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# CROSSING THE BRIDGE

## WHEN WE GET THERE

When Satan whispers in a man's ear, encouraging him to do something foolish (at best) or sinful (at worst), the man sometimes goes ahead against his better judgment, figuring he'll be able to work it out.

As Nancy and I fell in love and started our journey toward marriage, there were many questions to be answered. Most of them came from her.

Here was a fifty-seven-year-old woman who had never been married. It wasn't that she wasn't "marriage material." Nancy was beautiful, highly relational, intelligent, and gifted. But early in her life she had sensed the call of God to give her life to vocational ministry, which she had joyfully done for all those years as a single woman.

"And then"—if you'll forgive me for borrowing from an old rock lyric made popular in the sixties by a group called The Association—"along came Robert."

So back to those questions Nancy asked. Many of them were practical considerations, such as, where would we live? And how would we reconfigure one of our homes to accommodate both of us? There were more: Nancy is a night person, and I'm up long before dawn; how would

that work if we were married? Where would we go to church? And what would happen to the ministry she founded and leads?

More often than not, my answer was a simple, “We’ll work it out,” because I truly believed that we would. And, for the most part, we have done exactly that. We’ve worked it out. But many times it seemed that “we’ll work it out” was not an entirely satisfying answer to Nancy. Now I know why.

You may have never thought of it this way, but often, when a man is faced with a problem that has no immediate or obvious solution, his heart and his words may find themselves at odds. His situation could be a stalemate; in his heart he truly is not sure what to do, but his lips express confidence in the outcome. His shameless *panache* emboldens him. So he steps out and acts on the information he has.

## LIES MEN BELIEVE

In 2001, Nancy authored her bestselling book, *Lies Women Believe*.<sup>1</sup> Now, at her request and my enthusiastic “yes,” I am taking up the mantle to create a matching book, exploring some of the lies we as men tend to believe. Because men and women are both human, there is some overlap in the lies. But, because men and women *aren’t* the same, there are some differences in the lies that lure us in. More important still, there is a difference in the *how* and *why* we believe these lies. As men, it seems that we are less likely to be blindly deceived and more likely to embrace lies with our eyes wide open.

As I did when faced with Nancy’s questions about what married life would look like for us, sometimes you and I, in the face of uncertainty, simply push confidently ahead, as though we know what we’re doing. As for the fallout? “I’ll cross that bridge when I get to it.”

Taking a page from the Old Testament book of Genesis, the whole idea of

***Adam was not deceived. Adam had no such excuse. He knew what he was doing. When he took the bite, his eyes were wide open.***

“we’ll work this out” makes its first appearance in the garden of Eden. Eve was deceived. But Adam wasn’t. He knew exactly what he was doing. How do we know this? The apostle Paul gives us a snapshot of the man’s experience:

**For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. (1 Tim. 2:13-14)**

There are two puzzling notions in this text from Paul’s letter to Timothy. First, what does it mean that Eve was deceived? Second, what does it mean that Adam was not deceived? And why does any of this matter?

The serpent didn’t attack Eve head-on. His approach was subtle and nuanced. He used sleight of hand. Deception. Pure trickery. “Did God actually say . . . ?” (Gen. 3:1). Eve was guilty to be sure, but her guilt was mitigated by the deception.

Adam was not deceived. Adam had no such excuse. He knew what he was doing. When he took the bite, his eyes were wide open.

## **TRUTH WE CAN COUNT ON**

The Bible contains accurate history of ancient times. But the Bible is also enigmatic at times, as it describes various scenes that are outside our experience—floating ax-heads, chariots of fire, a talking serpent. So it’s easy for some to read biblical history like they’re reading Mother Goose or the Brothers Grimm. But the Bible tells us what actually happened in space and time. In the beginning there truly was a man, shaped by God’s own hand from the dust. And there truly was a woman, also shaped by God’s own hand, though from the man’s rib. And these two lived in the middle of perfection.

In Eden there was no conflict between the lion and the lamb; there were no biting mosquitos; there was no discord between Adam and Eve. Eve never needed to ask Adam to pick up his socks (oh, wait . . . they were still naked). No shame or sickness, no death or disease, all because there was no sin. Yes, there was a time in human history when misery did not

*I wonder if Adam determined he would rather live with his wife's approval under God's curse than to be without her affirmation under God's blessing.*

exist, guilt was unknown, nothing and no one died, and peace reigned.

Yes, all was right with the world.

And then along came Satan.

Many Bible scholars believe Adam was present for the whole conversation between his wife and the serpent. If that is the case, as it appears to be, Adam failed to stand up to Satan or embrace his calling to protect his wife. He stood there doing nothing until she offered him the fruit. And as his wife had done, he ate it. Over the centuries, theologians have speculated over Adam's

motives. Looking at this encounter through my own somewhat romantic lens, I wonder if Adam determined he would rather live with his wife's approval under God's curse than to be without her affirmation under God's blessing.

Of course, you and I can't be sure of what motivated Adam. But we do know that he walked into the fateful event with his eyes open. There was no pulling a rabbit out of a hat. No trickery. He was not hoodwinked. He took the fruit with the knowledge that it was the wrong thing to do.

The difference between Adam and Eve at this watershed moment in human history may give us an insight into some of the differences between men and women—how we think and how we make choices. And what kinds of lies we are charmed into believing.

In this book, as I identify some of the lies we are tempted to believe, I will be painting with a broad brush. In doing this I'm not suggesting that all men are the same or that all women are the same. I am merely speaking of tendencies, peculiar temptations that men tend to face versus those that women may more typically encounter.

## THINKING AND FEELING

All human beings, like the Maker whose image we bear, both think and feel.

**When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a *delight* to the eyes, and that the tree was to be *desired* to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. (Gen. 3:6)**

*Saw. Delight. Desired.* These words explain a lot about Eve's willingness to make a giant, disobedient decision.

Men, as a rule, are more prone to separate their beliefs and their feelings. You and I seek to maintain the rule of our minds over our hearts. That's one reason we, at times, tend to be less compassionate.

As I was writing this book, I had a conversation with a couple who had been married just a year. Because I was a veteran married guy and she thought I could help, the young wife said to me: "When I'm struggling with something, my husband is eager to figure out how he can fix the problem. I've explained to him that at the moment, I just want him to care, to hold me, to sympathize with what I'm experiencing."

You and I understand this, don't we?

For us, there can be another danger that first reared its ugly head in Eden. When a man operates with his head and his heart—his thinking and his feeling—in separate realms, he often moves forward with an overinflated confidence, because his mind is making his decisions. He assumes that acting out whatever he *thinks* will result in acting in a way that is right.

And even when we *know* the right thing to do, we often choose to do the wrong thing anyway, whether out of expediency, convenience or, just sheer laziness. What follows is the folly of rationalization. We engage our minds to come up with excuses for why we did the wrong thing.

Wrestling with this very issue, the apostle Paul described his frustration with knowing what was right, but doing what was wrong.

***And even when we know the right thing to do, we often chose to do the wrong thing anyway. What follows is the folly of rationalization.***



**I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway. (Rom. 7:19 NLT)**

Even when he *knew* the right thing to do, and even when he *wanted* to do the right thing, Paul found himself impotent to *do* what was right. He was helpless, apart from the power of the gospel and the enabling Spirit of Christ. So are you and I.

## **PAYING THE PRICE (LITERALLY)**

As a college junior, I was presented with “an opportunity of a lifetime . . . a money-making chance too good to be true.”

Sure enough.

I bumped into “Jenny,” a high school classmate at my home church during the short Thanksgiving break. Her dad was a church leader and a highly respected CPA in town. Standing near the church entrance after worship, Jenny filled me in.

The “opportunity” involved buying and selling US Savings Bonds and circulating a “chain” letter. “Is this legal?” I asked. “Yes,” she assured me, “since the actual letter doesn’t use the US Postal Service. My dad says it’s totally legit.”

*Sounds shady*, I remember thinking. *But if Jenny’s dad says it’s okay, it must be okay.*

Pushing past my better judgment—my eager mind ignoring my hesitant heart—I plunked down \$37.50 to buy the letter and went to the bank and bought two US Savings

bonds for \$18.75 each—made out to the guy at the top of the list on the letter—another \$37.50. Now I’m into this thing to the tune of \$75. Not a lot of money today, but for a college student in the late 1960s . . . a lot of money.

The next afternoon, I drove back to my college. Walking into the dorm room, I filled my roommate in on what I had done. His face was a

***Walking into the dorm room, I filled my roommate in on what I had done. His face was a blend of skepticism and wonder.***

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“Is this legal?” Steve asked. “Sure,” I said, borrowing some of Jenny’s confidence.

A few days later, I sold my chain letter and savings bond to two equally gullible classmates.

The scheme swept our campus like a tsunami. In a matter of less than a week, more than a hundred wide-eyed, eager—and equally broke—college men had jumped in. In a few more days, men from other universities within driving distance of my school learned of the opportunity (scheme) and got involved.

A week later, after two stern warnings from our Dean of Students, including a threat to expel me, I went from door to door in each men’s residence hall and begged guys to stop the chain letter. Some, including my cautious roommate, had gotten caught with a financial loss.

“How much did you lose?” I’d ask each man who had swallowed the scheme. “I have been asked—ordered—by the dean to tell you not to try to sell your letter.”

These men were not happy. And so, recording each of these losses in a small spiral notebook, I promised to reimburse them. Working in construction the next summer, I sent thousands of hard-earned dollars to these men to help them recover from my foolishness.

Like Adam, I knew—at least strongly suspected—in my heart that what I was doing was wrong. No one had deceived me. My eyes were wide open. *I’ll work this out later*, I naively figured.

Sure enough.

## **THINKING CONSCIOUSLY, PLANNING CARELESSLY, ACTING FOOLISHLY**

Eve’s husband knew that he was not to eat of the tree. If we could have taken him aside in that dramatic moment and given him a quiz on the ethics of eating the fruit, he would have passed. But when Eve offered him that first bite, he failed.

You and I often pride ourselves on the clarity of our thinking. We seem to make dispassionate analyses, to construct carefully crafted scenarios like puzzle pieces. This affirmation leads to that affirmation, which leads us to the next affirmation. And the next.

On the surface, this looks like a good thing. The trouble comes when decisions must be made in the moment, and our carelessness pushes us to override what we, in our hearts, know to be right. And true.

### ACT NOW, LISTEN LATER

When David saw Bathsheba bathing, he didn't forget God's prohibition against adultery (more about David and Bathsheba later). Thinking that his kingly position would afford him whatever he would need to "work this out later," he pushed past the law of God and the prodding of his conscience and slept with her.

Do you wonder how well David was able to put this horrible travesty behind him in the ensuing weeks? Actually, I'm guessing that, given David's willingness to use his power to abuse his neighbor's wife, and then to cover it up by having her husband murdered, he did just fine. The easily distracted and proud king got busy with his kingly duties. Busy, busy, busy. Then, one day, Nathan the prophet rained on his parade, busting him with the truth.

Once David knew he had been found out, emotions (that should have shouted in the first place) overwhelmed him. A reading of Psalm 51 paints a life-size mural of David's profound regret for making a bad decision (actually, two bad decisions).

When you and I fall prey to lies, the reason is more likely to be pride and less likely

***When you and I fall prey to lies, the cause is more likely to be pride and less likely to be gullibility. In the moment, we think we know better than God. We know in our heart and our conscience what is right, but we choose what is wrong.***

to be gullibility. In the moment, we think we know better than God. We know in our heart and our conscience what is right, but we choose what is wrong.

Sometimes we believe the lie that God will not notice. Sometimes we believe the lie that God will not care. Invariably we believe the lie that somehow it will work out and so we go ahead and do what we want to do.

Back in the garden, Adam knew that God would not be pleased with his actions. Adam knew he and God disagreed; perhaps in that moment he was foolish enough to think that his way was right and God's way was wrong . . . or at least, that he could go ahead with this disobedient choice, he could talk his way out of a corner, and God would understand and forgive.

In the chapters that follow, you and I will consider the kinds of lies that men believe. As you read, please don't lose sight of the reason why we are susceptible to believing them. The root of the issue is pride. We think of ourselves as thoughtful and in control. We think of ourselves as wiser than the God who planned all things from beginning to end. We think we can see the future, disbelieving God and believing ourselves.

But we are called to be obedient soldiers in God's kingdom. We are called to walk with Him as loving husband-shepherds seeking to reflect our Good Shepherd, as fathers seeking to reflect the character of our great Father, or just as men, who simply want to live a holy life. We must take every thought and every emotion captive to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor. 10:5).

*Jesus, who is  
Himself truth,  
has promised not  
just to reveal truth  
to you and me,  
but to give us the  
strength to obey.*

## **ORTHOPRAXY ROCKS!**

We should be compelled to put aside the lies of our natural father, the devil, and to embrace the life-giving truth and the heart of our adoptive Father, God Himself. To do so we need to learn to both *think* and *feel* in

accordance with God's Word and ways.

**Teach me your way, O LORD,  
that I may walk in your truth;  
unite my heart to fear your name. (Ps. 86:11)**

There it is . . . “walk in your truth; unite my heart” . . . correctly feathering together our minds and hearts.

Theologians sometimes have a clever way of putting concepts into single words. They would say that it's not good enough to just embrace *orthodoxy*—right beliefs—but we also need to cultivate *orthopathos*—right feelings. This leads us to exactly what we're pulling for: *orthopraxy*—right behavior. So Adam *knew* what God had told him (orthodoxy). In the moment when Eve handed him the fruit from which she had already taken a bite, he probably felt conflicted. That's when a big dose of *orthopathos*—right feelings integrated with right thinking—would have enabled him to put on the brakes, to stop his wife from revising what God had told him, and to tell the serpent where to go. Literally. *Orthopraxy!* Class dismissed.

Jesus, who is Himself truth, has promised not just to reveal truth to you and me, but to give us the strength to obey, and in so doing, to set us free (John 8:32). To be this kind of a man is to be a free man, to be anchored by the truth, to build our lives on the solid Rock. This is a lifelong struggle; the devil is relentless. Persistent. But we, by God's leading, move from grace to grace, from faith to faith, from truth to truth . . . from glory to glory (2 Cor. 3:18).

As you read further, my prayer is that the Spirit of God will fill you with wisdom, sound thinking, clear emotions, and the strength to tear down the devil's strongholds. To be a man of truth. Of strength. Of orthopraxy.

So here are forty lies. My hope is that, once identified, these lies can be banished to the pit where they belong and replaced by rock-solid truth and the pure freedom it promises to you.