

# **CALLED**

**A NOVEL ABOUT  
YOUTH MINISTRY TRANSITION**

by Jen Bradbury

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*To my Jakes: Kitty, Tony, Ginny, & Bob.  
You're who I have to thank for being—and staying—in ministry.*

*This is a work of fiction.  
Any resemblance to real people is purely coincidental.*



## THURSDAY, APRIL 2: THE CALL

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Kendall walked into her home and slammed the door. After five years of marriage, she knew her actions would get a rise out of her husband, Frank.

Sure enough, she heard Frank push his chair back from his desk in their home office directly above her head and walk the twenty-seven steps to where she stood in the kitchen, waiting for him.

“What’s wrong?” Frank asked.

“It’s been a day,” Kendall replied, her voice far from calm.

“It seems like there’s been a lot of days like that lately,” agreed Frank.

“There have been. But this one might just take the cake. Jill called Nate today.”

Even as Kendall said Jill’s name she felt her blood boil. In many ways, Jill was a typical SAM—*Springfield Area Mom*. She dressed well, looked perfect, worked out multiple times a week, and helicoptered over her teens at every opportunity, constantly convinced that without her, their lives would fall apart.

The first time Kendall met Jill, she’d been all smiles. She’d fawned all over Kendall, saying how delighted she was to have Kendall join their “family of Grace.”

The second time they’d met, Jill walked into Kendall’s office with a yellow clipboard in hand and asked for a few minutes of Kendall’s time. Kendall foolishly agreed, a mistake she’d vowed never to repeat.

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During that meeting, Jill had addressed a list of “growing concerns” she had regarding Kendall’s recent decisions about the youth ministry. Since “youth ministry is supposed to be about the *body*, soul, and heart,” Jill’s family was concerned about the calories in the snacks found in the youth room. She was also perturbed that some of the “cooler” kids were no longer coming to The Lighthouse, their weekly youth program. And she was *especially* anxious about the new kids who’d recently begun coming. They weren’t from the “kinds of families” that usually frequented Grace, which had set off all kinds of alarm bells in Jill’s mind. She feared these newcomers would introduce her beloved daughter to all kinds of sexual sin, including porn.

Kendall had found it difficult not to stare open-mouthed at Jill as she spoke, especially as she systematically checked things off the list attached to her clipboard, a list that Kendall jokingly began referring to as “Kendall’s sins.”

Since then, Kendall had butted heads with Jill on a regular basis. Usually, she was wise enough to try her best to steer clear of these conflicts. But sometimes, she just couldn’t help herself. Other times, Jill’s reactions really did catch her off guard.

As if Frank could read Kendall’s mind, he questioned, “Jill’s reaction isn’t that surprising, is it?”

“No, it’s not,” replied Kendall honestly. “I had a hunch that duct-taping kids to the wall was not going to go over well with her. But you’ll still never believe what she did! She asked Nate how he could continue to support a youth pastor who obviously thinks there’s nothing wrong with subjecting kids to bondage.”

“Bondage?” laughed Frank. “That’s a new one, even for her. What did Nate tell her?”

“That’s the thing,” Kendall said hesitantly. “I don’t know. I ran into Nate at the end of the day as I was walking out the door. He said we needed to talk because Jill had called him. He wondered why she



thought I was subjecting the high school teens to bondage. I laughed until he assured me he was serious. I suggested we talk right away, but Nate said he had an evening meeting and needed to get home to Beth and the kids before then. It made me feel as though he didn't even want to hear my side of things."

"I don't think that's it at all," Frank, who always tried to see the best in people, replied calmly. "It sounds like Nate just had a busy day and he wanted to give you a heads up about what Jill said. What time are you going to meet with him tomorrow?"

"3:00," said Kendall, exasperated. "That means my whole morning is shot because I'm going to be worried about this. It's going to make it hard for me to focus on anything else."

"Don't catastrophize this, Kendall. Just go talk to Nate. This isn't the end of the world."

"Then how come it feels like it is?" Kendall cried.

Frank enveloped Kendall in a giant bear hug as she finally let her tears fall.

