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## THE WINDOWS ARE CRACKING

*"If a window in a building is broken and  
is left unrepaired,  
all the rest of the windows will soon be broken."*  
—James Q. Wilson & George L. Kelling

*"Above all else, guard your heart,  
for it is the wellspring of life."*  
—Proverbs 4:23

**I**magine that you are walking down the street with no one else in sight and you notice an abandoned car. The hood is up, there are no license plates and apparently no one could care less about this car. Would you be tempted to help yourself to some free parts? What if you noticed someone else getting away with some tires, a battery or other accessories? Would you be even more tempted to help yourself?

Several years ago Stanford University psychologist Philip Zimbardo took two cars and parked one on a street in affluent Palo Alto, California, and the other in one of the seediest neighborhoods in the Bronx, New York. As part of the experiment he removed the license plates, raised the hoods and abandoned the cars to their fate.<sup>1</sup> Within ten minutes (!) people in the Bronx began helping themselves to parts of the car and within twenty-four hours virtually everything of value had been stripped. Then random destruction began until the entire car was trashed. In contrast, the car in Palo Alto sat unmolested for a week until Zimbardo smashed one of the windows with a sledgehammer. Within a few hours it, too, was totally demolished.

Reflecting on Zimbardo's research, Malcolm Gladwell, author, speaker and staff writer with *The New Yorker*, stated, "Disorder invites even more disorder; a small deviation from the norm can set into motion a cascade of vandalism and criminality. The broken window was the tipping point."<sup>2</sup> *Once one of the windows was broken, and left unattended, soon the entire car was trashed.*

### **SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES OF SMALL-SCALE NEGLECT**

Zimbardo developed what became known as "Broken Windows Theory," which suggested that to reduce or prevent crime and maintain social order, "small" problems must be fixed immediately. Zimbardo's theory held that a little disorder

that goes unattended invites even more disorder.

On the heels of Zimbardo's experiment, criminologist George Kelling and social scientist James Q. Wilson reported that a broken window in a building left unrepaired soon led to *all* of the windows in the building being knocked out. Why? Damage left ignored sends a message that "no one cares," "no one is in charge," "we can further vandalize with no penalty." Kelling and Wilson found that neglecting even the smallest things led to abandoned property, growing weeds and additional smashed windows.

### **"FIX THE BROKEN WINDOWS"**

In the 1990s New York City mayor Rudy Giuliani decided to test the Broken Windows Theory. His police chief selected two high crime precincts and ordered the police to "fix the broken windows"—that is, zero tolerance for the small crimes like graffiti, public disorder, aggressive panhandling, the window washers at stoplights, fare jumpers at subway stations, public urination, etc. Police arrested petty offenders, cleaned up the neighborhoods and enforced a zero-tolerance policy for violations of public order. They washed the subways of graffiti daily, cracked down on fare beaters and loiterers and made their presence known.<sup>3,4</sup>

So, what happened as a result?

### **SURPRISING STATS**

Police officers found that one of seven "petty offenders" had an outstanding warrant; one

of twenty had a gun. Arrests for misdemeanors went up 500 percent between 1990 and 1994. As a result, New York City became one of the safest large cities in the country (actually about as safe as Boise, Idaho on a per capita basis). Car thefts were down seventy-one thousand from one hundred fifty thousand. Burglaries fell from two hundred thousand to seventy-five thousand. Homicides decreased to 1970s levels and dropped by one-half since 1990. Every precinct showed double-digit decreases in violent crime.

Inspired by New York City's dramatic results, communities across the country developed "neighborhood watch" programs. A cursory search of "broken windows" on the Internet reveals thousands of applications in communities, schools and businesses.<sup>5,6,7</sup>

### **SOME GOOD NEWS**

The good news is that many communities, schools and businesses are finding that when they began to pay attention to the small details, a positive tipping point emerged. When order is visibly restored at the smallest level, a signal is sent out. "This is a community where bad behavior has serious consequences." "If you can't get away with jumping a turnstile into the subway, you'd better not try armed robbery."<sup>8</sup>

### **BROKEN WINDOWS OF THE SOUL**

You get the idea, right? Of course "broken windows" is a metaphor for the astonishing speed

with which societal norms unravel. A single broken window soon attracts people who will smash more windows. After all, breaking windows is fun, isn't it? Pockets of disorder (graffiti, litter, etc.) communicated that authorities could not or would not enforce standards. Soon, law-abiding citizens left and criminal elements moved in.

The concept of "broken windows" has important spiritual applications for you. In his book *The Christian in Today's Culture*, Charles Colson cites the concept of *shalom* (e.g., civility and harmony) as the key preventative to reduce crime. His compelling challenge to the Christian community is to get involved where we live. He notes, "The best way to reduce crime is not to react after the fact with punishments and rehabilitation but to discourage it before it happens by creating an ordered and civil community life."<sup>9</sup>

Colson appeals to the Christian community to put faith into action by fixing "broken windows" in our communities and cites a number of success stories. He believes that

it is only Christians who have a worldview capable of providing workable solutions to the problems of community life. Thus, we ought to be in the forefront, helping communities take charge of their own neighborhoods.<sup>10</sup>

As you have already guessed, there are a number of spiritual applications of "broken windows."

This book develops the metaphor of “broken windows” and makes practical applications to your life. Specifically, while we talk about dealing with temptation in general, our main focus is on the myriad of sexual temptations you face on a daily basis. Let’s be brutally honest. What “broken windows” have you left unrepaired in your life? Have you been guilty of allowing the litter of immorality, loose talk and compromised values remain like unwashed graffiti in your heart? Have you ignored the voice of God’s Spirit by allowing selfish independence, sexual temptation and wandering affections to go unattended? Are you sending a message to God’s enemy that no one is in charge; no one cares? What are the consequences of small-scale neglect in the neighborhood of your soul?

### **LET’S GET STARTED**

For much of my professional life as a Christian psychologist, I (Don) have ministered to clergy and religious leaders who have had moral failures. I recall hearing one pastor preach a sermon with fervent conviction on the topic of temptation. He exclaimed, “Moral failure usually begins with an urge, thought or idea long before the act.” How true! Sadly, I found out that a couple of years later, he had an affair with the church secretary, divorced his wife and abandoned his family and ministry. What he apparently didn’t realize was that the cracks of his own urges, thoughts, fantasies and ideas were not quickly repaired.

When one “broken window” was not quickly fixed, more were soon to follow.

So, how do you deal with the “broken window” of besetting sin and/or temptation? It begins with attending to the “small stuff.” Most Christian leaders who found themselves experiencing the consequences of a moral failure never dreamed that their flirtation with sin would lead to such devastating consequences.

There is a heavy price for small-scale neglect. Temptation is an example. Think about the time when you have ignored the “broken windows” of small compromises. Apparently dealing with temptation isn’t a twenty-first-century phenomenon. The elder Paul reminds the youthful Timothy to “flee the evil desires of youth” (2 Timothy 2:22). Like a broken window, temptation needs to be dealt with when it is still an urge, a thought or an idea.

You may believe that because you struggle with sexual temptation that you are spiritually weak or that you may have a character flaw. Not so! Scripture is quite clear that Jesus was tempted in every sense that we are—and yet without capitulating to sin (see Hebrews 4:15). To be tempted is not sin. It is only when we are drawn away in our temptation and the evil desire is conceived that it gives birth to sin (see James 1:15). We’ll talk much more about this later.

### **HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF THIS BOOK**

To make this book even more practical for you, we provide personal reflection questions at



the end of each chapter. The temptation will be to skip over these and read through the book. If you do that, you will miss some great opportunities for personal spiritual formation and growth. Further, we advise you to share the book and the reflection questions with a trusted friend. Our prayer is that you will begin to take small steps toward healing and victory in the areas the enemy most wants to destroy you. Take a close and personal look at some of the “broken windows” in your own soul. Will you open your heart to what is presented and ask the Holy Spirit to fix the “broken windows of your soul”?

## **REFLECTIONS ON MY OWN “BROKEN WINDOWS”**

As you go through the remaining chapters in this book, ask yourself the following questions:

1. What are some of the “broken windows” in my life? Pray and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal any lingering cracks in the windows of your soul. List several triggering events that have been particularly bothersome in dealing with temptation.
  
2. When are “addictive/sinful” cravings most prevalent? When am I most susceptible to temptation? When I am hungry, angry, lonely or tired? Is it when I’m bored, anxious or depressed?
  
3. What are some specific consequences I would have to face if discovered in a moral failure?
  
4. List several guards or “ways of escape” I will employ when I am aware of being in a state of temptation. Be specific.

**FOR FURTHER READING**

Colson, Charles. *The Christian in Today's Culture*. Tyndale House, 2001 (describes "Broken Windows Theory" in an urban setting).

Gladwell, Malcolm. *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*. Little Brown and Company, 2000.

Rabey, Lois Mowday. *The Snare: Understanding Emotional and Sexual Entanglement*. NavPress, 1994.

Wilkinson, Bruce. *Set Apart: Discovering Personal Victory Through Holiness*. Multnomah Publishers, 1998, 2003.

Wilson, J.Q., and G.L. Kelling. "Broken Windows." *Atlantic Monthly* (March 1982): 29–38.