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## CHAPTER ONE

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# *Wholeness Versus Compartmentalization*

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### A TALE OF TWO CHRISTIANS

Henry Jordan grew up in a Christian home. At an early age he made a decision to commit his life to Christ.

Henry and his family attended a wonderful church. It was full of great Christian activity and solid biblical teaching and was host to an exciting youth group. Henry took full advantage of that group as he grew up. He did “the whole thing”: planned activities, missions trips, and summer camps alike.

After his graduation from high school, Henry attended a well-known Christian college where he majored in business administration and marketing. He excelled in college. In fact, he was considered a leader on the campus. Henry served as president of both his junior and senior classes, and was a member of several prestigious academic fraternities.

Henry entered the real estate business after college. Before long, he was a successful real estate developer. Within a relatively short period of time, Henry became a very

wealthy man. He became a community leader. He was involved in evangelistic outreaches. His company funded various Christian initiatives, missionaries, and organizations. Henry was also an elder in his local church. He had made major contributions to the church through years of leadership and his generosity with his personal fortune.

Then tragedy caught up with Henry's personal life. The community was shocked when they heard that Henry had been caught with a high-priced call girl. The local newspapers, radio, and TV covered the story.

The shame and embarrassment were almost too much for Henry to handle.

When he was confronted by the leaders of the church, Henry admitted that what he had done was wrong. Still, he quickly began to make excuses for his sin. He even blamed his wife for her "lack of warmth."

You see, Henry had lived with this problem for years—and *that was the problem*. He had developed a private addiction to pornography, and he had never forsaken it. Rather, Henry just "managed" it. Whenever he indulged in this sinful activity, the shame hit him. Henry's response was to privately "claim a verse," but he never seriously sought help.

Pride stood in Henry's way. Oddly enough, as he "managed" the sin, it became increasingly unmanageable. His appetite for sexual activity—and his desire to live out the fantasies he read about—began to grow. Henry kept all of this a big secret, of course. He acted out these fantasies mostly when he was on out-of-town business trips. Away from home, he indulged his sexual appetite with prostitutes.

Henry was a bright man. So, through the years, he had become adroit at manipulation. Not even his wife knew this dark, private side of Henry. He felt trapped. He was driven to keep his big secret because of his visibility and his reputation as a Christian leader in the community.

## Compartmentalized Christianity

After Henry was discovered and the news was out, some of his Christian friends had a “hindsight insight.” They remembered that, despite his outgoing nature, Henry was evasive (sometimes even strangely silent) when the issues of accountability were raised. You see, Henry knew how to hide his sin. He could “keep it in the back,” compartmentalize it, and still look like and act as if he was a wonderful, effective Christian.

Let’s contrast Henry’s story with that of Judy Hallsey. Judy is a thirty-four-year-old single parent with two children. Judy has been a Christian for just over six years. Prior to coming to Christ, she experienced a broken marriage to her high school sweetheart, Kevin.

The Hallseys’ marriage started out as if it would last forever. Judy and Kevin were the ideal couple. They were both popular in high school, but shortly after the wedding things began to fall apart. Kevin wanted to spend more time with “the guys” than he did with Judy. It seemed as if he was running from something. Predictably, a noticeable distance developed between the two of them.

Kevin wasn’t the only one at fault, however. Judy contributed to the breakup of the relationship too. Since childhood, Judy had engaged in a pattern of lying and dishonesty. For as long as she could remember—and for a variety of reasons—Judy had lied about almost everything. Judy’s dishonesty as an adult drove a wedge in her relationship with Kevin. It fed Kevin’s desire to spend more time with his friends than with his wife. Judy didn’t tell the truth about where she was, what she did, or even what happened with their money. She constantly lied in an attempt to impress other people. Kevin sought refuge with his friends, never really knowing whether he got a straight story from Judy. Finally the distance between them overwhelmed their marriage, and they divorced.

The divorce left Judy an emotionally broken person. She carried an enormous amount of guilt because of her dishonesty. Although she tried to comfort herself by focusing on Kevin's neglect (and an assortment of his other faults and shortcomings), she still could not rid herself of the guilt and shame associated with the lies she had so often told.

Before long, Judy's sense of guilt and shame became almost unbearable. At times she felt totally hopeless and in the pit of despair. Then one day she ran into Beverly Hawkins, an old friend from high school, at her youngest son's baseball game. During the game they renewed their acquaintance and caught up on old times.

Judy was delighted to see Beverly once again. It had been quite a while. Over the next two weeks, they talked as they waited for their sons' practice to end. They talked throughout their sons' games. As the baseball season ended two weeks later, they made an appointment to meet again.

Beverly met Judy for coffee the following Saturday morning. In tears, Judy told of the pain that she was going through. Judy had not talked to anyone about the anguish that was in her heart since her marriage with Kevin had ended. Judy was somewhat embarrassed. Yet as she spoke, she also felt a great sense of relief and release. She poured her heart out to a dear friend. Beverly sat, listening to every word, empathizing with Judy.

Judy felt so much at ease. She felt as if she was drawn to Beverly's heart. In fact, she said to Beverly, "You know, I've been watching you these past few weeks ever since we reconnected at the ball game and, I have to say, I notice a difference in your life. You seem to be so much at peace. You're at ease with your life. The issues surrounding your life don't seem to upset you, either. I'd love to have what you have."

Beverly humbly thanked her. Then she confessed to Judy that she had not always had the peace that Judy wanted.

Beverly related to Judy how her older sister had explained the Gospel to her a few years after high school, and about her personal decision to receive Christ as her Savior and Lord. Beverly candidly recounted the changes, too, that Christ brought to her life.

You can guess what came next. Beverly went on to explain to Judy how she could establish that same relationship with Christ. Right there in the restaurant, Judy bowed her head and repeated a prayer after Beverly, expressing her faith in Christ.

### Conversion, Confession, and Congruency

Too often, we evangelicals would let the story end there. But this point of decision is actually the beginning of the issues we're about to cover. Why? Because our decisions at conversion are rarely the end of our life experience. Our prayers to receive Christ don't always affect our behavior down the road, as we saw with Henry—and are about to see with Judy.

Judy left that coffee shop with a new sense of hope and direction. She felt a strange sense of cleanness about her life. Over the days and weeks ahead, Judy also developed a hunger and appetite for the Scriptures, and she began to grow in her newfound faith as a Christian. But she still struggled with lying. Each time she lied, she experienced guilt and conviction.

Judy mustered the courage to tell this embarrassing, sinful secret to Beverly. She wanted help, and so she asked for it, even though she wasn't sure how Beverly would react to her confession.

Beverly responded graciously when Judy told her of her ongoing struggle. But she didn't soft-pedal the severity of Judy's situation, either. Beverly invited Judy to become a part of an accountability group, a small group of women that met once a week. It sounds weird, but Judy's sensitivity to the Lord caused her to be honest to the three other

women in the group about her lying. She learned not to hide her sin and sinfulness. In so doing, she has embraced repentance.

Judy's conversion led her to a new pattern of honest confession. That confession helped her life to hang together and make sense in ways it never had before. Her faith and her actions became more congruent. Now, the love and security she is experiencing in her relationship with the Savior and with the women in her accountability group are helping her overcome the sinful habit of lying. Judy still slips occasionally, but she makes it right. As a result, her lies are fewer and farther apart. She has learned that *darkness breeds destruction and light leads to life*.

Judy is now living at the crossroads of overcomers, where honesty before God and transparency with oneself and others intersect.

Our friend Henry played the tragic game of compartmentalizing his life. His pride would not allow him to own up to the truth of his struggle with sin. Quietly, in hiding, he eventually destroyed himself. In contrast, Judy allowed brokenness to drive her to a place of confession, repentance, and eventual wholeness.

### "COMPARTMENTALIZING" DEFINED

*Webster's Third International Dictionary* defines *compartmentalize* as "to separate into compartments or categorize in a manner tending to preclude interrelationships." So when we compartmentalize, we put sin in an area of our lives that is hidden, so we think, from others. To compartmentalize sin simply means to hide it.

Our desire for this kind of "sin management" is often driven by self-deception. The sin is never dealt with. It is just quietly managed in such a way that it's kept out of obvious view. We think that "out of sight, out of mind" will apply to others' perception of our sin. Eventually, we ourselves are deceived into thinking that if our sin can be hid-

den, it must not be so big. We can even delude ourselves into thinking we're so good at "sin management" that God Himself can't see our trespasses.

When we compartmentalize, we push aside our sin into an area that we think is not related to other areas of our lives. We compartmentalize sermons too, in not allowing what we hear to interact with our weekday lives, and by forgetting what we have heard as soon as we walk outside the church doors. But as we'll see throughout the course of this book, our lives cannot be divided up into unrelated segments. Sin that is not repented of will always be exposed. It's a principle of the universe: *One way or the other, we'll have to deal with our sin.*

Henry lived to compartmentalize. Judy pursued wholeness. The difference in their two stories are not unlike the contrast between David and Saul in the Scriptures.

### HOW DO KINGS DEAL WITH FAILURE?

David and Saul had some amazing similarities. They both were from small towns. They both had leadership thrust upon them when they were not looking for it. They both experienced great deliverance by the hand of God in battle. They both sinned and failed terribly.

Still, a major difference remained between them. David was known as "a man after [God's] own heart" (1 Samuel 13:14). Saul, however, was rejected as king for his repeated acts of disobedience and cowardice. David stayed on in the office even after he had committed adultery with Bathsheba and orchestrated a vicious deceitful plan to murder her husband Uriah and cover his tracks. (You can check into the full story in 2 Samuel 11 and 12.)

So what's the difference between Saul and David? The only explanation is that through all of David's failures, *he continued to fall at God's feet in brokenness, seeking cleansing and forgiveness.* He was sincere in his pursuit of righteousness. His walk with God was not a public relations game or

a means to secure power and favor in the eyes of people. In a word, David was a *repenter*. David's words in Psalm 51 ring through the history of God's people—because we've all “been there” with him:

Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your  
 lovingkindness;  
 According to the greatness of Your compassion blot out  
 my transgressions. . . .  
 Behold, You desire truth in the innermost being,  
 And in the hidden part You will make me know  
 wisdom. . . .  
 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;  
 A broken and a contrite heart, O God,  
 You will not despise. (*Psalm 51:1, 6, 17*)

As David repented, he recognized that God's plan for him was a restoration to wholeness, beginning with the truth about himself. He recognized that brokenness and repentance were the keys that opened the possibility of restoration—and that a forthright acknowledgment of his sin was the beginning of the entire process.

Not so with Saul. He was the master manipulator. His legendary ability to twist the facts finally was his undoing. He would not sincerely repent of his sin. He seemed to be constantly looking for ways to justify or hide his disobedience. The account of Saul's disobedience regarding the destruction of the Amalekites in 1 Samuel 15 offers a prime example of Saul's ability to compartmentalize. Saul was commanded to destroy the Amalekites and all their holdings. Instead, Saul spared their king and those things that he thought had some worth. When the prophet Samuel confronted Saul regarding his blatant disobedience, Saul twisted the facts about his motives. He said that the intent in sparing some of “the spoil” was to save it for a sacrifice to God.

At this point, can't you hear something in Saul's head saying, "Yeah, that's the ticket! We wanted to sacrifice them all along! What's the problem here?"

Samuel responded to Saul's "near-obedience" with these words:

Has the Lord as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and insubordination is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He has also rejected you from being king. (*1 Samuel 15:22–23*)

Saul's stature as the king of Israel stood in the way of an honest, transparent walk with God. Much like Henry Jordan, he was more concerned about the favor and opinions of man than he was about the approval of God. Because he would not genuinely repent, he never experienced the forgiveness of God.

Saul's response to sin was to hide it. He had a complete program of private sin management, in fact, and compartmentalizing was the key to his program.

### THE PURSUIT OF WHOLENESS

In contrast to compartmentalization, wholeness drives us to pursue honesty and integrity. "Wholeness" is not perfection; it does not mean that we have arrived. But true repentance brings an openness to all of our hearts and lives that marks the journey to wholeness.

*Webster's Third International Dictionary* defines *wholeness* as "the quality or state of being whole; an unreduced or unbroken completeness or totality; a hale vigor or soundness: integrity." *And that's what we need to pursue.*

I want to make clear that a Christian's journey to wholeness takes a lifetime to complete. Having said that,

we must also take the steps we can each day. We dare not take the time God gives us for granted. For many of us, only the finest of lines separates our working hard at our profession from becoming a full-blown workaholic. The hours we spend to provide for our families can too often extend into hours we rob from them. Our spouses are sometimes uncomfortable bringing the issue to our attention. Our children usually aren't.

That's exactly the situation that faced Jeff, an up-and-coming young executive in a Fortune 500 company. Jeff had been a Christian since his high school years, when he invited Christ to be his Savior and Lord at a Fellowship of Christian Athletes camp. Jeff had met his college sweetheart, Kelley, at a campus fellowship group at the state university they both attended. Jeff and Kelley set some goals before they were married: how much family income they wanted to gross annually, in which neighborhood they wanted to buy their first house, which stocks they would buy to build their retirement portfolio, even the country club they wanted to join in Atlanta. Strangely, their spiritual goals were left unstated at the time.

Jeff was a climber in the company. He had a promising future by everyone's reckoning. Kelley was the ever-faithful wife. She taught as a substitute for "pin money" until she gave birth to their first son, Derek, almost five years to the day after they were married.

Once Jeff began climbing that corporate ladder, he became protective of his position and his goals. That meant more hours at the office, more hours working at home, and less time watching Derek grow.

Another five years, and Derek was ready for kindergarten. Jeff was about to be named a senior vice-president—the youngest one in his company's history. He had a lock on their future, even though it would mean the same kind of dedication and hours it had taken to bring him to this point in his career. Jeff and Kelley had achieved their

goals: the dream house, the right neighborhood, the growth stocks, the country club. They'd even become part of a church some of the other senior executives attended.

Jeff was making his typical dash out the door as Derek ate breakfast one day—the first day Derek would attend school. Derek turned to him and asked, “Daddy, will you take me to school today?”

Jeff wished he could have. If he'd only thought about it, he could have postponed his 8:30 meeting until 10:00. He smiled sadly as he ruffled his son's hair. “Sorry, buddy. I know it's a huge day for you, but I have a meeting even before you have to be at school.”

Derek didn't give up. “Daddy, will you pick me up when it's time to come home?”

Now guilt was entering into Jeff's gut, and he wasn't sure he liked it. “Aw, Son, I wish I could.” There was that 3:00 he could have shifted to 2:00 if he'd only known it would matter so much to Derek.

“Daddy, now that I'll be in school all day, will I be so busy that I'll never see you again?”

“Of course not. We'll see each other.”

“But when? If you can never get away from work to see me, and they won't let me leave school, and you have to work even when you're here at home, *when?*”

Jeff looked at Derek, whose eyes were filling up. He glanced across the kitchen at Kelley, who seemed dumbstruck at Derek's question. Jeff made an on-the-spot decision.

“Son, I'll be there to pick you up after school. I'll have to change one appointment to do that, but I'll make it happen.”

And he did. Just as important, Jeff kept making the adjustments that let his family know that they held priority over his career. Derek saw more of Jeff during that kindergarten year than he had in his first five years of life combined. Jeff had repented of putting his job before his

family. He was still successful, but he quit climbing and started living. It didn't take long for Kelley to appreciate the wisdom of that change, either.

Derek entered his teenage years with the foundation only an involved father can bring to a child. Jeff and Kelley didn't have as much in their portfolio as they might have had with Jeff on the fast track at the office, but the investment they'd made in Derek was priceless.

Remember, then, that it's true that you probably have a lifetime to work through the complete process of repentance and change. Still, those you love most will benefit from the steps of repentance and change you can make *today*.

We need to pursue wholeness. How we live must tell the truth about who we are. Again, repentance brings about a certain openness, an appropriate vulnerability that is the arena for God's activity in and through our personal lives. Remember when you were new to the faith? You were willing to let God work in you in ways you may not be comfortable thinking about today.

There's a reason for that: *We have created an environment in Christian circles that makes it difficult for people to be real and genuine.* Because we have to look like winners, we're afraid to acknowledge our sinfulness in areas in which we struggle. So we learn quickly how to play the game, and we withdraw to our corners.

Then we compartmentalize. We destroy ourselves, usually with each one quietly whimpering to ourselves about "what might have been," when God's desire for us from the moment of our redemption is to make us whole.

Jesse Bingham grew up in a wonderful, warm Christian home. His father was an outstanding pastor in the community where he lived. Therefore, Jesse was exposed to some of the finest Christian teaching in the country. He had been a part of the most wonderful Christian experiences imaginable.

Although he made a profession of faith as a young teenager, Jesse began to rebel as he grew older. He had always been strong willed. The time came when he was simply determined to do whatever he wanted to do. Through his teen years he experimented with drugs and alcohol. He wandered far from home. Many, many people prayed for Jesse as he experienced one setback after another.

The heartache and heartbreak that he brought to his parents were unimaginable. At times he would apologize, “confess his sin,” and seek to get right. But it was clear there was a deep struggle in his soul.

One day, Jesse decided to carjack a student’s car. The young fellow gave Jesse the keys to the car without a struggle. As the student was walking away from the car, Jesse shot him in the back and killed him.

Jesse was arrested, tried, and sentenced to spend the rest of his life in jail. I went by to visit him there not long ago. As I talked with Jesse, he said these words to me: “You know, I’m so terribly sorry for what I’ve done and the pain that I’ve caused. I know the disappointment I’ve been to my parents, and the pain that I caused this young man’s family . . . and I’m so terribly sorry.”

Tears filled Jesse’s eyes as he continued. “Although I’m behind bars here, there’s a freedom that I’m experiencing now that I’ve never known before. I’m sorry for what I’ve done, and I’ve asked God to forgive me. *I’m beginning to experience that forgiveness.*”

You see, that forgiveness was released when Jesse finally came to the end of himself and experienced the joy of repentance. It is my prayer, as you wander through the pages of this book, that you’ll discover that that degree of joy and release can be yours. Until that happens, you’re even more of a prisoner than Jesse.

Don’t let your compartment for sin become your prison. Unlock it; confess it—and get on with your journey to integrity and wholeness.