MADISON PREWETT TROUTT

Bestselling author of Made for This Moment and The Love Everybody Wants

5)



DEFEAT THE **LIES** THAT BIND YOU AND LIVE OUT THE **TRUTH** THAT FREES YOU

FOREWORD BY JONATHAN "JP" POKLUDA

PRAISE FOR

DARE TO BE TRUE

"Dare to Be True is a heartfelt, faith-driven invitation to embrace identity, purpose, and truth as defined by God, not culture. With raw honesty and wisdom beyond her years, Madison Prewett Troutt encourages readers to trade insecurity and performance for freedom and grace. Her vulnerability and boldness make you feel like you are sitting down with a big sister who loves you too much to let you stay stuck."

—Arielle Reitsma, co-host of the *Girls Gone Bible* podcast and co-author of *Out of the Wilderness*

"Madi writes with honesty and biblical depth, offering hope for anyone who feels stuck, ashamed, or overwhelmed. These pages won't just challenge you—they'll lead you toward healing and purpose. If you're ready to live free, this book is a powerful place to begin."

—Bestselling author Rebekah Lyons, speaker and co-founder of THINQ Media

"Madison Prewett Troutt brings truth with boldness, grace, and a whole lot of heart. *Dare to Be True* feels like a deep breath of fresh air in a world full of confusion and noise. Madi doesn't just talk about truth—she lives it, and she invites you to do the same. This book is honest, practical, and full of hope."

—RILEY GAINES, USA Today bestselling author of Swimming Against the Current

"Madi is a powerhouse of truth—bold, wise, and unwavering in her call to live and lead with conviction. She doesn't just write about daring to be true; she lives it with courage and consistency. This book is a weapon against the lies that keep us bound, and a lifeline to the freedom found in Jesus. Every sentence points back to Him. Madi is the real deal, and this message will set captives free."

—Angela Halili, co-host of the *Girls Gone Bible* podcast and co-author of *Out of the Wilderness*

"Dare to Be True is a challenge to live with authenticity in a world that begs us to perform. Madi doesn't write from a stage; she writes from the middle of real life, and every page reflects the strength she has found in surrender. If you're ready to stop pretending and start living free, this book will be a breakthrough."

—Savannah LaBrant, YouTuber, influencer, and co-author of *Cole & Sav*

"In a world that is constantly feeding us false information and urging us to follow 'our truth,' we must learn to stand firm in the Absolute Truth of Scripture. In *Dare to Be True*, Madison Prewett Troutt challenges and encourages her readers to break free from what's keeping them bound, and to dare to live in truth and freedom."

—New York Times bestselling author Jentezen Franklin, senior pastor at Free Chapel

"Dare to Be True is an engaging, practical guide to living a life unburdened by worldly lies. This book is both unapologetic and gentle, layering biblical truth with relatable stories that urge readers to live holy lives. As a mom working to raise godly daughters, I'm so grateful resources like this exist!"

—Allie Beth Stuckey, New York Times bestselling author of Toxic Empathy

"In a world that constantly tries to redefine truth and distort identity, *Dare to Be True* is a timely and needed reminder of who we are in Christ. Through powerful personal stories and unwavering biblical truth, Madi calls us back to the source of our God-given identity and shows us how to stand firm in it."

—Tonya Prewett, founder of UniteUS and Madi's mom

"Dare to Be True is a powerful invitation to step out of deception and into divine truth. Madison Prewett Troutt masterfully guides readers with wisdom, vulnerability, and unwavering faith, making this book a must-read for anyone seeking clarity, confidence, and lasting freedom."

—New York Times bestselling author Daniel G. Amen, MD

"In a world where it's easy to pretend like everything is okay, I value authenticity and transparency. What I love about *Dare to Be True* is that Madi pulls back the curtain on her life further than she ever has before—and in the midst, points readers back to the only hope we all have for true freedom: Jesus."

—Jonathan Isaac, NBA player and founder of the UNITUS apparel brand

"In *Dare to Be True*, Madison Prewett Troutt doesn't shy away from the hard realities—confronting the lies that keep us bound while boldly declaring the truth that sets us free. This is a book for the one who is ready to rise. For those who are done with pretending. For those who know they were made for more."

—New York Times bestselling author LISA BEVERE, co-founder of Messenger International

DARE

HOW TO DEFEAT THE LIES THAT BIND YOU

TO BE

AND LIVE OUT THE TRUTH THAT FREES YOU

TRUE

MADISON PREWETT TROUTT



WaterBrook

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To my daughter, Hosanna Rose,

You are a gift, a reminder of God's faithfulness, and a light in this world. May you grow to know how deeply you are loved, not just by your dad and me, but by the One who formed you with purpose and delight. My deepest hope and prayer is that you would walk unashamedly in the light of God's truth for such a time as this.

This book is for you, my little light.

May it guide you to live the life Jesus died to give you—boldly, freely, and full of His love.

FOREWORD

I first met Madison Prewett Troutt—well, technically, I embarrassed her before I met her—when I was preaching at The Porch in Dallas, talking about what not to do when it comes to dating and relationships. In full pastoral fashion, I used *The Bachelor* as a sermon illustration, not realizing that Madi—yes, that Madi—was sitting in the second row, fresh off her time on the show. Everyone in the room turned to look at her. She sank a little in her seat. And I had no idea.

Until I heard about it later... and called to ask for her forgiveness.

That call began a friendship that I now consider one of God's great gifts to my family. Madi is the real deal. I don't say that lightly. I've spent decades working with people in ministry—some who wear faith like a brand, others who genuinely bleed it. Madi doesn't just talk about Jesus, she lives like He's worth everything. And He is.

A few years later, our family moved to Waco to serve Har-

ris Creek Baptist Church. As God would have it, so did Madi and her husband, Grant, who had been a part of our team. And ever since, I've had a front-row seat not just to her platform but also to her life—to her marriage, her friendships, her consistency, her obedience. And here's what I've seen: Madi is a warrior. She doesn't flinch in the face of lies. She doesn't follow Jesus halfway. She's all in.

That's why I love this book.

Because Madi doesn't just write truth—she lives it. Every chapter in this book is soaked in Scripture, anchored in conviction, and bursting with clarity. It's bold, but not self-righteous. It's passionate, but not performative. It's full of wisdom—but it's not just head knowledge. It's hard-earned, heart-tested, and Spirit-led.

This book isn't for the half interested or the casually curious. It's for those who know something isn't working. Who feel the ache of striving and still coming up empty. Who are exhausted by the pressure to perform, to please, to pretend. It's for the person who's tired of chasing lies that promise happiness but deliver heartache.

You see, Satan is crafty. He doesn't come at us with obvious evil—he comes dressed in just enough truth to sound right, feel right, and even look like freedom. But it's slavery. Madi knows that. And she's here to help you see it too.

In these pages, you'll be confronted. Encouraged. Equipped. You'll be challenged to trade comfort for conviction. You'll be invited to step out of the fog of cultural confusion and stand in the clarity of God's Word.

She doesn't shy away from the hard topics—sin, shame,

identity, eternity. But she also doesn't leave you there. She points to Jesus again and again. To the freedom only He can give. To the truth that never changes. To the life that's actually worth living.

If you read this book with an open heart and a surrendered spirit, you will not walk away the same. I've seen what happens when someone dares to live by truth. Their life stands out. Their joy holds up. Their faith doesn't flicker when the storms come.

That's Madi.

And that can be you.

So here's my challenge to you: Don't just skim this book. Don't just read it. Wrestle with it. Let it ask you hard questions. Let it press in on your assumptions. Let it pull you deeper into the presence of God.

You were not made to blend in. You were made to be set apart.

You were not made to live in chains. You were made to be free.

You were not made to believe lies. You were made to walk in truth.

Let Madi show you how.

Your life will never be the same.

Jonathan "JP" Pokluda Pastor, Harris Creek Baptist Church, bestselling author and host of the Becoming Something podcast

CONTENTS

	Foreword by Jonathan Pokludavii
1.	TRUTH ABOUT FEELING BOUND
2.	TRUTH ABOUT LIES
3.	TRUTH ABOUT TRUTH
4.	TRUTH ABOUT YOU
5.	TRUTH ABOUT SIN
6.	TRUTH ABOUT SHAME
7.	TRUTH ABOUT ETERNITY
8.	DARE TO BE TRUE
9.	DARE TO LIVE IN PRAYER
10.	DARE TO LIVE PURE
11.	DARE TO LIVE IN COMMUNITY
12.	DARE TO LIVE ON PURPOSE
13.	DARE TO LIVE DIFFERENTLY
14.	DARE TO LIVE FREE
	Acknowledgments 213

TRUTH ABOUT FEELING BOUND

I nearly blew up our house.

Let me rewind. I married my best friend, Grant Troutt, a few years ago. Our wedding day was dreamy, and our honeymoon was, shall I say steamy?! (Well, if you don't count the food poisoning incident, but that's a story for later.) After our blissful honeymoon, we packed our bags and moved into our first home together in Waco, Texas. Neither of us had owned a home before. "This will be so fun!" we said. We were super excited.

And super clueless.

There were so many things we didn't know. We didn't know how to change the water filter on our fridge or the filters on the air-conditioning unit, how to set up auto pay for utilities, or what to do with our terrifying bug problem. Maybe you're judging us right now, and that's okay. I own it: We were ignorant. Or maybe everyone's first home situation is challenging. I don't know. Regardless, it seemed like everything that could go wrong went wrong. We had massive spiders in our house and mice in our garage. The pest control team informed us the spiders were brown recluse spiders. *I'm sorry, sir, WHAT? The ones that can kill you?!* We had mold in our shower that refused to go away. Our drains stopped working and our shower flooded the bathroom. There were cracks in our ceiling. The water was so bad it gave us sensitive teeth and corroded our silverware.

One house problem outweighed them all, and even though we couldn't figure out the cause, it was majorly affecting our health. Grant's symptoms were dizziness, memory loss, fatigue, headaches, and brain fog. I had it easier, with nausea and a mild headache—but those were no picnic either. We were newlyweds, new to the city, starting a new job, and managing a new home. So when we told folks what was happening, several joked, "Welcome to marriage!" This was not what we wanted to hear.

Grant suggested we move into a hotel for a few days because every time we were home, we would feel sick, but as soon as we left the house, we would feel better. We decided to book a few nights at a local hotel so we could think clearly and figure out what to do. Excellent idea! It was like our honeymoon all over again, minus the food poisoning! But as soon as we went back to the house, we felt sick again. A place that was supposed to be our sanctuary had become a danger zone. It seemed to be sucking the life right out of us.

We'd been in our house for six months and had been visited by a seemingly endless parade of service providers: a water specialist, mold specialist, HVAC repairman, and appli-

ance repairman. Then Grant suggested we call a plumber. I thought, How could a clogged toilet be creating all our health problems? But since that was the only type of repairman we hadn't yet consulted. I made the call.

The plumber arrived wearing a fully loaded tool belt. He walked around holding an electronic device I'd never seen before. It was like a scene out of National Treasure. Grant was on speakerphone since he was at work, and I kept him in the loop on what was happening by asking the plumber questions.

"What is that beeper thing doing, sir?" I asked.

"Checking for gas leaks," he said cryptically. "So far, so good."

A steady, reassuring beep sounded from the plumber's tool. Then he got into our living room and the beeping increased in intensity.

"What does that mean?" I asked.

"There's a gas leak in here somewhere," he said. When he got to the fireplace, the beeper screamed. He turned to me. "Where's your fireplace wall key?" he asked.

"There's a remote with an Off button—is that what you mean?"

"No, that remote turns off the flame." He ran his hand along the mantel until he picked up a brass tool. "This key turns off the gas." He demonstrated with a swift turn. "If you don't turn the key, the gas just keeps going."

"Going where?"

"Into the air. Of your house."

My mouth fell open.

"When did you last use the key to turn on the fireplace?"

"When we moved in. Six months ago!"

His eyebrows shot up. "And you haven't turned it off since then? Good thing you didn't light a candle. Could've blown the whole house up."

I had indeed lit a candle. Multiple candles, multiple times. But I kept that part to myself.

How had we not known gas was poisoning us for six months? I asked, "Shouldn't we have been able to smell it?"

"Methane gas is odorless," he explained.

I looked up methane gas poisoning online as he drove away. Symptoms include brain fog, headaches, nausea, long-term memory loss, and death. I told Grant what Google said.

"Good thing you called that plumber."

It's kind of a funny story now. We caught it before any long-term harm could be done. The headaches and nausea did go away, and I'm glad the chronic unease, misery, and stress of it all is behind us now.

Grant still won't turn on the fireplace.

But here's the thing: Because we had ongoing sickness symptoms, Grant and I knew something wasn't right in our house. Our bodies needed oxygen, but we were getting toxic fumes instead. Where we were supposed to feel free and safe, we felt sick and stuck.

And it wouldn't have been enough to medicate our symptoms or spend the rest of our lives treating them. We needed to be free from the toxicity. We needed to kill what was killing us. And so do you.

Our entire generation is experiencing ongoing symptoms of sickness. It might not be methane gas—related, but we do wrestle with anxiety, work pressures, mental health struggles, family and relational tension, self-doubt, self-hatred, depression, suicidal ideation, body shame, loneliness, chronic stress, identity and gender confusion, and hopelessness. And then, to cope and numb, we often turn to vices like alcohol, vaping, under- or overeating, social media, binge-watching shows alone, busyness and overworking, shopping, pornography, masturbation, and sex.

The problem is that we often can't identify what is making us sick. We feel bound and powerless, but we don't know why, just like how with this gas leak, Grant and I felt the symptoms and the weight of it but couldn't identify the problem. Maybe you can relate. You feel stuck. You feel like a shell of yourself. You are living with something that is slowly sucking the life right out of you. And you just want to be free.

THAT'S TOXIC

Maybe you can't yet identify the underlying problem you're dealing with, but you can identify symptoms like anxiety, hopelessness, lack of purpose, stress and overwhelm, apathy, depression, or loneliness. Maybe that's what drew you to this book.

We often read books like this because we know God has more for us, and we need change, but deep down we feel like we don't have what it takes. Maybe the reason you chose this book is because you feel bound, broken, confused, or stuck. Maybe you are dissatisfied and defeated, but you know there is more for your life. Maybe this book is in your hands because you are searching for truth and answers. Wherever you find yourself right now, I want you to know that you were made for a life of joy, peace, purpose, and freedom. You can break free from what has been breaking you.

You can break free from what has been breaking you.

Maybe you have made decisions you deeply regret, and you live in deep shame. You feel unclean. Maybe you were taken advantage of by someone you trusted. Maybe you gave your purity to someone you thought would love you. Maybe you had an abortion. Or you have been addicted to pornography, impure thoughts and fantasies, and masturbation. Maybe you have shared naked pictures digitally. Or you've hooked up with someone of the same gender, or you've had thoughts about it. Maybe you hate what you see when you look in the mirror. Maybe you deal with fear and comparison.

I pray that, in this book, you will feel safe and seen. And that you will realize, if you don't already know, there is a better way to live. We don't have to keep living with toxicity. There is a way that leads to hope, confidence, joy, purpose, and freedom. A way that leads to a deeper relationship with Jesus. There is a way that leads to deeper friendships and connections with those you love. A way that leads to greater respect, satisfaction, and love for yourself. If that way hasn't been part of your story up until this point, I pray it's your story by the time you finish the last chapter.

With all the mixed messaging, misinformation, and AI-

induced deception in the world today, you may wonder, What is truth anyway? What is real anymore? What can I even trust? I don't blame you for wondering. I've felt the same way. My aim in writing this is not to paint false realities or confusing messages that appear to be true and loving, but that only leave you in bondage and deep shame. My goal is to point you to the truth—the truth that leads to a freer you.

If you're looking for a book that tells you what you want to hear, that tells you to follow what feels right for you and excuses your sin, promising freedom but leaving you enslaved, I'll let you know up front that this book is not for you. But if you want to experience unshakable peace, joy, and purpose, to walk out God's will for your life and experience the more that you have always longed and hoped for, this book is exactly what you need.

Am I promising you health, wealth, and a life of ease and pleasure? No. But I am promising you freedom—true freedom, not the kind that feels good in the moment but goes on to enslave you. I'm talking about real freedom—in your mind, in your heart, in your life, in your relationships, and throughout your future.

This book was by far the hardest I've ever written. In fact, I rewrote it twice. During the process, I wanted to quit many times—more than I can count. I felt a heaviness as I wrote, fully experiencing the tension in our world today, the weight we all carry, the questions we have, the lies we believe, and the pressures we face. Most of us feel bound, suffering and stuck, and we don't know why.

One night I was dead asleep, when suddenly I sat up in bed

and wrote in my notebook something God spoke to me. Then I fell back into dreamland. The next morning, I read these words: *The TRUTH everybody needs*.

It hit me in the center of my chest in the *best* way. I knew then I had to persevere to write this book. It wasn't written from an "I'm perfect and I've overcome, now learn from me" mindset. Yes, I've been following Jesus since I was a little girl, but no, I don't have it all figured out. I'm taking it one day at a time as I navigate the good days and the hard ones. This book was birthed from a place of feeling weighed down, from having seasons when I felt stuck, confessing to God and to my friends that I just wanted to be free—free from all the societal pressures I felt, the internal wrestling to be more and do more, the lies in my mind, and the anxieties in my heart. I was breathing in toxic air, but fresh air is what I desperately wanted.

So I started writing from a place of pain and vulnerability. From a place of growth. In the pages that follow, I'm excited to share with you some of what I'm learning. Not only will we talk about what is *true*, but we will also confront the lies that bind us. Then together we will *dare* to walk in freedom, embracing our true identities and living out our God-given purpose.

In the first half of this book, we'll uncover the lies that have been keeping us stuck, and together we will unpack the truths we need in order to break free. In the second half of the book, we'll talk practically about how to overcome the obstacles we will face and the action steps that will lead us to freedom. It's a truth-and-dare process. It takes both faith in the

truth and daring to follow that truth with action. With biblical truth and bold, practical steps, you and I can break free from what has been breaking us and live out the abundant life that God has for us.

Remember our gas leak? Once Grant and I discovered the root problem causing all our symptoms of sickness, we stopped breathing toxic fumes and immediately felt better! In the next chapter, we'll use our own metaphorical "beeper thing" to discover what's making us feel sick, bound, and stuck, so we can stop living with what is slowly killing us, and we can start living in true freedom and purpose.

TRUTH FOR YOU

You can break free from what is breaking you.

2

TRUTH ABOUT LIES

I have toilet trauma.

How about you? Do you have an irrational fear? Something that haunts you and taunts you and is (perhaps) ridiculous? Well, I am afraid that a snake will attack me while I'm using the bathroom. I think this fear started when a boy in my middle school class showed us a picture of a snake coming out of the hole of a toilet.

And then my irrational fear became a reality the summer of 2012. I was at my great-grandmother's house. We call her Mawmaw. Her house sat in a small town in Alabama called Goodway, right in the middle of cotton fields, with woods and pastures all around. Population was around three hundred, including cows. All the cooking happened upstairs, but downstairs was where we all liked to play. One day I was with my sisters and had to use the bathroom. Since the only one downstairs was next to the back door, that's where I went.

When I stood up after using the toilet, something was by

my foot. And it had eyes. And a forked tongue. *Gulp.* My biggest nightmare was staring back at me: A snake was wrapped around the bottom of the toilet. It was huge, coiling around three times. Its head was just inches behind my foot. I can't even replicate the kind of scream that came out of my mouth. I was suddenly Usain Bolt as I ran wailing to my dad.

He grabbed a shovel and went into the bathroom and . . . well . . . cut off its head.

Apparently, the snake had slithered in through the gap at the bottom of the basement door. That gap got fixed soon enough, but do you think I went back to that bathroom ever again? No way! My irrational fear became real. It happened. I was traumatized. Even now, every time I use a bathroom, I check my surroundings (about five times). Thankfully I didn't get bitten, but I still have nightmares about it.

SNEAKY SNAKE

We've all experienced a snake attack. Not necessarily with a literal limbless reptile in a basement bathroom in rural Alabama, but definitely by that snake known as Satan. His first appearance to humans was in the form of a serpent. A snake. Not only was his physical appearance like a snake then, but his very character is like one today—a slithering, sneaky, scheming, untrustworthy, deceitful enemy, coiled and ready to attack.

What's more, Satan lies. But lying isn't just something he does; it's who he is.

So, who is this Satan guy? Let me give you the "Madi summary" version: Satan was an angel—some believe a leader of heavenly worship. Lucifer was his name in heaven, and he was described as beautiful and wise. Created by God and made to worship God, Lucifer decided he wanted to be like God instead. So God cast Lucifer out of heaven, and he took with him a third of the angels—that's a lot of sneaky snakes!

How and why does Satan's fall affect us in the natural world today? Here's how: The Bible calls him various names like "prince of this world" (John 12:31) and "ruler of the kingdom of the air" (Ephesians 2:2). When Satan fell, he didn't fall into a black hole in some other spiritual realm or even into hell like many think. It says in the Bible in Revelation 12:13 that Satan was "hurled to the earth" and in Job 1:7 that he is "roaming throughout the earth."

Lucifer's other names in the Bible are "the evil one" (Matthew 13:19), "a murderer," "a liar," "the father of lies" (John 8:44), "that ancient serpent" (Revelation 20:2), and "accuser of our brothers and sisters" (Revelation 12:10). Yeah, he's bad news bears. But most commonly he is referred to as Satan, the devil, and the enemy. His name in Hebrew literally means "opponent" and "adversary."* He has always opposed God and the people of God. Simply put, he hates us. He hates us because we were made in the image of God, and he hates anything that looks like God or loves God. It says in 1 Peter 5:8, "Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour."

^{*} BibleProject, "The Satan and Demons," *BibleProject*, bibleproject.com/explore/video/satan-demons.

The devil is not some cute, tiny red character with a pitchfork that appears over your left shoulder. No, he is a scheming, evil, crafty, deceptive enemy who wants to take you out. He's a force to be reckoned with. The New Testament refers to Satan over thirty times. Satan has been given a short window of time before he is cast into the lake of fire for eternal damnation (Revelation 12). Unfortunately, he's made it his mission to take you with him.

Satan's attacks are subtle and crafty. We are even told in Scripture that he comes disguised as an "angel of light" (2 Corinthians 11:14). It would be much simpler to identify and defeat the devil if he showed up in red with a pitchfork, twirling his mustache and saying, "I'm here to ruin your life!" But that's not how he works. Satan uses the allurements of the world and the appeal of the flesh to try to get us to do what God commands against. He twists the truth, he tempts us to sin, and then he accuses us.

I don't share this to scare you but to inform you. I want us to be aware of Satan's attacks and know how to fight back so that he won't take more from us. He's coming after our peace, purpose, relationships, joy, salvation, and identity. It can be tempting to believe that the devil has the upper hand in our disheartening world. So, how does Satan scheme? He lies.

Satan tempts us with lies like:

You don't need God . . . you can be your own god.

Freedom and satisfaction are found when you look within.

Sin will give you power and pleasure.

Do what feels good to you . . . God doesn't understand.

God doesn't care about you.

God could never love you after what you have done.

Maybe you can relate to hearing some of those lies or even believing them. I know I can. But—spoiler alert—the devil is a loser. Scripture is clear—in the end God wins, which means that as Christians we win too. Revelation 20:10 tells us "the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur . . . [and] will be tormented day and night for ever and ever."

Remember how my dad went after the snake in the basement at Mawmaw's with a shovel? The Bible promises that, in the same way, Jesus will "crush" the serpent's head. So that end has already been written. As we say in Alabama, it's all over but the shoutin'.

The victory has been won. Jesus Christ is so much stronger than the devil. In Matthew 28:18, Jesus says, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."

So, Jesus has won and will win, but the enemy is mad. Revelation 12:12 says that the devil is "filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short." So, he is prowling around, looking for someone to devour. But, in Jesus's name, we can beat Satan.

Sorry-not-sorry about that "spoiler." This is your charge to keep fighting. We can renounce and overcome the lies of the enemy instead of being defined and bound by them. We have authority to declare the truth of God's Word. And that truth brings freedom! Now let's learn together how Satan works. Because before we can go chasing him around with a shovel ready to cut his head off, we first have to learn his strategy.

RUNNING THE SAME PLAY

I love sports.

I grew up playing basketball. My dad was my coach, and my dream as a ten-year-old was to be a WNBA player. It didn't quite work out for me, so instead I'm writing a book on snakes for you. Just kidding.

My high school team was good. We won four out of five state championships during my basketball career. But unfortunately, we lost my senior year. It was the championship game and we had to play a number one seed team, and, I'll be honest, they were better than we were. They were taller and more athletic. The only way we could possibly beat them was if we ran the same play again and again, holding the basketball so they couldn't score.

My dad, our coach, said, "Just don't let them get the ball." So that's what we did. The game started and we got the tipoff, and we just held the ball. If you don't know much about basketball, this is not how you normally play.

We held the ball almost the entire first half. By the second half of the game, the other team had caught on to our plan. They pressured us so intensely that we couldn't keep up the charade any longer. They changed their defense strategy. They got the ball back. And when the clock officially ran out and the game came to an end, we lost.

Guess what? The devil operates in a similar fashion—he runs the same plays over and over. Let's look at the plays he uses, beginning in Genesis, where it all started. You'll see that while the devil is *cunning*, he's *not creative*. We read in Genesis 3:1–5:

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?"

The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'"

"You will not certainly die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

If you don't know much about the creation story, let me give you a quick rundown: God made a perfect world. He created the stars, the sky, the ocean, and all the living creatures. Then God made humans in His image. He put the two humans, Adam and Eve, in the Garden of Eden, and they were in charge of working the land and ruling over all the living creatures. Everything was perfect. Adam and Eve had everything they could ever want, a garden to themselves. But they were given one command and warning from God not to "eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" for if they did, they would "certainly die" (Genesis 2:16–17).

Then Satan entered the picture. And I want you to notice the first declaration out of Satan's mouth: a lie. Proving that he is the *author of confusion*. We see from the beginning of time that the lie is core to the devil's character. He's constantly scheming by planting doubts and provoking sin through lies. And his strategy with Eve is his same strategy with you and me. Notice the three deceptions in those verses:

- 1. *Did God really say?*—He questioned God's character and caused Eve to distrust her knowledge and relationship with God. He says to us, "Would a 'good God' really ask that of you? Is that even what the Bible says? Is that even a sin? Did God really say that?"
- 2. You won't die!—He downplays the danger of sin and calls God a liar. He says, "Sin isn't a big deal. You can do whatever you want, without consequences. God lied to you; you won't actually die."
- 3. If you eat this fruit, you will be like God.—He speaks to the advantages of sin. He says, "Sin is good. Sin is fun. Sin will give you everything your soul desires. Power! Pleasure! You can be like God."

Why does Satan tempt us to sin against God? Because Satan himself sinned against God. Do you remember when you were younger and you did something that you knew in your heart was wrong? You didn't want to be the only one caught, so you got your siblings or friends to join you, right? Yeah—the devil does the same thing. He's condemned, so he wants to condemn you. He does that by lying about God's character, tempting you with things that will hurt you, trying to separate you from God, and running the same play—the same strategy of deception—again and again and again.

LIAR, LIAR, PANTS ON FIRE

My mom said she could always tell when I lied as a child because I had a "tell." I would stick my tongue to the side and press it against the inner lining of my mouth. It is as weird as it sounds. That was my body's reaction to lying. I couldn't help it. So, every time I lied, my parents knew. I told on myself! We laugh about it to this day.

The enemy's lies are more subtle. Sadly, he doesn't have a "tell." And his lies can feel like truth. He whispers what he knows you fear. He comes at you, targeting your weakness. He whispers that nobody really knows you. That you don't measure up. That your past defines you. That you don't matter.

Some other common lies Satan tells are:

You will always be what you've done.

You will always be what's been done to you.

You are disgusting. You are dirty.

You don't fit in anywhere.

You will always be anxious.

You are the problem.

You are a burden to everyone.

You are not enough.

You are too much.

Life would be better if you weren't here.

Can you relate to one of these? All of these? You are not alone. In fact, let me ask you a question. Try to answer it hon-

estly: What lie are you believing right now? Is it about your looks? Your life? Your future? Your past? God's love and heart for you? Go ahead and write it out.

The LIE I am	believing right now is	
	5 5	

Want a real picture of the lies he's whispering in my head, even as I write this book? "Madi, you will never be good enough, no matter how hard you try." "No one cares what you have to say." "Everyone else is so much better than you." "You don't belong. You are so alone." "No one really knows you or cares about you." At times I've believed those lies. So much so that I almost quit writing this book altogether.

We often treat Satan's lies like they are real. And to be honest, they may even have some truth mixed in. We'll call those lies "half-truths." And though half of something might be true, if it isn't the whole truth, it isn't true. Then there are other times a statement is just a full-on lie dressed up like truth. We're going to call that "fake truth."

Here's an example of a half-truth. I used to tell everyone Mandy Moore was my aunt—you know, the actress from the movie *A Walk to Remember* and the TV show *This Is Us.* The truth is, my aunt's name was Mandy Moore before she married my uncle and became a Prewett. She was a southern blonde from Atmore, Alabama, with a kind heart but no acting ability whatsoever. So, I wasn't technically "lying." I just wasn't telling the whole truth. Fake truth, however, is a

straight-up lie posing as truth. Like when a four-year-old gets caught with chocolate all over his mouth, but when asked if he's eaten chocolate before dinner responds, "No, Mommy."

Fake truth might be cute on a toddler, but it's not so cute coming from Satan. John 8:44 says about the devil, "There is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies." There is no truth in him. Whether that is a half-truth, fake truth, bent truth, or a bald-faced lie, it's all the same with Satan: lies.

Believing these lies creates bondage and suffering. Satan works hard to steal your peace, kill your purpose, and destroy your relationships with God and people. He's a liar. My prayer is that throughout the first half of this book, we identify and confront the devil's lies and schemes and replace them with the truth that sets us free. In this next section let's talk about a universal lie that many in our culture have fallen for today.

"LIVE YOUR TRUTH"

Let me tell you about the time my car got repossessed.

I woke up like normal, made my coffee and breakfast, and was having my quiet time when I was interrupted by my husband shouting, "Madi, your car is gone!" I thought he was pranking me, so I continued with my quiet time. A few moments later he came running in with a panicked look on his face, saying, "It's not out there!" I decided to check out the scene for myself. Sure enough, the driveway was empty. The car was gone.

We looked through our security footage and saw two guys with a tow truck towing my car away at midnight. I thought, *Wow, these thieves came prepared.* But after doing some digging, I realized it was not a thief; it was the repo crew coming to repossess my car.

In my defense, the leasing company had gotten my address wrong and was sending the loan notice to the wrong place, so I never knew the payments weren't going through. I assumed everything was in order and the bill was being paid each month. I thought the car belonged to me. In reality, the car was not being paid for, and now it was the lender's. What I thought was true didn't matter. What mattered was what was actually true.

The truth wins every time.

This lie of "live your truth" has been used by the enemy to deceive many in our world today—the idea that if something is true for you, then it's true, period. For example, let's say that "your truth" is that gravity is not real. Even though there is proof and evidence, you "feel like gravity is a lie." Well, if you decide to test your feeling and jump off a building, "your truth" will be painfully confronted with the real truth—gravity will kick in, and the truth will win.

People trying to claim that their truth is reality is not a new problem. The Bible talks about people thousands of years ago who "exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator" (Romans 1:25). And we see that today.

The "live your truth" mindset is often intertwined with New Age spirituality. This teaching believes that there is no absolute right or wrong, no objective truth—just a landscape of experiences that your soul goes through. It gives you false idols to worship, starting with yourself, teaching that you are always perfect the way you are. You are your own god, in a sense.

This mindset encourages you to turn to spiritual rocks and crystals to promote physical, emotional, and spiritual healing. In addition to involvement with crystal power, there are other mystical practices such as astrology, numerology, divination, tarot cards, psychic healing, mediumship, witchcraft, and sorcery.

Why do we worship what's been created, rather than the One who created it? Don't get me wrong, crystals are beautiful, and so are the moon and the stars. But those things are created. They are not the Creator. True power doesn't lie in what has been created, but in the One who created it. God's creation just points back to Him and His power and beauty.

True power doesn't lie in what has been created, but in the One who created it.

It's all just a twist of truth. It's part of how the enemy works as the deceiver. He appeals to a truth that is about you and that serves you. He deceives and lures people in with a "truth" that feels inclusive and loving, a "truth" that excuses our sin and lets us do whatever we want to do. But this "truth" isn't loving. The enemy doesn't love you. He hates you. And he knows that this "truth" leads to bondage.

When we follow culture's lies and mantras on what is true,

eventually "our truth" will be confronted with the truth—and the truth will always win.

Hopefully by now, you know that you have an enemy. That now you see how believing his half-truths and fake truths lies—leads to suffering and bondage. The good news is that the slithering reptile is one shovel away from destruction. In the next chapter, we'll see how to find rescue and relief from what has been binding us.

TRUTH FOR YOU

The moment you believe the lie, you empower the liar. The moment you believe the truth, you defeat the lie.

3

TRUTH ABOUT TRUTH

I almost drowned in the wave pool.

Allow me to explain. When I was growing up, we went to Orange Beach, Alabama, every summer. My favorite part was always going to Waterville amusement park. The smell of coconut suntan oil and chlorine instantly takes me back to memories of the lazy river, the go-carts, the massive waterslides, and, best of all, the iconic wave pool.

One hot summer day at Waterville when I was nine years old, I decided to hit the wave pool, despite it being more crowded than usual. Even with the throngs of people, I was fearless. I grabbed the required yellow ring-shaped inflated tube and spent the first hour kicking and paddling my little feet out to the deeper end. Then the waves would come up and I'd "surf" back to the concrete beach at the shallow end. I started to get a little too confident and would even swim outside of my yellow tube, which was not allowed because some of the waves could be dangerous, especially to a little nine-

year-old. But I felt bigger than the waves. Until . . . suddenly a huge wave took me completely by surprise. My inflatable yellow float flew off like a bullet, never to be seen again.

I was underwater.

When I searched for a place to surface, all I saw was endless yellow tubes and kicking legs above me. This yellow wall—or more like a ceiling—kept me down. I couldn't push through and I was desperate. I started seeing stars—like in the cartoons, but for real. I'd never held my breath for so long. I thought, I'm going to die!

Then, out of nowhere, an older gentleman reached down and pulled me up onto a tube. My lungs filled with sweet, sweet air as I gasped. Hallelujah!

The man asked if I was okay. I could only nod my head yes. I was so happy I could breathe again.

I think of that story when I read Psalm 40:2. "He lifted me out of the slimy pit... he set my feet on a rock." The Madi translation: "You pulled me out of the chlorinated pool and set me on a yellow float." I nearly died, but I got rescued. I was thankful.

The reality is, Jesus saved me from a worse fate. He rescued me from darkness and brought me into the light. He rescued me from lies and brought me into truth. He rescued me from eternal death and gave me eternal life. I was flailing around, unable to breathe, with no hope, until He pulled me up and into His grace and goodness. He took my sinful and selfish choices, hurts, addictions, sins, and anxieties, and He redeemed me. He pulled me from death into life. And He can for you too.

Even if you've never had a life-or-death experience at a

water park, you can still relate because we have all felt helpless. And if Jesus as Savior still feels a little abstract to you, if you haven't yet recognized your need for rescuing, you will. We were all born falling for Satan's lies and trapped in our own sin. Just like me in that wave pool, we cannot possibly break free in our own strength or power—apart from Jesus.

PRISON BREAK

I am really close to my family, including my two younger sisters, Mallory and Mary Mykal. About ten years ago, my family was obsessed with this show called *Prison Break*. Not to spoil the show in case you haven't seen it, but the whole plot of the show is in the name. It's all about a guy continuously breaking out of prison. Many seasons, he would find himself in a new prison and then somehow break out.

I can't relate to breaking out of prison, but I have broken out of an escape room before with my friends. It was exhilarating. My younger sister Mary, however, had a real-life experience behind bars during her wild-child stage. (Don't worry, she gave me permission to share this story.)

Mary and I are six years apart, so I was always like her second mama. If she was scared at night and afraid to go downstairs to our mom and dad's room, she would crawl into bed with me. If she needed help with something or needed money and our parents weren't around, I was always the first call.

Although Mary started out as the innocent baby sister, that

didn't last forever. High school came along, and my parents and I would find empty alcohol bottles in the back of her car or vape pens in her pants pockets. There were many conversations with her but no change in her actions. This continued for years. When she went off to college (about two hours away from home), she chose to hang with people who weren't good company, and we grew increasingly concerned. There were a few situations that left us scared, but there was one night that put us all over the edge.

It was 2 A.M. and I awoke to see three missed calls from my mom. I knew something was off, so I called her back. She said, "It's about Mary." My heart started racing.

"Is she okay? What happened? Do I need to fly home?" I was living in Dallas, Texas, at the time, and the rest of my family lived in Alabama. I began asking all the questions in full-on panic.

She explained that she had just gotten off the phone with the police who had arrested Mary. Apparently, Mary was at a college party where she drank too much. And she thought she would drive herself home. Bad idea. Super bad. The worst.

To make a long story short, Mary was pulled over and arrested for drunk driving. The cop told my mom, "If I hadn't stopped her, she never would have made it." I started shaking on the other end of the phone. I was praying in my heart, Oh Lord, save my sister! Let this be the end of this! Save her, Lord.

Mary was booked into the county jail that night. There she was, lying on a cold metal bench, alone in her cell, still half-drunk, trying to make sense of what she'd done, feeling the weight of her sin and shame, wondering how she could get

herself out. Can you imagine? How did I get here? How could I do this? Will anyone ever see me the same? How can I face my family and friends? How am I going to get out? Maybe I can call my parents and say, "I promise I'll never do this again and you can have my car and I will drop out of school and waitress until I pay you back. It'll take a few years but . . ."

Mary looked at the locked cell door. She wasn't going anywhere.

No matter what she said, no matter how much she tried, no matter what she looked like, no matter her greatest efforts, she couldn't get out of jail. She was stuck. Enslaved. Imprisoned.

But she knew the one who could free her. She needed her father to come and pay the price she couldn't pay and bail her out.

Overwhelmed with love and disappointment, my parents drove an hour and a half to pick her up. My dad talked to the officers. He paid Mary's bail. And they released her. He didn't cuss her out. He didn't shame her. He didn't judge her. He embraced her and said, "I love you."

Mary still had to face consequences. She had to stand before a judge and say, "I messed up. I did a dumb thing." She was sentenced and has a police record now. And she had to do a lot of community service. There were some things she needed to work out for sure. But she was free.

That's a picture of you and me because of sin. We are sitting in a prison cell, filled with shame and self-pity, trying to reason our way out, powerless to change our condition. We're stuck. And even though we can't *Prison Break* our way out of our mess, we know the One who can. We know who can set us *free*.

WHAT IS TRUTH?

One thing I can say for certain about every single human being, no matter their story or upbringing or beliefs, is that we are all searching for truth. We all desire to know what is true. And we all want to be free. Every single one of us. And the two go hand in hand, according to John 8:32.

If you look at our world today with its rise in palm readers, witchcraft, New Age spirituality, astrology, and confusion about our gender, it's all a desperate plea to find truth. That's the thing. We all want hope. Hope that there's more to this life than the burdens and bondage we feel. Hope that there's an escape from the internal wrestling and the imprisonment we feel like we are in. Hope for meaning, purpose, and peace. We're all searching. Only most of us are searching in the wrong places.

As a result, many people believe they are living in *freedom*, yet they are unknowingly enslaved by the very things they pursue. With mass media and social media, AI, secular movies and music, political and government agendas, and news outlets spewing misinformation, there's so much confusion about what is true and real.

We ask questions like, What is true about me? Where did I come from and why am I here? Where can I find real inner peace, freedom, love,

connection, and contentment? What's the meaning of everything? What happens to everyone after they die? Am I a part of something bigger than myself? Is there a God—one true God? Do heaven and hell really exist? Why does it feel like the world is getting more and more confusing and dark?

We all are asking some form of the question "What is truth?" And we aren't the first to ask. A man named Pilate asked that question two thousand years ago. In John 18, we see the interaction between Pilate and Jesus. Jesus is arrested and brought before Pilate, the Roman governor. Pilate interrogates Jesus, questioning Him about being the King of the Jews. Jesus responds, stating that His kingdom is not of this world and that He came to testify to the truth. Pilate, seemingly confused, asks, "What is truth?" I can imagine that in Pilate's time, just like today, there were many versions of "truth." Many turning to culture, power, idols, money, self, nature, work, and good deeds to find meaning and truth. Sound familiar?

Today, truth is often confused with perspective. Some see truth as a human experience or a feeling. Some think truth is subjective and changes based on a person or circumstance. And I do understand why that is an appealing "truth" to cling to. Because we all want to believe that we are innately good and that our feelings and opinions really matter. Today many believe that if it feels right or seems right for you, then it's true.

But there is a big problem with that belief system: It's not true. A mindset is not *truth*. And because it isn't true, it doesn't lead to real freedom. Actually, it leads to quite the opposite. Like the "freedom of expression" movement that is preached

and celebrated today, to follow whatever you feel and express it in a way that makes you feel happy, this type of freedom doesn't free; it binds. Only real truth leads to real freedom. Because truth isn't about you, from you, or based on you. It isn't tied to personal preference, perspective, or feelings.

Only real truth leads to real freedom.

Let me give you an example of what I'm saying. Let's say you or someone you love has a medical emergency like kidney failure and you rush to the hospital and some random lady comes up to you and says, "I can help you!" She doesn't seem like your typical doctor, so you ask her where her credentials are and if she is qualified. She then responds to you, "Well, I am not an actual doctor, but today I feel like being a doctor!" As you question her, you learn that she has no experience or background in medicine. Rather, she just decided today that her truth was that she identified as a doctor. Would you let her take you into surgery? Would you trust her with your life or your loved one's life? I hope your answer is a resounding no. Because believing or following that version of "truth" is not just a ridiculous idea—it could cost you your life. Just because you believe something is true doesn't mean it is. Truth is what actually is, not what we want it to be.

Just because you believe something is true doesn't mean it is. Truth is what actually is, not what we want it to be.

Proverbs 14:12 says, "There is a path before each person that seems right, but it ends in death" (NLT). In other words, just because something seems right doesn't make it true. And the result of following what "seems right or feels right" leads to death.

We live in a time where more information is available than ever, yet confusion about truth is widespread. Fake news, misinformation, and media bias make it difficult to discern reality. Just like Pilate, people are exposed to truth but struggle to accept it. We find ourselves asking, What's real? What's true? About God? About eternity? About me? About my future and purpose? In the search for truth, sadly, most will follow the ways of Romans 1:25: "They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen." Many will turn to stars in the sky, crystals and rocks, and other humans for truth—rather than the God who created it all.

Pilate's story serves as a warning. The world's approach to truth leads to confusion, compromise, and condemnation. But the good news is that there is a better way. There is a truth that leads to breathing in fresh air instead of toxic fumes. A truth that brings color to your life when you've only been seeing black and white. A truth that fully satisfies the deepest longings and desires in your heart. A truth that doesn't lead to confusion but offers certainty, clarity, and eternal life. A truth that sets you free.

Maybe like Pilate, you're asking the question, "What is true?" Pilate wasn't the only one in the Bible who wrestled and longed for truth. In John 14, one of Jesus's disciples,

Thomas, asked, "How can we know the way?" and Jesus answered in John 14:6, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." Jesus says, *I am the truth. I am the way.* Our questions and longings are answered, and He addresses not just what truth is but *who* Truth is. Truth is a person—Jesus. And the way to life is through Him.

Jesus was sent to the earth to cancel our debt by paying for it in full with His life. And in His resurrection He disarmed and destroyed all the powers of darkness at work. Jesus was sent not just to rescue us from death but to give us life and life eternal. Jesus was sent not only to defeat the liar, but to be the Truth that sets us free and gives us life.

And it doesn't stop there. Jesus didn't take truth away when He went into heaven. His disciples were a little worried about that, but He promised to send the Holy Spirit. And in the Bible, the Holy Spirit is described as the *Spirit of truth* (John 14:17). In John 16:13 it says that the purpose of the Holy Spirit is to "guide you into all the truth."

So let's make it simple. Jesus is Truth. He came to testify about Himself so that in Him we may know the truth and experience true freedom, life, and life eternal. But then He gave us the Holy Spirit to live inside of us and remind us of the Truth.

So, the question is not as much a matter of "What is truth?" but rather "Who is Truth?" And that person is Jesus. And when we find Him, everything changes. Your "truth" will lead you to bondage, but the Truth will set you free. You will only be free by the truth—not what you believe to be true.

You will only be free by the truth not what you believe to be true.

The reality is that we *all* are susceptible to fall for lies rather than live for truth. And though lies may vary from person to person, and each of our circumstances may look different on the outside, we still wrestle with the same things within. And that leads to the same bondage.

You won't find truth by looking within. Because you didn't create you. You won't find truth by looking to culture, because culture is constantly changing. And you won't find truth by looking to what this world has to offer you, because it's fleeting and fading.

"I CAN SAVE MYSELF"

One of my favorite pastors, Jonathan Pokluda, has a sermon illustration about his daughter who fell into the pool when she was little and didn't know how to swim. He saw it all go down from a distance and ran as fast as he could to the rescue! His daughter clearly would have drowned if he hadn't stepped in and saved her. Imagine if, in that moment, she thought to herself, "I shouldn't scream for help. If I can't save myself, I deserve to die."

Although that sounds crazy, one of the biggest lies we believe and the dominant narrative in culture today is that we as humans are so powerful all on our own that we don't need saving outside of ourselves; we think we can save ourselves through our own efforts.

But if we look at the increase in mental health problems, depression, rape, shootings, and suicide in our world today, we discover something quickly: We cannot save ourselves.

For me, I thought my performance, perfect reputation, clean résumé, and good deeds would save me and give me the freedom I longed for. I measured my own worth based on my efforts. If I was good, I deserved good. If I was bad, I deserved bad. This metrics-based system that I put on myself left me constantly striving, exhausted, and feeling like I was never enough. That's because I wasn't meant to save myself, free myself, or sustain myself.

Ephesians 2:3–5 says, "All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. But because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved."

The truth is, we were deserving of wrath, without hope, shackled and chained up in our sins and shame, until Jesus. He took our sins and shame—past, present, and future—upon Himself so that we didn't have to carry them. His death and resurrection made it possible to be free in Him. It is by His grace alone we have been saved and set free.

My sister Mary didn't just learn a lesson about not drinking and driving. More important, she experienced a huge demonstration of God's grace. She finally understood what she'd been hearing about the gospel. She 100 percent did not deserve it, but she was given grace. Mary Mykal knew she couldn't save herself. But when she encountered Jesus and His freedom, she was freed from more than physical bondage; she also was freed from the sin and shame that had kept her bound for years.

Her story didn't stop there. One year later, on her one-year anniversary of getting bailed out of jail, she left for Kona, Hawaii, for ministry and missionary training, to be discipled and trained on how to evangelize and bring the same freedom she had experienced to others. She went on to travel the nations to share that truth. She even went to Pakistan in the Middle East and became part of a ministry that freed slaves, paying their bonds and giving them jobs, all while sharing the gospel. She experienced freedom, then went and set other people free, both physically and spiritually.

Jesus doesn't ask you to do all the right things and get all cleaned up to come to Him. *Jesus* did all the right things, took all your uncleanliness upon Himself, and came to you.

Maybe you feel imprisoned in your mind or heart. You feel stuck in the same cycle of sin, trying to change by religion and performance and trying to break free on your own. In the same way that Mary could not get herself free, neither can I. Neither can you. And that is a liberating truth.

Maybe you feel stuck in an internal prison. That was my story. I was stuck in a prison of shame, bound by religion and a slave to sin. Breaking free and finding life didn't feel possible. My truth, my efforts, and my ways couldn't set me free. But just like my sister, I know the Man who could. I know the Man

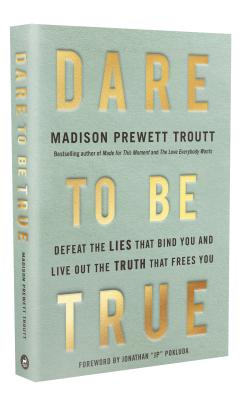
who did. Jesus was the key. He was the key to my freedom. And that can be your story too. Jesus is the Truth that defeats the lie. Jesus is the One who sets us free.

At Waterville, I was saved from drowning by that older gentleman. My sister Mary was set free from her jail cell by our father. Many of us have experienced heroic moments when someone has stepped in and saved us from disaster. But the biggest rescue of all time was when Jesus, Son of God, laid down His life so that in Him we may have life. We don't have to keep searching and longing and asking, "What is truth?" Jesus is the Truth. Jesus is the way. And John 8:32 says, when you "know the truth . . . the truth will set you free." You might ask, "Free from what?" Keep reading and you'll see.

In the next chapter, we'll talk about how knowing who Truth is will impact the truth about who *you* are.

TRUTH FOR YOU

Truth is not a personal opinion. Truth is a person. And when you find Him, you find truth.



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