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TRUTH . . . OR *Consequences*

“Become a World-Class Violinist Instantaneously.”

“How to Play the Piano . . . Instantly!”

“‘Instant Health’ at the Flip of a Switch!” (ad for a kitchen appliance).

“Melt 10 Lbs. in 10 Minutes! . . . a Workout So Easy, You Do It in Your Pajamas!”

“Delivers So Much Peace of Mind It Should Be Covered under Your Health Plan” (ad for a popular car).

“Look Better and Feel Younger in Just Minutes a Day . . . the Key to a Healthier, Happier Life” (ad for an oxygen chamber, price tag: \$3,999.95).

*Y*ou’ve no doubt seen these kinds of outlandish claims on social media ads or at the checkout line in the supermarket. They’ve been around as long as there has been advertising.

And then there are the endless, more subtle, variations. Is it just me, or does it seem that “gluten free” is stamped on everything from celery bags to milk cartons today? Advertisers trying to get us to purchase their product based on a hollow promise. (I’m pretty sure celery and milk have always been gluten free!)

Our culture is riddled with deception. Sometimes it’s easy to see through the falsehood (as in the claim that one can become a world-class violinist instantaneously). Unfortunately, however, deception is not always easy to detect.

Deception in advertising appeals to our natural human longings. We *want* to believe that somehow, mysteriously, those unwanted pounds really could melt away in just ten minutes—no sweat, no discipline, no cost, no effort, no pain. That’s why we buy the pills, the diet drink powders, and the exercise equipment promoted on Internet ads.

A clever and cunning pitchman whose intention was to change Adam and Eve’s thinking about God and His ways designed the first advertising campaign. Satan’s objective was to drive a wedge between God and His creatures. He rightly assumed that the man and woman were not likely to support anything that appeared to be an all-out assault on God. He knew that, instead, he would have to subtly trick them, to deceive them, to seduce them by making an offer that appeared to be reasonable, desirable, and not entirely “anti-God.”

Satan deceived Eve through a clever combination of outright lies, half-truths, and falsehoods disguised as truth. He began by planting seeds of doubt in her mind about what God had actually said (“Did God really say . . . ?” [Gen. 3:1 CSB]).

Next he led her to be careless with the Word of God and to suggest that God had said something that, in fact, He had not said. God had said, “Do not *eat* the fruit of the tree.” However, Eve quoted God as saying, “Neither shall you *touch* it” (v. 3).

Satan deceived Eve by causing her to question the goodness, love, and motives of God. His implication was: “Has God put restrictions on your freedom? Sounds like He doesn’t want you to be happy.”

The Truth is that God had said, “You are *free* to eat from any tree of the garden” (2:16 CSB)—except one.

The Truth is that God is a generous God.

In that entire, vast garden, God had posted only one Keep Out sign: “Do not eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.” Furthermore, the one restriction God imposed was in the best interests of the couple and was intended to guarantee their long-term blessing and happiness. God knew that when they ate of that tree, they would die; their relationship with Him would be severed; they would become slaves—to Satan, sin, and self.

The Serpent further deceived Eve by lying to her about the consequences of choosing to disobey God. God had said, “In the day that you eat of it you shall surely die (2:17). Satan countered, “You will *not* surely die” (3:4). He flatly contradicted what God had already said.

The devil seduced Eve by offering her all kinds of benefits if she would just eat the forbidden fruit (3:5). He promised that a whole world of knowledge and experience would open up to her (“Your eyes will be opened”). He assured her that she would be equal with God—that is, that she could be her own god (“You will be like God”).

Finally, he promised that she would be able to decide for herself what was right and wrong (“knowing good and evil”). God had already told Adam and Eve what was right and what was wrong. But Satan said, in essence, “That’s His opinion. But you’re entitled to your own opinion—you can make your own decisions about what’s right and wrong.”

Satan deceived Eve by causing her to make her decision based on what she could see and on what her emotions and her reason told her to be right, even when it was contrary to what God had already told the couple:

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.

— Genesis 3:6

Eve took the bite. But instead of the promised rewards, she found herself with a mouth full of worms—shame, guilt, fear, and alienation. She had been lied to—she had been deceived.

As seventeenth-century Puritan pastor Thomas Brooks put it,

Satan promises the best, but pays with the worst; he promises honor, and pays with disgrace; he promises pleasure, and pays with pain; he promises profit, and pays with loss; he promises life, and pays with death.¹

From that first encounter in the garden to the present day, Satan has used deception to win our affections, influence our choices, and destroy our lives. In one way or another, every problem we have in this world is the fruit of deception—the result of believing something that simply isn’t true.

Satan holds out the glittering promise of “real life,” knowing full well that those who respond to his offer will certainly die (Prov. 14:12).

So why do we fall for his deception? Why do we go for the lure? For starters, Satan’s lies don’t come at us overtly, through talking serpents. Rather, they may be attractively disguised in a *New York Times* bestseller, a popular mommy blog, a movie, a TV show, or a catchy hit song. They may also surface subtly in a classroom with a brilliant professor or in sincere advice from a relative or friend, a therapist, or even a Christian writer, teacher, or counselor.

Day after day, we are bombarded with countless forms of deception that make their way into our minds, lobbed at us not only by our tireless enemy, the devil, but by this fallen world system in which we live and by our own sinful, weak flesh, all of which are at odds with God and the Truth and seek to seduce us.

Regardless of the immediate source, anytime we receive input that is not consistent with the Word of God, our antennae should go up. What we read or hear may sound right, may feel right, may seem right—but if it’s contrary to the Word of God, it *isn’t* right. If we could only see that the forbidden fruit—fruit that looks so ripe and tastes so sweet in the first moment—ultimately leads to death and destruction.

THE STRATEGY OF DECEPTION

Deception was—and still is—crucial to Satan’s strategy. According to Jesus, it is the devil’s very nature to deceive:

[The devil] was a murderer from the beginning,
and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him.
When he lies, he speaks out of his own character,
for he is a liar and the father of lies.

—John 8:44

For reasons we don't fully understand, Satan chose to target the woman for his initial deception. Twice in the New Testament the apostle Paul reminds us that it was the woman who was deceived: "The serpent deceived Eve by his cunning" (2 Cor. 11:3); "Adam was not the one deceived, but the woman was deceived" (1 Tim. 2:14).

Some theologians believe there was something in the way Eve was created that made her more vulnerable. Others suggest that because God had placed her under the headship of her husband, once she stepped out from under that spiritual covering and protection, she was more easily deceived. Or perhaps it was because of Eve's softer, relational, responsive makeup that she was willing to engage with the Serpent.

Whatever the reason, the Deceiver approached and deceived the woman, and she fell for the ploy. She then seduced her husband to sin with her, and together they led the whole human race into sin (though Adam, as her head, was held ultimately responsible).

Since that day, every man and woman who has ever lived has been born with a propensity to sin and has been deceived by Satan's lies. He knows that if we buy into his deception, we will influence others around us to sin, and our sinful choices will set a pattern for subsequent generations to follow.

Sometimes, as was the case with Eve, Satan deceives us directly. And sometimes he uses other people as instruments of deception.

In the fifth chapter of Ephesians, Paul warns, "Let no one deceive you with empty words" (v. 6). Repeatedly, he challenges God's people to speak Truth to one another. When we are not honest with each other, we help the Enemy out, acting as his agents, deceiving and destroying each other.

According to the Scripture, we can even be deceived by spiritual leaders—those who have been entrusted with the responsibility of shepherding God’s flock and communicating the Truth to His people. Through the prophet Ezekiel, God addressed those leaders who were abusing their calling and their followers by failing to speak the Truth:

Because with the lies you have made the heart
of the righteous sad. . . ;
you have strengthened the hands of the wicked,
so that he does not turn from his wicked way to save his life.

—Ezekiel 13:22 NKJV

This description isn’t limited to Old Testament spiritual leaders. There are respected “Christian leaders” and influencers today of whom the same might be said. They may not intend to deceive their followers—in fact, they may not even realize they are being deceptive.

Nonetheless, they “strengthen the hands of the wicked” by promising God’s blessing and grace to people who do not qualify because of their willful disobedience and unrepentant hearts. Their teachings help people justify . . .

- rage (“You’re just being honest about your feelings”)
- selfishness (“If you don’t look out for yourself, no one else will”)
- irresponsibility (“Your problems and your reactions have all been caused by others”)
- infidelity (“God wants you to be happy—it’s OK to divorce your mate and marry someone you really love”)

At the same time, they make “the righteous” feel “sad” or guilty . . . for taking responsibility for their own sinful choices, for demonstrating a servant’s heart, and for being faithful to their vows. They may also mislead their followers by preaching the law of God without pointing to Christ, who alone can fulfill the law. Doing this can leave people without hope and under chronic guilt and condemnation of works- or performance-based religion.

OPEN YOUR EYES

Many of us have unthinkingly exposed ourselves to deception, oblivious to the fact that we are being deceived. That is the very nature of deception.

One of my goals in this book is to urge Christian women to open their eyes and begin to evaluate what is going on around them—to wake up to the deception that is so pervasive. So much of our lifestyle is rooted in ways of thinking that simply are not true. The result is a house built on sinking sand. One lie leads to another and another and another.

It's tempting to mindlessly accept whatever we hear and see. We listen to music, radio, and podcasts; read blogs, magazines, and social media; watch movies; listen to advice; and respond to advertisements without asking ourselves:

- “What’s the message here?”
- “Is it really true?”
- “Am I being deceived by a way of thinking that is contrary to the Truth?”

Satan’s promise to Eve was tantalizing: “Your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (Gen. 3:5). Who could resist such an amazing offer?

The forbidden fruit was “*good* for food . . . a *delight* to the eyes . . . to be *desired* to make one wise” (v. 6). If it hadn’t seemed so attractive, do you think Eve would have fallen for the offer? If that fruit had been rotten and crawling with worms, would she have considered disobeying God? Probably not. What makes Satan’s offers so alluring and so deceptive is that they look so right.

The problem is that Eve didn’t stop to evaluate what was really happening. She didn’t take time to discern Truth from error. She didn’t stop to consider the cost and the consequences of what she was about to do. If Eve could have imagined the ugly, painful, deadly consequences of her choice—in her own life, in her relationship with God, in her marriage, in her children, in her children’s children, and (through the sin of her husband, who joined her in disobeying God) in every human being that

would ever live on the planet—do you think she would have listened to Satan’s lie and disobeyed God? I doubt it.

But how often do we make choices without stopping to consider the consequences that may follow? Many of us simply live our lives, responding to the people, circumstances, and influences around us—eating what we crave at the moment, buying the latest deals that pop up in our social media feeds, adopting the latest fads, and embracing the lifestyles, values, and priorities of our friends. It all looks so good; it feels so right; it seems so innocent. But we end up in abusive relationships, head over heels in debt, angry, frustrated, trapped, and overwhelmed. We have been deceived. We have fallen for a lie.

In an unforgettable example of this kind of deception, a mother of seven young children (five of them adopted) told me she was carrying on an illicit relationship with a man she had met on the Internet; she was seriously thinking of leaving her husband for this other man. As we met together one night at a mall (while her husband watched the kids), she acknowledged that what she was doing was wrong. “But,” she said of the other man, “he’s so good to me and to my children.”

For sure, there were issues in her marriage that had left her sad, emotionally thirsty, and vulnerable to the attention of another man. She felt that she had a chance to exchange sadness for happiness, that perhaps she would find a shortcut to solve the pressures and challenges she faced at home. But as I listened, it became clear to me that leaving her marriage would only set her up for new and greater problems.

As we talked over the next couple of hours, I begged her to realize that this man was not truly interested in her or her children. If he were, he would not be breaking up her marriage. If he really loved her, he would not be leading her to violate God’s law. I gently explained that the road she was on, though it seemed so appealing, would not lead to the freedom and happiness she was seeking. I tried to help her see that she was being deceived and that her only hope was to believe and embrace the Truth. The long pathway of confession, counseling, prayer, and recommitment to her marriage and children would not be easy. But

it would lead to a beauty that could not possibly be found in pursuing a shortcut.

THE PROGRESSION FROM DECEPTION TO SPIRITUAL BONDAGE

In the chapters that follow, we'll examine some of the most common and destructive lies women believe, but first let's take a look at how we become deceived and how deception leads to captivity.

Generally speaking, people don't fall into spiritual bondage overnight. They don't just wake up one morning and discover that they are addicted to food or have a temper they can't control. There's a progression that leads to enslavement, and it begins when we . . .

Listen to a lie.

That's how it all began in the Garden of Eden. Eve *listened* to the lies told her by Satan. I'm confident she had no idea where those lies would ultimately lead her and her family. Perhaps it didn't seem particularly dangerous just to *listen* to the Serpent—to hear him out, to see what he had to say. Listening in itself wasn't disobedience. But—and here's the key—listening to a viewpoint that was contrary to God's word put Eve in a dangerous position that led to disobedience, which in turn led to physical and spiritual death.

Listening to things that are not true is the first step toward spiritual bondage. That's why I believe it is so important to carefully monitor the input we allow into our minds and hearts.

My parents both came to know Jesus as young adults. From the time they married, they were eager to establish a Christ-centered home, based on the solid foundation of His Word. They didn't have the advantage of the many helpful resources that are available to Christian parents today. However, God gave them the wisdom and resolve to cultivate a climate in our home that was conducive to spiritual hunger and growth. My six younger siblings and I couldn't help but be "infected" by their love for Christ, His Word, His people, and His kingdom. They were intentional

about surrounding us with spiritually nurturing influences, and they were equally intentional about protecting us from influences that could be harmful to young hearts or could desensitize us to sin.

This approach to child rearing did not always make sense to us when we were kids. But how I thank the Lord today that my parents had the courage to say, “We are not going to knowingly allow our children’s lives to be shaped by the lies promoted in this world.” They earnestly desired that we would grow up to love the Word and the ways of God, that our hearts would be quickened by the Truth, and that we would embrace it for ourselves. Once they released us from that protected environment into the world, they prayed we would continue to walk in the Truth and to recognize and reject anything that was deceptive and untrue.

Today, as an older woman, I still have to guard my mind—to carefully choose the input I allow into my life and to reject that which promotes ungodly thinking. The world’s deceptive way of thinking comes to us through so many avenues—television, magazines, movies, music, friends, and social media, to name a few. A steady diet of these influences will shape our view of what is valuable, beautiful, and important.

There are no harmless lies. We cannot expose ourselves to the world’s false, deceptive way of thinking and come out unscathed. Eve’s first mistake was not eating the fruit; her first mistake was listening to the Serpent.

Listening to counsel or ways of thinking that are not according to the Truth is the first step in developing wrong beliefs that will ultimately place us in spiritual bondage. And once we have listened to the lie, the next step toward captivity is that we . . .

Dwell on the lie.

First we listen to it. Then we dwell on it. We begin to consider what the Enemy has said. We mull it over in our minds. We engage the Enemy in conversation. We contemplate that he may be right, after all. The process can be likened to farming or gardening. First the soil is cultivated—we open ourselves up to input that is contrary to God’s Word. Then the seed

is sown—we listen to the lie. Next the seed is watered and fertilized—we dwell on the lie.

And then, if we allow our minds and hearts to dwell on things that are not true, sooner or later, we will . . .

Believe the lie.

At this point the seed that has been sown begins to take root and grow. That's exactly what happened with Eve. First she listened to the Serpent's sales pitch. Then she considered it and engaged him in further discussion about it. Before long she believed that what he had told her was true—in spite of the fact that it clearly contradicted the Truth of what God had said. And once she believed the lie, the next step was a small one. Listen to the lie, dwell on it, believe it, and sooner or later you will . . .

Act on the lie.

Now the seed that has been sown, watered, and fertilized and has taken root begins to produce fruit. Beliefs produce behavior. Believing things that aren't true produces sinful behavior.

What we believe will be seen in the way we live. Conversely, the way we behave will invariably be based on what we believe to be true—not what we *say* we believe, but what we actually believe. “As [a man] *thinks* in his heart, so *is* he” (Prov. 23:7 NKJV).

The important thing to remember is that *every act of sin in our lives begins with a lie*. We listen to the lie; we dwell on it until we believe it; then finally we act on it.

Now watch what happens next. We reject the Truth and violate the Word of God one time in what seems to be just a little matter. However, the next time we are tempted, we find that it's easier to sin, and the next time it's easier still. We don't just sin once; we sin again and again and again until a groove has been worn in our hearts—a sinful pattern. Before we realize what has happened, we're trapped. A sinful stronghold has been established. Satan threw out the bait, we took it, and now he has reeled us in and made us his catch.

Don't miss how the progression got started:

***Every area of bondage in our lives
can be traced back to a lie.***

A seed is sown. It is watered and fertilized. It takes root. Finally it produces fruit—not just a single piece of fruit, but an entire harvest of spiritual bondage, destruction, and death.

MOVING FROM CAPTIVITY TO FREEDOM

Most of us have areas of our lives where we are held captive because we have listened to, believed, and acted on lies. How can we escape and begin to move toward freedom in those areas? Here are three steps to keep in mind as we begin to deal more specifically with some of the lies that lead to spiritual bondage and the Truth that sets us free.

1. Identify the area(s) of spiritual bondage or sinful behavior. Chances are, you already know what some of these are, but there may be others that are not as obvious. We're going to look at some common ones throughout this book. But right now ask God to start showing you specific areas where you are not free. The Scripture says, "Whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved" (2 Peter 2:19). Can you pinpoint any issues in your life that have overcome you?

- Are there areas where you are in physical bondage (overeating, disordered eating, substance abuse)?
- Are you in emotional bondage (anxiety, fear, depression, chronic emotional disorders)?
- Are you in bondage to sexual sin (masturbation, pornography, lust, fornication, homosexuality)?
- Is financial bondage (overspending, greed, stinginess) an issue in your life?
- Are there sinful habits that plague you (anger, lying)?

- Are you in bondage to the need for approval?
- Are you hooked on TV, computer games, social media, romance novels, or erotica (“sexy” stories designed to arouse)?

God may bring other areas of bondage to your mind. Once you identify those areas, don’t just try to eliminate them. That’s likely to be futile. In fact, you may have already tried to deal with these behaviors, failed, and been tempted to give up.

If you want to get rid of poisonous berries growing on your property, it’s not enough to go out and pick all the berries off the bush. More will quickly grow back in their place. The only way to permanently get rid of the poisonous fruit is to pull the bush out from the roots. That’s why this next step is so important.

2. Identify the lie(s) at the root of that bondage or sin pattern. What lies have you listened to, believed, and acted on? The answer to that question may not be immediately apparent—roots are generally hidden beneath the surface, and lies, by their very nature, are deceptive. We need the Lord to help us see what we have been believing that is not true.

In the pages that follow, we will identify forty-five lies that are representative of the countless different lies we may have allowed to take root and produce fruit in our lives. Ask God to show you which of the Enemy’s lies you have bought into—whether the ones in this book or others He brings to mind—and to help you repent of believing them.

Once you identify the specific lies you have believed, what next?

3. Replace the lie(s) with the Truth. This is so important. Satan is a formidable enemy. His primary weapon is deception. His lies are powerful. But there is something even more powerful than Satan’s lies—and that is the Truth. Once we identify the lies that have put us in spiritual bondage and repent of believing those lies, we have an effective weapon to overcome deception—the weapon of Truth!

Each lie must be countered with Truth. Where we have listened to, dwelt on, believed, and acted on lies, we must begin to listen to, meditate on, believe, and act on the Truth. That is how we can move from spiritual

bondage to true freedom—by the power of the Spirit of God. This process won't always be easy, but He will give us the grace we need each step of the way. And what joy we will experience as the lies are exposed, chains are broken, and we begin walking in the Truth.

As Jesus declared, it is the Truth that “will set you free” (John 8:32).

Remember the woman who was thinking about leaving her husband and children for a man she had met on the Internet? She had grown up in a Christian home and graduated from a Christian college. She knew a lot of Truth in her head. But at the time we first connected, she was deeply deceived and blinded. The Enemy had done a number on her thinking, and she was not ready or willing to listen to the Truth.

Long story short, over the next few years she continued going her own way and making one foolish choice after another, for which she and her family paid dearly. But God in His mercy continued to pursue her, just as He pursued Adam and Eve in the garden. Years later, this woman wrote and updated me on her journey:

Broken, feeling utterly worthless and alone, I finally began to seek Him again. I started reading my Bible, attending church, and praying. The change in my heart was nearly instantaneous. I pressed on, driven by the seeds of Truth planted in my soul.

The Lord miraculously and amazingly started removing the scales from my eyes! The God I thought I knew suddenly revealed Himself as vastly more mysterious and powerful than ever before. At the same time, He showed me the great depths of His love, compassion, and mercy. He was not only what my tired, weary soul had been craving; He was so much more!

Today He reassures me that He sees me as holy, perfect, and unstained through the blood of Jesus Christ. After nearly thirty-six years of running, I understand that all along He just wanted me to find my solace in Him. He has amazingly rebuilt all that I sought to destroy in my defiance. I now know that God's love is irresistible.

We have a redeeming God who is making all things new. He is redeeming and making this woman new. And He wants to do the same with you and me, whatever our history may be, whatever lies we may have believed, and whatever consequences we may have experienced. His grace and love truly are irresistible.