find strength in Him.

The goal is for you to understand the strength that you have when you stop relying on your own works to make you one way or another. By referring to yourself as God's Precious Treasure, is that a description of weakness? No! Instead it's the exact opposite. When you find your strength in who God says that you are, you are stronger

than any man. Because man's words no longer have a hold on you.

The man who finds his identity from the eternal is the *eternal warrior*.

Matthew 11:12 says "Since the days of John the Baptist until now the Kingdom of Heaven has been forcefully advancing and violent men take it by force!!!"

It takes violent force in your beliefs to war against who this world tells you that you are. This way of faith is not singing Kumbaya, or waiting till peace in the by and by. This mental state is about shaking off the lies that the enemy has piled on you, rising up with strength, seeing with your eyes of faith, getting strong in who you are, and resisting in the strength of God the lies that the enemy has put on you.

You are not worthless! You are valuable because He is valuable! You are loved because He is loved! You're an heir to the throne because He is an heir to the throne. And NONE OF THAT has anything to do with what you have done. Good or bad. You need to see that your ETERNAL worth is 100% completely decoupled from your actions here on Earth.

You are a warrior! So is *Precious Treasure*...weak? No! Precious Treasure is the strongest thing that

you can possibly grab hold of. It is your eternal worth in God. The very strength of God. It is your identity.

FINDING THE REAL YOU

The Bible says that “we see but a dim reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.” Did you hear that? God knows the kinds of things we see when we look into the mirror. For a lot of us, we look in the mirror and we hate what we see. Some of us see something ugly or broken or worthless. But that’s not the real you.

Most of us see ourselves dimly, not as we truly are. But the true image of who you are is beautiful. As you begin to see yourself the way God sees you, that image will grow clearer and clearer until you have a full and total revelation of yourself like God does. Just like the person who has no idea the value of the old painting in their attic until one day when they get it appraised, so many of us have no idea of our value until we hear and believe the words that God says about us.

God simply sees you as perfect. Plain and simple. Because God does not create worthlessness. Let that sink in. God doesn’t see you for your good or

bad deeds. He could honestly care less about your deeds. He only cares about you and your heart.

THE PROGRAMMED RESISTANCE

Here's one thing to keep in mind. This whole idea of your identity as perfect— it's not going to be realized without resistance. When you've been living your whole life believing that you are less-than, that you're worthless, it's not going to be easy for you to just suddenly block out the voices of despair and self-hate. And as a Christian, I actually believe that the enemy (call it the devil or resistance or whatever), wants nothing more than to keep you locked up in guilt and shame.

The Bible calls the devil *the accuser*. I think that's a pretty accurate description of what happens with us. The accuser, the liar, tries to get us to laugh at the things we desperately want. It's crazy because sometimes I tell people about them being a *Precious Treasure* and they start to laugh. Isn't it strange that we've been programmed to laugh at the very thing that we all desperately want and need — to be loved and to feel like we are okay.

That's how it works. The enemy preys on our greatest fears and insecurities. We're afraid that we'll be alone so we do whatever we can to create a false sense of relationship. Our insecurity leads us to front and pose with things we can't afford

and that will never bring true satisfaction anyway. I did that on more than one occasion.

And I'm guessing that some of you reading this book are going through the exact same thing. You've done whatever you can to make others think you're OK, but deep, down inside you wonder what you're really worth. Maybe like me, you've walked around with a mask on. A mask of happiness, or wealth, or maybe a mask of the *perfect Christian*. When all along, on the inside of the mask, you've been a wounded, scared, empty person. That's exactly where I was before that retreat and if I could find a way to drop the mask and begin to look into the mirror, you can too!

EIGHT
SCHRODINGER'S IDENTITY

I left that retreat with a whole new outlook on life. I remember driving home with my buddy Dan, excitedly blabbing on and on about this new idea considering how I might really be a *Precious Treasure* in God's eyes. It was a super freeing feeling. When I got home and told my wife about what happened, she was excited for me, but a bit skeptical, considering all she had been through with me.

In reality, it didn't take too long for the old habits and bondage to come back around. But it was different now. Before the retreat, whenever I'd fall back into old habits, I would find myself in an endless loop of guilt and shame. After my new perspective of how God saw me, I didn't feel the same way. I did not feel hopeless as if those

actions defined me, and thus, their grip of permanence over my life began to loosen.

A COAT OF GARBAGE

A week after the retreat, while I was at church, God gave me a cool picture of what it's like to try and *earn* God's favor. The Bible says that *our works are like filthy rags*. For all of my life, I had tried to do stuff to make God love me. Now, for the first time, I saw things completely differently. I realized that my true identity from God was (and had always been) perfect, but I had been covering that perfect identity up with my own filthy works! The things that I thought were making me a better person were only covering up the glory and the beauty that God had created in me. It was a total paradigm shift from how I lived up to that point.

I had spent my life trying to make myself better with my works. But now, I realized that the whole time it was like my works were filthy rags — like a coat of garbage that I was covering myself in. You know the nastiness in your garbage? You know that feeling when you have to dig to the bottom of it because you accidentally dropped something in it, and the reluctance that you feel to have to dig in it? That's what my coat was made of in comparison to the beauty that God spoke over my identity. Like a coat made of old banana peels, or

coffee grounds, or nasty wet paper towels. And I was using that to cover myself!

The thing that I thought made sense, turned out to be the most backward thing that I could have been doing. Once I realized who He created me (and you) to be perfect at our core, I saw just how worthless all of my actions were. I saw how disgusting my attempts were to make myself righteous or beautiful. I didn't need to do that anymore. Because he had already made me perfect. Because he is perfect.

YOU CAN'T PROVE IT

Here's the tricky part — to walk in our TRUE Identity as Precious Treasures, we can never prove our worth. It has to be faith. We can only ever believe it. We can never prove it.

It's a little bit like Schrodinger's cat (if you've never heard it, Google it), in that the second you look at it to prove it, the very act of observation locks it into a state. Before you look at it, maybe it's in both states at once? To me, that's easier to accept. Because the problem is, the second we look at our actions to prove our worth, it locks us into a provable state and it brings us death.

You can think about the results of looking back to prove your worth (good or bad) in this way:

Doing good: Let's say you do something really awesome and you get all proud about it. Well then, what happens on your next choice, when you don't do awesome? Who are you then? See, the good never lasts — so, proof via good actually brings death.

Doing bad: What if you do something really horrible? Well, that one is easy because you will condemn yourself about it and thus it brings death.

Both are traps that lead to death. Both bring death because BOTH are the result of the faulty equation of “DO something to BE something.” It never works.

Instead, to find life, we must reject the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (or measuring our right or wrong), as it says in Genesis, and instead start eating from the Tree of Life, the Tree of Faith. To do this, we must find our identity in what God did for us and who God says we are. We have to completely decouple our actions from our identity. This is the trick. This is what takes the “violence” that's referenced in Matthew 11:12.

It takes violence in our mind and heart to fight the fight for identity continually. Not just on the big stuff, but the small little subtle glances, the quiet places in our thought process and our heart.

Those moments when we are tempted to believe that we would be better if we bought this or that or if we owned a nice car or if our house looked as nice as our neighbor's, or if our spouse was as attractive as that other person's. These are the quiet places in our heart, that no one ever hears us consider. But it's in these places, in these thoughts, that we have to keep guard.

We can never look back. The Bible is clear "that the Lord takes no pleasure in those who *shrink back*." That means God is looking for people who will fight with grit and never give up. Do you get it? We have to press forward with violence. I don't mean violence in the destructive sense; I mean it as a word to describe the aggressive, determined all-out attitude that brings about true change. This violence doesn't "look back" to try and prove anything. Instead, it continues to look forward, into the unknown.

The second that we try to prove our worth by what we did in the past, we are looking back. The only actions we can look to are the actions of Christ. God's actions. Because he speaks our worth over us. The second that we point to our own actions, we are worshiping ourselves as our creator and we're hosed. Whether they're good or bad, we die either way.

Here's a really awesome quote about faith by Mike Mchargue from his book, *Finding God in the Waves*:

“We can approach beliefs not as gems to be mined from the earth and protected with clenched fists, but rather as butterflies that land on an open hand — as gifts to enjoy but not possess.”

We can never really *grasp* or *possess* our identity. We can never lay hold of it. We can never grab it because the second we do, we're going to break that butterfly's wings. That's right, we can never know it for sure. Heck, let's be honest. We walk in faith. We don't even really know if Jesus was really God. We can believe it, but we can't prove it. As He said, all we can do is *let our yes be yes* and our *no be no*. Everything else, swearing one way or another, is from the evil one.

So you just had this butterfly land in your open hand, and it is saying that you are perfect in who God made you. Don't grab it to possess it, or you will break it. Instead, simply continue to look at and enjoy it.

NINE
GETTING STRONGER PHYSICALLY

I can honestly tell you that deciding to step out in faith and draw out that picture at that retreat changed my life as much as anything else I'd ever experienced. It changed the way that I believed God looked at me. It changed my perspective on who I was. But I can't tell you that I got home from the retreat and never looked at porn or drank a beer again. That's not what happened. Instead, what happened was for two years I had a slow, day-by-day CHOOSING to walk in who I really am. I had found out the information, but I hadn't made daily choices to walk in it on a continual basis.

During that year, as I continued to make the choice to walk in my true identity, I could feel a gradual strengthening of my inner person, my spirit, the real me. And as my inner man was

slowly growing stronger, I wanted my outer man, my flesh, to get stronger, too. I remember feeling like I had spent way too much time in 2013 behind my computer and I was ready to get back in shape physically.

As a kid, especially in high school, I worked out and was in great shape physically. I played sports and kept myself in top condition. After high school, I joined a super intense internship program because I loved the way I felt when I was surrounded by physical discipline. In that program, we climbed mountains and ran marathons and raced in Eco-challenges. And I loved it. But I had gotten older, I was thirty-eight, the things of life, family, work, etc, had crept in and I was no longer walking in the discipline physically that I had in the past. My body had gotten soft, but internally my spirit and my mind were getting stronger.

There was an incongruity. Internally, in my mind and spirit I was making hard choices and getting stronger. But I saw that my body was still weak. I was still catering to my flesh. Sitting around the computer, eating crappy food and energy drinks, and not working out. It was something that didn't line up.

It was the end of 2013 and I was longing for that external discipline and felt a draw to the idea of a

New Year's resolution to work out every single day for 2014. But to be honest, I was totally petrified to take the step of committing. There was just no way I could afford to fail again. For me, the idea of actually committing to something like that was as scary as picking up the 20 ton colored pencil to write *Precious Treasure*.

I was scared to try, so that's what I did. Because that was what needed to be done.

15 MINUTES A DAY

I decided that I would not skip even a single day. It was pretty straightforward. Workout for 15 minutes, uninterrupted, every day for a year.

Why 15 minutes? Why not the an hour a day? Because I knew myself. I had done the hour-a-day workouts before, and they never stuck. It was too much time. Besides, an hour a day is a little bit silly. You do a set, then you rest for a minute or two, then you do another set in the same muscle group. Instead, I would do one intense set for one muscle group and then change to another muscle group. That way the first muscle group was resting, while the other one was working. And this system worked really well because it kicked my butt for 15 minutes, and then I was done. The only two requirements for the workout? 15 minutes every day. And pain. That was it. If it

met those two requirements it met the goal for the New Year's resolution, and so off I went.

Some days were awesome, and I felt like a stud all pumped up on creatine, but there were other days that it absolutely sucked. But guess what. I did it anyway. The worst were the days when I was sick. I remember a leg day once, having to do squats right after I threw up. It was horrible. But guess what? I did it anyway. After about four months, I began to feel and see the changes. I was getting stronger, leaner, fitter.

I kept on hitting it every single day that whole year, and after that year, I never stopped. Yeah baby, bring the pain! That was 7 years ago. And I haven't missed a day since. Is it hard? HELL YES IT'S HARD!! That's the point! And that's why I love it. You see, I knew back then that I didn't want to run away from discipline. Instead, I wanted to embrace it. And the pain that went along with it. Somehow, I knew that if I embraced the pain, it would reap a harvest in me, my body, my family...my life. And it has. I'm stronger than I've ever been. My family actually works out *with me* every day. I'm a better husband, a better dad, and a consistent business owner. I believe that one of the biggest parts of that is the fact that I am willing to embrace the pain every day.

Don't get me wrong. I'm not saying that the answer to your problems is a daily workout. Knowing who you are in Christ is way more important than embracing pain. Just for me the two sort of go hand-in-hand. I bring the pain because it reminds me physically of the spiritual choice I make daily. It's difficult to make the choice to walk in who you are. It's not impossible, but it's unnatural. It's also unnatural to force yourself to feel the pain of discipline. But without putting yourself under stressful situations, you'll never grow. That's how muscles grow stronger physically and that's also how you grow stronger spiritually.

NO WEAK KNEES & FEEBLE ARMS

The Bible says in Hebrews 12 that we should, "strengthen our feeble arms and weak knees." I knew the Bible was talking about the spiritual, but I wanted to grow stronger in both the physical and the spiritual. I wanted my entire self to be renewed and strengthened.

I think part of the reason I was so ready for a daily workout was that I was coming out of a season in my life where I was pretty much doing whatever I wanted to please my flesh. I'd drink if I felt down, take a pain med if I felt bad or look at porn if I needed to feel loved and accepted. But

now, I wanted to embrace the pain and discipline as a way to gain strength so that when the old familiar comfortable way of thinking of “do-to-be” tempted me, I could instead walk in the less comfortable way of believing that I am a Precious Treasure whether I do good or bad. You see that takes discipline, it takes consistency, it’s not natural, and at first, it’s not easy. But you get stronger in it the longer you walk in it.

I was shocked at what happened in my life as I embraced the discipline of 15 minutes a day. It wasn’t just my body that changed. I literally saw every area of my life improve. My marriage was better than it had ever been. Where I used to bicker and fight with my wife over the smallest things, now I found that I had more patience and I was able to communicate in love, even when communication was strained.

I was becoming a better father to my kids. I had more love and patience and kindness to give them. But it didn’t stop there. My job changed, too.

I’d been cutting down trees for a living for several decades and I’d always been able to make money when I needed it, but I never really got ahead in business because every time I started to get ahead, my addictions would stop my forward progress. I was never consistent because of the drugs, alcohol

and porn. Once I began to embrace discipline, things began to change in my work. I brought the same sort of consistency to my work as I did to my workouts.

I added the stability of the daily grind to my work. I realized that making small choices, that by themselves may not make much of a difference, cumulatively would add up. And they did. Big time. I started to get more calls, I had happier clients and I believe that God began to give me ideas that have grown my business exponentially over the past few years.

TEN
GETTING STRONGER SPIRITUALLY

This book wouldn't be complete if I didn't share with you probably the two most important scriptures that made a difference in my life — James 1:22-25 combined with Hebrews 12:11-13. These two verses describe how you can walk out your identity. You mix these two together, and you'll understand exactly how to grow spiritually. Take a look at them.

In the book of James, it says:

“Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and

immediately forgets what he looks like. But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.”

So check this out, this verse is saying *don't just listen to it and deceive yourself*. It's telling you to *do something*. And then it gives us an illustration of what it looks like if you don't. It's a picture of a man who looks at his face in the mirror and goes away and forgets what he looks like. There's that mirror verse, the one that made such a difference for me at that retreat.

Interpreting this verse from the natural has us believe that the reflection in the mirror is ugly and worthless, but that's the exact opposite of the truth. Let's look closer...

THE PERFECT LAW

Now, this is the important part. Do you see in the next verse where it says *whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom?* What do you think it means by *the perfect law that gives freedom?* Seriously, stop and think about it for a second. Does the perfect law that gives freedom make you perform?

Is that freedom? You have to do a whole bunch of stuff in order to be? Or is the perfect law that gives freedom the one that says you are a Precious Treasure because of what Christ did. Do you see the difference? This is what I saw for the very first time at that retreat. The perfect law that gives freedom is actually understanding what the scripture REALLY says about us. That we should look into the mirror and see beauty the way God sees us. That's the message that the enemy doesn't want you to hear.

I used to hate looking in the mirror. I always saw a piece of garbage. God is trying to tell us something. He is trying to tell us that through Christ, the way he sees us is that we are beautiful and wonderful. And he is imploring us, in black and white as clear as can be, stating right there, that he wants us to look at ourselves as he looks at us. He is practically screaming it. There it is, right in front of you. Look! Look at how I see you! Don't look away! You're beautiful! You're wonderful! Don't Look Away! Continue to do it! And if you will! I promise! You will be blessed!!!!

Do you see it? Do you see the difference? The enemy wants us to look at ourselves as worthless. And continue to look at worthlessness. And God is imploring us to see the truth, through Christ, that we are beautiful. And to continue to look at our beauty! God has done everything he can to

demonstrate and have us focus on our worth in Christ and the enemy continues to lie, trying to trick us into trying to perform for our worth.

Is this a new trick by the enemy? No! It's the same thing he's always done. Remember when he took Jesus into the desert to be tempted? The Bible says that Jesus was led by the spirit to be tempted by the enemy. About what? About his position, his identity. It's the same thing, for Jesus and for you. Look at the three Temptations.

“If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.” This verse clearly tells us that Jesus was tempted with his identity. *“If you are the Son of God,”* he said, *“throw yourself down.”* Again tempted to doubt who he was. And finally, *“all this I will give you,”* he said, *“if you will bow down and worship me.”* The nature of Christ was not to bow. It shows us that we are tempted to second-guess our identity by what actions we choose to walk in. Did Jesus bow? No! Bowing to this world is not his nature. And in Christ, it's not yours either!

So we see that the important part is to continue looking into the word. Not forgetting what we see, but doing it. And when we do, we will be blessed.

THE 1000-YEAR-YOU

As a Christian, the idea of living eternally makes the 80-ish years we live on Earth seem pretty insignificant. Thinking about it, the person I am in 1,000 years is likely a more accurate picture of who I actually am than the 38-year-old version of me. The *1,000-year-you* is a better representation of the real you than who you are at any given moment in your life.

The real you is the eternal you, not the temporary you. The Bible talks about the *man of the spirit* and the *man of the flesh*. I imagine that man of the flesh is the person we are while we're in this skin. But the man of the spirit is so much more the *real* us.

The 1,000-year-you isn't addicted to drugs. The 1,000-year-you isn't driven by pain or loneliness or insecurity. The real you is 100% free. The real you is good enough. The real you has what it takes. The real you is full of life and freedom and love and victory. But you have a choice...

IS THAT AIR YOU'RE BREATHING?

There's this scene in *The Matrix* where Morpheus asks Neo, "is that air that you're breathing?" He was trying to get Neo to doubt the authenticity and permanence of the world that was wrapped

around him. It's such a great analogy for our Christian walk.

In considering this eternal thousand-year nature, the thing that struck me the most is that I had a choice to believe **WHEN** and **WHERE** I truly was. For the first time, I saw that I could continue to identify with this world, or instead, I could believe that I am seated with Christ in 1000 years.

As a Christian, I believe that the real you isn't lost or broken, or dirty. And definitely not a "sinner." The real you is, as the Bible says, "seated with Christ." The real you isn't hiding with your smartphone, looking at porn. The real you isn't sneaking off for a quick hit or drink when nobody is watching. The real you isn't mentally undressing girls while you're standing in church or at work or school. Though you may not see it yet, the real you is free. Totally and completely free from addictions! The real you is designed to lift up others, not tear others down for your own satisfaction. The real you is giving, the real you is patient and kind. The real you is walking in victory, free of guilt and shame. The cool part? You can step into your real identity **IN THIS LIFE!** You can choose to walk in who you really are right now.

As I considered this choice, I began to understand that who I actually am is **NOT** a guy who

objectifies women. The real me is not the one that's drinking and losing control in 1,000 years. The 1,000-year-me isn't taking drugs to numb the pain. And even though it sounds crude, I began to understand that none of us are looking at porn with Jesus in a thousand years. So if we're not doing it then, why do it now?

You may be saying that you've tried to stop before and it hasn't worked. I get it. But this is different from trying to stop under your own strength and willpower. You need to know that God can completely change who you believe that you are. Are you really one to take advantage of others? Are you one to exploit others? Is that really how God made you? Are you doing that in 1,000 years? Are you looking at porn in a thousand years? NO. That's not me. And it's not you, either!

The enemy has us so completely tricked. The enemy wants us to try to fight this battle in the flesh. Instead, as Morpheus implored Neo, we need to doubt the authenticity of this world.

The way Jesus provides 100% transcendent freedom from this world is by simply understanding one simple truth — that through Christ, you're perfect. You're not one to look at porn. You're not built that way. It's not how God designed you. When you finally realize that your

nature, the way that you're built is in the nature of God's nature, you will start walking in it.

GROWING SPIRITUALLY

So now, let's look at how we grow stronger in our spirit. The Bible talks about this in Hebrews chapter 12. Basically, this portion of scripture is all about discipline. Not the kind of discipline that you give a three-year-old when they're acting up. I'm talking about the kind of discipline that an Olympic athlete or MMA fighter commits to. I think of words like grit, blood, tears, sweat and aggressive determination. It's the scene in Rocky when he's preparing for the fight of his life. When you'll do whatever it takes to win.

The Bible says that discipline never feels good at the moment. It's painful! But, if you stick to it, later on it will produce a "harvest of righteousness and peace" for those who commit to it. Then, the writer of Hebrews tells us what will be the result of our training, of our discipline, that this difficult process will "strengthen our feeble arms and weak knees..."

This is talking about *growing spiritually* — submitting to the father of our spirits and truly living.

We are all born of the flesh. But we are also born of the spirit, as Jesus explained to Nicodemus in the garden. But that baby Spirit has to grow. And that's what we are talking about here. When you're a newborn, you have to eat spiritual food and drink spiritual drink. Now, you have to learn to walk.

SMALL STEPS TO STRENGTHEN THOSE KNEES

I lived for twenty years as a Christian and barely knew how to take a step. I didn't know how to walk, spiritually. I didn't know who I was. It wasn't until I started to believe that I was God's Precious Treasure that I began taking small steps in the right direction. And I didn't look away. It was wobbly and it felt weird, but I took a step. And it was unnatural. But I kept my eyes focused on that *Precious Treasure* reflection in the mirror, the perfect law that gives freedom. And I continued to do so.

And I walked with discipline, and I trained my body, and I took the pain that went hand-in-hand with the unnaturalness of continuing to look into the mirror. And God began to work. I began for the first time in my life to eat spiritual food. To strengthen my feeble arms and my weak knees. And, I began to not care what other people thought.

In just a few short verses later, it explains it so clearly, the fear of man. The scripture employs us to, “*Keep your lives free from the love of this world and be content with what you have, because God has said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you. So we say with confidence, “**The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. For what can man do to me!**”*”

Obviously we see the fear of man in terms of others, but the same fear is there when we’re beating ourselves down through condemnation. I was my own critic! I was a slave to my own thoughts. I beat my own self down under the guidance of the enemy. I was not looking into the perfect law that gave freedom. Instead, I was a slave to my works, trying to make myself better. I didn’t make myself, to begin with — I didn’t create myself, I didn’t make myself be born, so why did I ever think that I could make myself better?

I had finally found the truth in these two verses, and through this disciplined act of daily looking at the *Precious Treasure* reflection in the mirror I began for the first time in my life to *strengthen my feeble arms and my weak knees*. The paths began to be level. Back in the Bible days, they had to push heavy crap up hills. They didn’t have gasoline or diesel motors to help. So if you had to carry something heavy up a hill, if your knees were

weak, you were going to feel the hill. But if you got stronger, that path felt more like it was level.

It had been a long two years, fighting and praying and taking thoughts captive, then, on October 31st, after working out for 10 months straight, everything in my life would change again. I was about to level up. For good.

ELEVEN THATS NOT ME

October 31st, 2014 was one of the most important days of my life. It had been a couple of years since the retreat where I'd begun to believe that I was truly valuable in the eyes of God. I had been working out for 15 minutes every day for ten months. I was eating better. I was reading the Word of God and speaking God's truth over my life. I was slowly starting to see a change in my business. I was beginning to see the difference on the outside and inside. I was strengthening who I was in every way. But that night, I made a decision that would take me to an even greater level of freedom.

THE DEFINING MOMENT

It was Halloween night and I was in a neighborhood taking my kids door to door trick-

or-treating when my phone rang from my sister with some really bad news about someone in my family. It was devastating, to say the least. I felt sick to my stomach. Someone that I had looked up to, who struggled with addiction themselves, had betrayed me and my family in ways I won't write down in this book. For a split second, my mind raced to a lie. A lie that said that I would end up just like that family member, that I was just the same. And that their destiny would be my destiny, too.

Had it come prior to the previous 10 months of embracing pain, I believe that call could easily have thrown me into a downward spiral of doubt and anger. I could have believed that my future was going to be dark and hollow and lonely. That call could have undone all the good that had been building in my life over the previous couple years. But it didn't. Instead of shrinking back or giving up, something inside of me rose up.

Right then and there, I decided to stand on the truth of my true identity. I knew who I was and I was sick and tired of the lies I'd believed about myself. That night, standing in the middle of that street, phone to my ear, a thought went through my head that never had before. The thought came to me with total conviction and a glimmer of hope that it could be true. I told myself, the

world, the voices in my head that “That is not my destiny! The choice to act in addiction is not the real me. I finally realized...

THATS NOT ME!!!!!!

Something was different. That night, I meant it! That night, my “legs” had gotten stronger because I had been learning how to walk. Inadvertently, I had found some new courage, something that I had never found before. I decided that I was done. Once and for all, I was done with everything that held me in bondage — specifically for me it was porn, drugs, and alcohol.

I realized for the first time **THATS NOT ME!** The person addicted to porn. **THATS NOT ME!** The guy hooked on drugs. **THATS NOT ME!** The dude who needs a drink at the end of a day. **THATS NOT ME!** It’s not the *real* me. And if it’s not who I *actually am*, then I don’t need to give into it. Ever. And I mean ever.

It’s crazy thinking back because I remember that when I said it, there was something in the back of my head trying to convince me not to commit to that direction. That I couldn’t make it. But there was also something backing up my decision. The last 10 months of my life I had been taking baby steps and learning to walk in who I was and who I could be. The little decisions, the small glances

where I would have taken a sip of lust from the girls around me, but instead I had been retraining my brain that I was a Precious Treasure that did not do that.

Standing there in the street was the first time in my life that I had ever seen a glimmer of hope that there was actually a possibility to be free from the addictions. Free from the lie that I was worthless. And it was super duper scary to even think that I would say never again. I had lived a life of 12-step groups continually speaking that I'm an alcoholic, I'm a drug addict, I'm a sex addict. But you know what, it was stinking scary to say that I was going to do a New Year's resolution and stick with it, but I was 10 months in and I was going strong. My arms were freaking huge. I was knocking it out every single day and something had changed. I was in beast mode and I was tired of getting my rear end kicked by the enemy.

The news on that phone call kicked my butt hard enough and I was done living that life. God was opening my eyes to the warrior of who I was. — I was over it. God was opening my eyes to the beauty He created in me and that I know he created in you.

Man.... I hope you can see this. I really hope you could see who you are. I hope you can see the

person that he created you to be. You are beautiful. You are a warrior. You are loved. And you are not built to lose. You are strong, and you are a *beast*. That's what he created you to be. *Beast mode to conquer*.

I really hope that some of you guys reading this book won't let your religious side of you prevent you from hearing the truth of who you are. I've probably made it pretty clear that I'm a Christian. But being a Christian has nothing to do with the stuff of religion. I'm over the hypocrisy and greed and pride and all the bad stuff that comes along with a lot of organized religion.

TOTAL FREEDOM

That night, I began to see myself as I truly was — the way that God had seen me all along. And that one idea, it gave me total freedom to actually step into my true identity. And from that night on, I was free. Totally free. I stopped drinking. I stopped looking at porn. I stopped taking drugs.

Now, remember, it was a process for me. It didn't happen all at once. It began at that retreat and then it continued with me learning to walk by embracing discipline every day and then it culminated *with a choice* to believe the deep realization (that had been growing in me for 2 years) of God's love and my true identity. And the

work *continues* in me every day. It's not like I'm never tempted. But I'm seriously not tempted for more than a few seconds (more on that shortly) and I don't give in to temptation because I **KNOW WHO I AM.**

TWELVE SKEPTICAL

Did you know that your brain has the ability to reprogram itself? That's right, your brain can actually rewire itself, adapting and changing throughout your life. Scientists call it neuroplasticity. Scientists tell us that we can rewrite certain patterns and change the way we think. This is exactly what happens when we begin to embrace God's truth about you, rather than believing the enemy's lies.

The other day, I wrote to say thanks to one of my very first therapists. His name is Doug Weiss. He runs Heart to Heart Counseling Center In Colorado Springs, Colorado. I remember sometime in 2004-2006, I was going to his counseling center to try to get free from porn.

I remember Doug talking about the plasticity of the brain. He said that if I stopped looking at

porn, eventually the brain would change. That eventually I could go through a day without thinking about sex.

For those of you who don't know, full-on porn addicts have a really weird thing that happens. For whatever the trigger is, the brain will hit that trigger and release dopamine. For you porn heads, you know exactly what I'm talking about. The full-on rush. One glimpse after trying to stay sober and all of a sudden it's like you got hit by a train. A train of dopamine — you're breathing heavier, you can't pay attention, and you're done. You're toast. Whether you're acting out right then or whether it's 3 days later, it's going to happen. It's just a matter of time.

RETRAINING YOUR BRAIN

So back to Colorado Springs, I remember when Doug said that it was possible for your brain to be *retrained*, that you would no longer be controlled chemically, that you could literally be normal again. I was thinking *you're full of it*. There's no stinking way. I believed that I was going to live with this addiction for the rest of my life. That I was going to have this physical nagging problem forever.

For that matter, and this gets a little bit weird, but my mom knew all about my pornography

addiction. As I mentioned, my dad bought me my first pornography magazine in 1987. So I remember one time talking with my mom, telling her that there is just no way I was ever going to overcome this, that it was something that I was going to live with for the rest of my life.

Of course, my good old Christian mom was telling me that there is power in the name of Jesus, but she didn't know. She didn't know what it was like to live with dopamine hits and to have to go into the gas stations and have that huge magnetic draw of that porn rack practically pulling me off of my feet toward it. Much less, the internet with everything just a click away.

Isn't that crazy, there were two people telling me that it was possible? One scientist-doctor telling me that I could physically be set free, and one spiritual person telling me that Jesus had power, and I didn't believe either of them. That's funny. Because they were both right.

This book wouldn't be complete without telling you that since October 31st, 2014 only three times have I entertained illicit sexual thoughts for around fifteen seconds of duration before I caught myself and began refocusing on *that's not me*, because it's not. On top of that, maybe ten times for 5 seconds. ***THAT IS TOTAL NUMBER OF ILLICIT SEXUAL THOUGHTS THAT I***

***HAVE ENTERTAINED SINCE 2014!!!!!!!
OF WHICH EVERY SINGLE TIME THE
THOUGHT WAS TAKEN CAPTIVE AND
BROUGHT INTO LINE WITH MY TRUE
IDENTITY!!!*** Put that in your pipe and smoke it because that's freaking crazy. I never thought that would be possible. But it's true.

I'm telling this specifically to the porn addicts. (Maybe even more specifically, the Christian porn addicts.) Because if you would have told me in 2006 when I thought about sex probably 60+ times an hour, that would be possible, I would have told you to get the heck out of here. There's no way. And yet here I am, 2000 days later, telling you it's 100% possible. You don't have to be an addict. In fact, you're not a porn addict, not in a thousand years, and you can choose to start walking in that identity today. Because a pornography addict is not who you are.

And the best part, Doug was right. Your brain will change. I didn't believe him, but he was right. I had to email him a couple of years ago just to say thanks that he was right. And I'm super glad that he was.

When you begin to practice speaking and acting according to who you really are, your brain slowly begins to change. When your brain changes, habits begin to form. Your mind is literally

“renewed,” as you embrace God’s identity and reject the lies of the enemy. That’s what happened to me and that’s what keeps happening to me every day. I am becoming more and more who I really am. My brain is being retrained from the old me to the real me.

Now, the six-pack at the end of the day doesn’t attract me like it used to. The magazine rack in the dirty gas station, you know the one with the porn mags? Yeah, that situation doesn’t hold power over me like it used to. No more draw. No more pull of the porn gravity, **THATS NOT ME!** Why? Because I’ve started to make the choice to believe who I am and in turn, my mind is being rewired and renewed. And believe it or not, it gets easier and easier.

I’m determined to spend the rest of my life living out of my true identity. I’d love to challenge you to join me. I don’t know where you are in your personal journey of freedom, but I do know that if you’re willing to drop the charade and embrace the real you and then do the things to strengthen your body, your mind, and your spirit, then you’ll find every bit of freedom that I have.

THIRTEEN
STILL GOING...

Oh, and I'm still working out every day. Physically, spiritually and mentally. I'm renewing my mind with the scripture. I'm bringing the pain with 15 minutes of crazy intense workouts every single day since January 1st, 2014. Crazy huh? Even as I'm writing this I'm getting ready to go and work out with my kids (that'll be consecutive workout #2772). And I'm seeking God in the midst of it all. I know that every day is a new day that I "get to" die to my old self, my flesh, and come alive as the man I really am.

What about you? Are you ready to look into the mirror and see what God sees instead of who you see? You're not less than. You're not a failure. You're not an addict. You're not worthless, You're not garbage, You're not a mistake.

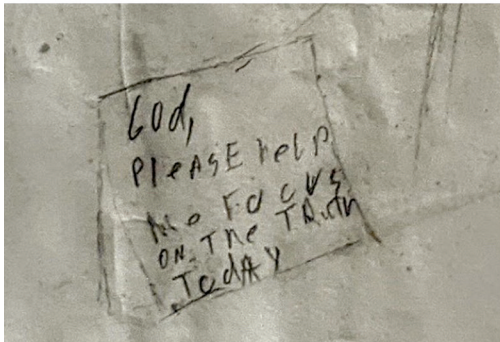
I'm hoping and praying that today you will peel back the painting and realize just how valuable you are. But unlike a masterpiece sitting in a museum somewhere, you are a living, breathing masterpiece. There is no one like you in the world. And there never will be. You were loved. You are loved. You will be loved forever. You are Perfect... Perfect. Because God does not make garbage.

I don't know you, but I do know a few things about you. I know that you are beautiful. You were perfectly designed by God with **NO MISTAKES**. You are worth it. You are so precious to God that He was willing to die for you and He is willing to go to any extent to show you how much he loves you. You are not forgotten. God sees you, He knows where you are, He sees right past all of your failures and crap. In fact, He doesn't even see your mistakes and failures at all. He only sees the real you. He loves you immeasurably more than you could ever imagine. God loves you and sees you as your **TRUE NATURE**. Loved. Valuable. A Precious Treasure!

A SHORT PRAYER

If you're ready, here's the short prayer you can pray to ask God to take over your life and reveal to you your true identity...

God, help me to focus on the truth (of who I am) today...



My Simple Prayer (the Post-It note on the mirror from the drawing at the retreat)

That's it. Nice and short. The effectiveness of that prayer is about the work of believing who you really are. It's about learning to focus on the truth and learning to walk for the first time in your life.

That said, let's look at some of the practical things you can do to start your own "that's not me" journey.

PUTTING THIS BOOK INTO PRACTICE

After reading this book, I'm sure you're asking, "OK, so what do I do now?" Here are a few things that have worked for me. And I hope they work for you as well.

PRAY

The first thing that you can do is pray. All the time. Continually pray. Every day, quietly, asking God to help you focus on the truth of who you really are each and every day.

Remember, He is the vine and we are the branches. Apart from God, we can do nothing. When we string a little bit of sobriety together, surrender that achievement to him. It's to God's glory, not ours — nothing to our glory ever. Not

the good, and not the bad. That's the whole point of identity in Christ; giving the glory to Him and not to ourselves.

God, help me to focus on the truth of who I am today...

Continue to pray this over and over every minute of the day.

TAKE CAPTIVES!

Along the same lines of praying, take every single thought “captive” including the intention behind every action. This really is the secret — be honest and introspective, invulnerable in prayer and assessment of your thought life. As you pray for God to help you focus on who you are, continually looking in the mirror, God's word will help you separate between the actions and thoughts of the flesh and the actions and thoughts of the spirit.

Take captive every single thought you have and compare it against who you really are. Does the 1,000-year-you think like that? Are you acting like that in 1,000 years? If it's not who you **REALLY** are, then why do it now?

Ask God to help you to continue to focus on who you really are. That's it. From the big actions like doing drugs or looking at porn or drinking

alcohol, all the way down to the small, quiet thoughts in your heart.

God, help me to focus on the truth of who I am today...

Pray that prayer again and again all throughout the day and compare it to your thoughts and actions to your 1,000 year perfect identity. As you do, God will begin to renew your mind. You will begin to see the break, the schism, where you have been working to be, instead of simply being and then walking out your true nature.

DECOUPLE ACTIONS FROM IDENTITY IN YOU AND OTHERS

If God separates, or *decouples*, our actions from our identity, and instead allows us to connect our identity to the actions of Christ, then shouldn't we do the same in our lives and for those around us?

For Yourself

Simply put, as the book says, continue to *speak life* over yourself because God speaks life over you..

For Others

Proverbs 11:25— “*Those who refresh others will themselves be refreshed*”

What the book did not cover is the habit of concluding someone else's identity based on their actions. Basically speaking life or death over other people.

The Bible says, "The measure you use, gets used against you."

Too many people couple the actions of others with their identity. The internet is full of it. People see a Republican, or Democrat, right wing, left wing, someone who cuts them off in the road, that person buying too much toilet paper — whatever it is, and we speak death by calling that person an idiot, jerk, or whatever.

Is that what God calls the person? Is that their identity? Absolutely not. They are Precious Treasures, too, just like you.

The guy who cut you off on the highway? Yes, that guy's a Precious Treasure. But he flipped me off! Yep. That guy who just flipped you off is a Precious Treasure. He's just seeing his true identity and acting in it. So give that person grace!

God gives you grace. This book has been about accepting that grace and listening to God's word over your life. In the same way, give others grace. Speak life over them, not death. Don't assess their identity based on their actions. Instead, look past their actions. Understand that in the same way

that you don't always see yourself how God sees you, neither do they see how God sees them. So, see them as God sees them. Look past their actions and see them the way that God sees them. Speak life over them the way that God speaks life over you.

Are you supposed to completely forget how other people are acting? No. If they're acting like a jerk, they are acting like a jerk. The difference is, not to couple a temporary action with a permanent identity. In other words, do not say you “are” a jerk. They may be acting like a jerk temporarily, but jerk is not their permanent identity so don't speak it over their life permanently.

This may seem insignificant, but it's important.

If someone makes a mistake by not focusing on who they really are, give them the grace to escape condemnation by using more accurate words to identify who they are in 1,000 years. Remember, they are a Precious Treasure, even if at that temporary moment, they aren't focusing on their true nature.

Make a habit of speaking life over yourself and other people. You have to get into the habit of seeing other people as they truly are, even those who don't align with your political view, or who cut you off, or who say nasty things about you.

Jesus demonstrated this when he was being crucified. The very people who were condemning him and mocking him — He was able to look to heaven and pray that God would forgive them. Why?

Because they could not see themselves clearly. They could not see how they were created to walk. They didn't know what they were doing.

That's what we're talking about. Speak life over others to the point of crucifixion. That is what taking up your cross looks like!!! Now that you see who God says you are, it's your responsibility to walk in life and speak life over others.

So practice speaking life, hope, and peace over other people's lives continually. Everyday.

WORKOUT

I highly suggest that you start working out because making a daily routine of taking pain helps to bite your lip when you want to snap back at someone. It also helps give you strength to understand who you are when the temptation to drink, do drugs, or look at porn tempts you.

Here are a few things I would recommend:

1. **Consistency.** Consistency is the key to building your spiritual man, just as it is with building your physical man. For example, if you eat salad for one day and workout for one day, you won't see a result that day. It takes months to see results. So don't go overboard at first with too difficult of a workout that you won't be able to stick to.
2. **15 minutes a day.** I workout for 15 minutes a day because I know I can stick to it. 15 minutes. Not more, not less. I don't do more when I have the extra energy and don't do less when I'm feeling tired.
3. **From home.** Not at a gym. Driving to the gym is a pain in the butt. It takes up a bunch of time. Getting out of the car, going to the locker room, changing, and then having to wait for equipment to free up if others are using it. It's just a huge time waster. Going to a gym simply provides too many reasons to skip workouts. But you don't have any reason not to block out 15 minutes and go do push-ups, jumping jacks and squats at your house.
4. **HIIT.** I do hiit training, basically *high intensity interval training*. High intensity for 15 minutes, with no breaks in between,

moving from one muscle group to the next, which takes care of your cardio at the same time as your muscle building.

5. **Bring The Pain.** I like to feel *good pain* when I workout, not injury type pain. Obviously, we are talking about the good pain. The pain that makes you want to quit because you're out of breath.
6. **Ease into anything new.** Be careful when you first start. This is a marathon, not a sprint. Anytime you start working a new muscle group, do light weights at first. Don't do anything heavy. Get your muscles prepared over time, even if it takes days or weeks. Remember, you're not made by what you do. So take it easy at first by not going so heavy that it would cause injury to unprepared muscles.
7. **Chase down the fear of that extra set.** Oftentimes as I'm working out, I will have a fearful thought of how I would not want to do a certain exercise because of the pain it would bring. Guess what I do? I go and do it anyway; especially because I didn't want to do it. So, when you're working out and you have that quiet thought of fear about doing something that would hurt, go do that exact thing. Take the pain.

Chase it down. It will make you stronger.

8. **Switch muscle groups.** As I mentioned above, the goal is to switch muscle groups in between sets. Burn one down, and then switch.

As an example, the following is the upper body workout that I follow when I'm lifting weights. There's nothing magical about this workout. In 15 minutes, I did 4 sets. If you try, you'll quickly realize that there's no time to wait in between different exercises.

Dumbbell Curl 4 sets of 10-12 reps	Seated Barbell Military Press 4 sets of 15, 12, 10,	Side Lateral Raise 4 sets of 12, 12, 10,	Lying Triceps Press 4 sets of 10-12 reps
Upright Barbell Row 4 sets of 12, 10, 10,	Seated Bent-Over Rear Delt Raise 4 sets of 12, 12, 10, 8 reps	Incline Dumbbell Curl 4 sets of 10-12 reps	Bench Dips 1 drop set of 10 reps

My Weights Workout Routine

- Dumbbell Curl (4 sets of 10-12 reps)
- Seated Barbell Military Press (4 sets of 15, 12, 10)
- Side Lateral Raise (4 sets of 12, 12, 10)
- Lying Triceps Press (4 sets of 10-12 reps)
- Upright Barbell Row (4 sets of 12, 10, 10)

- Seated Bent-Over Rear Delt Raise (4 sets of 12, 12, 10, 8)
- Incline Dumbbell Curl (4 sets of 10-12 reps)
- Bench Dips (1 drop set of 10 reps_

ACT OUT OF YOUR NATURE

Keep in mind that it's not just the idea that you are a Precious Treasure, but it's about all of your actions. You are equipped to walk fully in the fruits of the spirit.

Galatians 5:22 explains how you really are.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

Each one of these attributes you have the full power to walk in.

Through Christ

- You are loving
- You are joyful
- You have peace
- You have patience
- You are kind
- You are good
- You are faithful

- You are gentle
- You have self-control

Focus on these and you will walk in them. These attributes are who you were created to be. These are your true self. The actual way you were created.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Look at the reflection of the Precious Treasure in your mirror, and continue to do so. As you continue to focus on your true identity, who you really are, you will start to walk in it more and more, and the grip of addiction over your life will begin to loosen.

That is it. The talking is done. Now is your time to learn to walk in who you are...

