



Discover the seven agreements you make with God that will overthrow old patterns and bring real change. A new you awaits—a transformation that God wants to do in your life. It won't be easy. It won't happen overnight. But it'll be worth it, because growth beats stagnation every time.

Interested in the whole book?
Select your preferred book seller:

MOODY PUBLISHERS 

WALMART



AMAZON



APPLE BOOKS



GOOGLE PLAY



CHRISTIANBOOK.COM 

BARNES & NOBLE



LIFEWAY



TARGET



CONTENTS

Introduction – Radical Change Is Possible	9
Chapter 1 – Wrecked	19
Chapter 2 – Recovery	31
Chapter 3 – The 7 Resolutions	41
Chapter 4 – Resolution #1: Join God	47
Chapter 5 – Resolution #2: Think Truth	67
Chapter 6 – Resolution #3: Kill Sin	85
Chapter 7 – Resolution #4: Choose Friends	103
Chapter 8 – Resolution #5: Take Risks	121
Chapter 9 – Resolution #6: Focus Effort	137
Chapter 10 – Resolution #7: Redeem Time	155
Conclusion – Traction and Motivation	173
Resources	177
Acknowledgments	179
Notes	181

Chapter 1

WRECKED



Failure is not fatal, but failure to change might be.¹

John Wooden

“I don’t love you anymore.” With five simple words and a quivering chin, Junanne told me how far our marriage had fallen. There we were with our new home, two little kids, down the path of family life a few years, and waist-deep in a thriving ministry. At that moment, my world caved in.

I was wrecked. My whole life to that day had been about achievement. Adventure, competitions, rescues, extreme work environments—I had faced all of these and succeeded at most. But now I had no answers. The man who thought he could win it, build it, or fix it had nothing to say. As I walked away from Junanne into the bathroom, everything inside me wanted to cover my shame with blame—rattling off her sins and how she had failed me. She certainly had them, and she would have graciously owned up to each one. But God had a meeting scheduled with me. I needed to come face-to-face

with the fact that I had failed to be the man God called me to be and that Junanne deserved.

As I stared at myself in the mirror, I was faced with a big decision. Would I allow my mind to dwell on the shortcomings of my wife, or would I face who I was and own my contributions to the loveless marriage my bride felt shackled to? It was a “come to Jesus” moment. God was brutally merciful and gave me a peek at my soul, and it wasn’t pretty.

I had completely neglected my promise to love my bride as Christ loves the church. By strength of personality, I had rationalized my inaction and minimized what she felt. Ministry momentum and growing numbers of young Jesus followers became an excuse for distraction and my work addiction. I had spiritualized the pace of my life, and she was even buying what I was selling for a good long stretch. I had pushed Junanne into a forced fast in our marriage—I was starving her from love. God began to break me and shine the light on my brokenness. Through my tears, I could see God was up to something.

As much as her words felt like the end, it was just the beginning of something extraordinary. Junanne had just given us a chance at love. Real love. Intimate love. Honest, warm, knowing love. Love that hangs out the truth without fear and confidence that God can fix what’s broken. No longer did we have to live as glorified roommates who shared a couple of kids, groceries, common enemies, yearly vacations, and occasional sex.

With those five words and that quivering chin, God shattered the façade of a dynamite marriage. Now the reality of what I had built was exposed for me to see. We had mastered the art of sharing what we *thought* (usually cruel digs) about each other, yet never getting down to

what we *felt* about each other. We had learned to build up protective walls, and exchanging important information was as intimate as it got. What was dysfunctional felt normal, acceptable, and sadly, better than most other relationships.

I had helped build a marriage system that kept us looking pretty good on Sundays. We weren't shaking a fist at God and rejecting His plan; we had just settled for too little and learned how to survive it. We had our moments of laughter and fun. And our love for our son and daughter gave us the resolve we needed to stay together. Divorce was never an option, but what we had was so short of God's best. This moment in the mirror led to an awakening in our marriage—God wanted me to be a man who initiated and took the lead in acts of love. God was about to show me whole new patterns of living. The power of really listening was an art class God put me in, and He re-enrolls me every year. God showed me that He could breathe life into dead things, even a dead marriage. He also showed me something fun—chivalry still got style points from my wife.

The next few months brought on some dramatic changes. God kept the mirror of my failure in front of me. He loved us enough to allow me to sit with my pain. Amazingly, God began to reward my posture of brokenness with His power to love Junanne as she deserved. God placed a passion within me to be a good husband. I carved out time in my day planner to date the girl I loved. We began to talk and listen to each other to the point where we each *felt* heard and valued. If I told you it was an easy or quick fix, that would be a lie.

The constant risk of falling into the ditch of apathy was and is a present danger. But radical change can happen. Grace is more than a word—God has the power to do in us what we can't do ourselves.

After thirty-four years of marriage, I can say with joy, Junanne is my best friend.

GOD CAN FIX THAT

If you're normal, you have a secret fear that some of the broken stuff in your life will never get repaired and that some of your dreams simply won't be realized. Suspicions that "God's promises will never be fully experienced," "that addiction is unwinnable," and "those patterns

will never be fully broken," are like a family secret that everyone knows, but no one talks about. Well, let's bring that lie into the light of truth. God has this way of illuminating our broken pieces so nothing is hidden and, at the same time, cleaning and fixing us up without condemnation.

Please don't shy away from the truth. See it, own it, and believe that God can fix it. But be alert to this: some truths about God have been twisted and destroyed. Let's reclaim it

right now. Word on the street is that God approves of religious performers and condemns sinners. It's exactly the opposite! The life of Jesus shows the true character of God—He condemned the self-righteous performers and saved sinners. Never be afraid of the light of Jesus; He's here to help those of us who are willing to admit our need.

When taking stock of how you're failing and where you're headed in any area of your life, one question is paramount. It's not the question of what life you want to live. The question is this: "What are the destructive patterns or broken systems in my life that keep me

"WHAT ARE THE DESTRUCTIVE PATTERNS OR BROKEN SYSTEMS IN MY LIFE THAT KEEP ME CONFINED TO A LIFE I DON'T WANT TO LIVE?"

confined to a life I don't want to live?" These patterns and systems have consequences. There is no way you can pull yourself up to reach God's promises. Bootstrapping won't cut it. Grit is good for the short haul but fails with the slightest whiff of weariness or discouragement. I've started many goals with a flurry and had huge start-up success, only to be crushed with the weight of my failure and feelings of being caught in a cage I could never escape.

It's easy to believe that our failures will forever define us and that God is disgusted with us. We even question God's ability to overcome our inability. Seemingly unable to get a grip on life, we fake it, give up, or settle for a life that we consider "better than most." If this describes you, stay calm. You haven't lost your mind or your salvation. You need a revolution of your inner being. A total overthrow of the systems that ultimately govern and direct the life you live.

BROKEN SYSTEMS

No one is around, the music fades, and life punches you in the face. That's the best time to measure how your systems for living life are working for you. There is a gap between our desire to live powerfully and the reality of living in God's grace and power. Systems exist in this gap—spiritual, emotional, and relational. By systems, I mean behavioral patterns that—whether good, bad, or ugly—shape us, guide us, and produce outcomes consistent with the system.

Some systems are clearly visible; many are internal systems that can't be seen by others but negatively impact our lives. Systems formed out of sin, insecurity, discouragement, destructive traditions, family dysfunction, rebellion, pride, and other toxic sources are simply broken. We either invented these systems for survival, adopted them from

peer groups, or inherited them from family. Some live isolated lives because a vulnerable confession was thrown back in their face. Others are habitually critical because that's just how their friends roll. And still others have been trained by parents to look down at anyone who doesn't look like them. Broken systems are myriad, and they manifest themselves in any number of destructive ways.

All the desire and our best human effort can't seem to overcome the gravitational pull of the broken systems that hold us down. Like us kids who tried to fly by wildly flapping our arms, achieving only sheer exhaustion with no liftoff. These hurtful and destructive systems need to be overthrown by God if you're going to experience abundant life and grasp God's promises.

In the Bible, every great example of spiritual victory and conquest over broken systems paints a picture of revolutionary moments.

King David lived in a system of indulgence. Second Samuel chapters 11 and 12 reveal the epic story of David's repentance and restoration. His power and reckless desire for sexual gratification ultimately crushed a young family's dreams, killed innocent lives, and brought massive pain into his own heart. Only through the deep breaking of the system of "self" did David find the breakthrough.

God's grace and Jesus' ability to expose our sin without shaming our soul is on full display in John chapter 4. The nameless woman at a water well with Jesus lived in a system of shame and isolation. Everything about her was "lesser than." Her people, the Samaritans, were considered dogs by the Jewish elite. Her life choices left her shackled up with a man after five failed marriages—her life was a mess. Being exposed but not rejected by Jesus compelled her to share her freedom story. Through her life, God's power caught fire in the community and

led to a massive liberation in the region.

Want to see how much God hates the broken system of religious performance, living for the approval of others, and checking those boxes? God saves His most scathing words for the pretenders—the Pharisees, Jewish spiritual leaders distinguished by strict observance of the traditional and written law and pursuing superior sanctity. They were respected by many, and some Pharisees were well-intentioned God seekers. But their system of performance and pride missed the mark. They had put God in a box and wanted everyone else to do the same. It was an empty religion, and Jesus called the system for what it was—like a well-used travel mug, reasonably clean on the outside but filthy on the inside. Jesus never waters down truth: “Now you Pharisees cleanse the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. You fools! Did not he who made the outside make the inside also?” (Luke 11:39–40).

Here’s the uncompromising truth: as much as we don’t want to admit it, there’s a little bit of Pharisee in you and me. I had a caller to my radio show share a statement that stuck with me: “We judge ourselves by our best intentions, but we judge others by a single moment of weakness.” Christian, beware and examine your spiritual life thoroughly before trying to help others spiritually!

Of all the broken systems, self-help can be uniquely destructive. Self-help books are in a category on Amazon with approximately 70,000 different titles. I have a few shelves of the best self-help books. Although there are great truths packed into self-help books on topics like discipline, habits, time management, etc., they fail when they put the onus upon us to succeed in our efforts alone. The problem is that for all the writing, reading, blogging, and TED-talking, self-help only produces a

small fraction of people who see and experience sustainable wins.

To be fair, God's calling is higher than most self-help enthusiasts are aiming. The gospel goes to the soul of a man or woman. The gospel gets into messes that self-help doesn't even try to address. The gospel intends to alter the direction of our life and the very way we walk through this life. This work is tough, thorough, and impossible if not for God. The most authoritative author of Christian living, other than Jesus, was Paul. And look at how he approached witnessing and disciple making: "For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me" (Col. 1:29). Paul wouldn't touch self-help. His life and ministry was all about God's power—and that's what we need!

Paul actually got delivered from self-help and performance-based faith. He said he'd take on anyone if self-help and religious performance was measured, "though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more" (Phil. 3:4). Any effort outside of God's power got him nowhere! One of the best anecdotal pieces of evidence is the twelve steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. The founders knew that humble submission to God was central to freedom from addiction. Even the modern version of the steps refers to the need for a "higher power." We know this to be God.

Here's the harsh reality about dreams, goals, and ultimately, self-help: only 9.2 percent of people actually achieve the resolutions they aspire to at the beginning of each year.²

Hold on here! You should have a question for me right now. Why in the world write a book about seven resolutions if resolutions fail 90.8 percent of the time? Because almost all resolutions are attempted in our own strength! Let me tell you what makes the 7 Resolutions different:

- The 7 Resolutions embrace our weakness and are only achieved in God’s power; they position us for more of His presence. (Isa. 40:29)
- The 7 Resolutions don’t enable you to reach your dreams, but empower you to join God, who can do exponentially more than you can imagine. (Eph. 3:20–21)
- The 7 Resolutions are expressions of God’s grace—engage with them fully, and you’ll find increasing strength. (2 Cor. 12:9)

Wise decision-making, parenting victories, relational success, attainment of your professional stride, fiscal responsibility, and even those things beyond imagination are not unreachable. But God gives you the freedom to decide.

This is simply irrefutable: God sent Jesus to save you from your sin and transform your life, defeating destructive systems and getting your life aligned with His. Although not everyone will take hold of God’s promises and the precepts that get us there, God has always put the choice before His people. “I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live” (Deut. 30:19). The choice to take hold of it—it’s in your court.

Prepare to look within yourself. Take an honest look at the systems that work and those that are broken. While the broken systems need to be shut down, others, like redeeming time, may just need to be aimed at your calling or spiked with spiritual nutrients. It’s time to take an honest look at who you really are, see how it’s working, agree with God on needed changes, and get moving in “His energy.”

IT DOESN'T HOLD WATER

When God's people walked away from Him and tried to carve out a life for themselves, He sent a prophet! Jeremiah was a prophet who didn't hold back. He told the people just what he heard from God. We love to quote Jesus, "The truth will set you free"; but tradition holds that the truth got the prophet Jeremiah stoned to death. It seemed that anytime Jeremiah dared to speak truthfully, he was falsely accused, beaten, imprisoned, or thrown in a cistern and left for dead.

Jeremiah's words might not have gotten him killed today, but for sure, he'd be silenced. He was assessing the emptiness of God's children and made a bold statement:

"Be appalled, O heavens, at this;
be shocked, be utterly desolate,
declares the LORD,
for my people have committed two evils:
they have forsaken me,
the fountain of living waters,
and hewed out cisterns for themselves,
broken cisterns that can hold no water."

(Jer. 2:12-13)

Jeremiah nailed it then, and his words ring true today. We've abandoned the God who wants to fill our lives and dismantle our self-constructed cisterns (systems) that can't hold water. Cisterns were reservoirs carved out of rock that stored fresh water. Here's what we've done. We've built systems for ourselves that can't deliver what we'd hoped or what we need. They leak and come up empty when it comes to God's promises. We need to ask ourselves: What kind of life have I carved out for myself, and does it hold water?

The real test for a cistern would have been a dry season. When the refreshing runoff from the rainy season was over, the grass dying, the river dried up, and the sun beating down—would the cistern still hold water? That’s the test for us too. When we enter the desert seasons, we see how we’re made and if what fills us will sustain us.

No matter how much God pours into us through various means, we can struggle to find soul satisfaction, oftentimes because parts of us aren’t visibly broken but we have leaks. All the apps, online messages, and dynamic worship experiences can’t seem to fill us up. And no matter how good our intentions, we’re just not growing.

Here are a few examples of broken systems that cause us to leak:

- We lack essential spiritual disciplines, so we miss out on hearing the voice of God the moment we most need it.
- We’re not mindful of who we are in Christ, so we’re easily beaten back into a cave of insecurity and inaction.
- We try to manage and cover the tracks of our sin, so our sin winds up managing us and smothering us with shame.
- We gather foolish friends around us, so every time we attempt to make changes, we get pulled down to their level.
- We stopped taking risks, so we’ve settled for a life guided by mediocrity and the expectations of others.
- We lack focus around our unique calling and gifting, so we find ourselves aiming at nothing and hitting it.
- We don’t redeem time, so we see our days swallowed up by others’ expectations and squandered by our weaknesses.

Many of us are suffering from a cracked cistern; our lives are leaking. Spiritual impotence has gone mainstream, and we know it. Claiming God's name but living like He's powerless to change us is too typical. The fulfillment of the promises of abundant life (John 10:10) and lives that produce "much fruit" (John 15:8) is something we desperately want. But rather than experiencing overflowing joy, we've settled for sips of happiness. Little addictions become welcome relief from our nagging failings. We've resigned ourselves to a bitter deception—it's sometimes better to settle for less and live in secret than run the risk of experiencing more shame. But here's the hope we can hold on to: when we've come to the end of ourselves, we're strategically positioned for God to show His power.