

7 LIES THAT WILL RUIN YOUR LIFE

**WHAT MY JOURNEY FROM PORN
STAR TO PREACHER TAUGHT ME ABOUT
THE TRUTH THAT SETS US FREE**

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with Billy Hallowell

Foreword by Jonathan Pohluda



New York Nashville

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FaithWords
Hachette Book Group
1290 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10104
faithwords.com
twitter.com/faithwords

First Edition: March 2024

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data has been applied for.

ISBNs: 978-1-5460-0565-0 (hardcover); 978-1-5460-0557-5 (ebook)

Printed in the United States of America

LSC-C

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

To my darling, Hope,

This book is dedicated to you, the cornerstone of our family, the constant of light in our lives, and the embodiment of unwavering faith. Your belief in God's grace and your unyielding trust in His divine plan have been the guiding forces in our journey together since the day we took our walk in the park.

Your faith in me, even in times of my doubt and uncertainty, has provided me strength and inspiration. Your belief in my potential, your encouragement in my many projects, and your unwavering support have been instrumental in the creation of this book. I could not do anything I do without you.

Your sacrifices, both seen and unseen, in being an incredible mom to our boys and a wife to me impacts all of us more than you know.

Through your actions, you have shown them, and indeed all of us, what it means to live a life of service and devotion to God. Your tireless efforts have played a significant part in our ability to impact the world with the message of Jesus.

This book is a testament to your love, your faith, and your unwavering belief in the power of God's love. It is a tribute to your strength, your resilience, and your unyielding spirit.

May this book serve as a reminder of the profound impact you have had on our lives and the lives of those around us.

With all my love and gratitude,

Joshua Broome

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FOREWORD

by Jonathan Pokluda

For a while, our family of five shared one Netflix profile, rather than having one for each person. I would get frustrated when Netflix suggested shows to me based on what my kids had watched. “No, Netflix, I don’t want to watch *High School Musical*.” The *mind* of Netflix was like, *Oh you like this Disney movie? How about this one, and this one, and...*, you get the picture. I don’t know how those algorithms work; I just know Netflix wanted to show me more of what I’d already seen. Amazon, Instagram, and TikTok all work the same way. As you view an item or scroll slowly over a video, it’s learning you, and it begins to put more of those same kinds of things in front of you. I would expect this from highly profitable companies, with nine- and ten-figure marketing budgets. I didn’t expect it from my own heart.

It turns out my heart works like Netflix, Amazon, Instagram, and TikTok. It looks for more of what I’ve already had. It has been famously said “the heart wants what it wants.” This has not been my experience. The heart does not want what it wants. It wants more of what it’s had. Your heart works like a bloodhound that gets on a familiar scent and follows it. So, before you follow your heart, you best inform it where to go.

Our hearts have misplaced desires that take us to unwanted destinations.

For nearly a decade of my life, I fed my heart the vile images of pornography. It got so bad that I would call in sick to work to stay home and binge on porn. I was *sick*. It's not that I had a fever or a disease. I had poisoned my own heart. My thoughts were contaminated and my mind was cloudy. On the outside, my life looked great in a worldly sense. I had chased "bigger and better" things at every turn by climbing the corporate ladder. I lived in a penthouse condo uptown. I drove a nice luxury car. I wore a different watch every day to match my suit. I would get bottle service at the premier clubs on the weekend, all while my heart was chasing the things of this world, trying to fill a void that only Jesus could.

That's why this resource, from my friend Joshua Broome, is so important. When I first met Josh, I wasn't all that surprised that a porn star had become a Christian. While that's an incredible story, I have come to understand that is how The Holy Spirit often works. I was, however, surprised by his commitment to real discipleship, the biblical worldview that we shared, and his strong sneaker game. He has a genuine love for God's word, and truly desires to make disciples of Jesus. Most of all, I was surprised to instantly feel as though this new friend was a brother from another mother. I have watched Josh use his story to make much of Jesus and help thousands of people find freedom. His drive to be the best male porn star in the world has been redeemed to make him the biggest champion of Jesus and His people. He knows the emptiness that comes from seeking happiness in the wrong places. He's had so much of what others are looking for, and by the grace of God, was able to

walk away from it before Satan won. Josh has been on the inside of the darkest legal industry I'm aware of.

His career took him to the top and was prepared to drop him to his death, but Jesus was there to catch him and offer him HOPE. I am so thankful that he is on the side of righteousness now, and you should prepare your heart for a journey like no other in the pages ahead. Josh is going to be your guide to everything your heart desires. In a world full of counterfeit, fleeting pleasure, Josh is going to lead you to the only place true satisfaction can be found. We should not follow our hearts, we should inform our hearts, and you are doing just that by reading these pages.

INTRODUCTION

EVERYTHING YOUR HEART DESIRES

I was one of the world's most famous porn stars before Jesus totally transformed my life.

Today, I'm a speaker who preaches to thousands about Christ, exposes the dark underbelly of the porn industry, advocates on Capitol Hill for legislation to make adult content less accessible to minors, and serves as the cofounder of a ministry that connects people all over the world from social media to physical churches.

Now that I have your attention, I want to share one of the darkest moments of my life.

I was sitting on a plane that had just touched down at Los Angeles International Airport. I had just filmed a scene in Atlanta, hadn't had a proper shower, and felt filthy. My head was pounding from the erectile dysfunction medication I was forced to take to do my job, and I had a folded payroll check in my pants pocket that added to my utter disgust.

This was before the days of Uber, so I took a cab home, and as I slouched in my seat, I replayed in my head the things I had

just done, fighting off the ever-familiar nausea that so often plagued me.

As I got closer to my home in Sherman Oaks, California, I started thinking about how many pain pills I would have to take to end my life. I looked it up online and decided twelve would be the magic number—an appropriate amount to stop the pain.

When I got home, I laid the pills on the counter and separated them into four groups of three. My heart was beating so fast I could see it pounding through my shirt, but, in that moment, even as it felt like all my senses were heightened, I suddenly remembered the check still in my pocket, begging to be cashed.

It might seem like an odd thing to recall while preparing to end my life, yet it suddenly gnawed at me. In fact, it bothered me so much I decided to take it out and look at it.

I suppose I didn't want the degradation I'd allowed myself to go through to get that money to be a complete waste. And I assumed my mom or brother would end up with whatever money I had left in my account after my death, so I didn't want to end my life with the check uncashed.

I looked at it and saw the title of the porn website I was working for scrawled on the memo line. Seeing the name made me actually vomit. It was a common occurrence for me to be disgusted by my behavior—but this was different. This was a new low.

With the pills still neatly prepared on the counter, I decided to pick myself up off the bathroom floor and take a shower. After I got dressed, I decided it only made sense for me to deposit this check in the bank before taking my life.

The bank was across the street from where I lived, so I

walked over as I usually did, planning to drop the check in the deposit box or use the ATM if there wasn't a line.

On this day, though, I strangely felt like I wanted to be particularly self-destructive and have a personal interaction with a bank teller. I typically avoided these interactions by any means possible as I never wanted any other human to see the evidence of what I was being paid for and then have them look me in the eye in judgment and horror.

That day, though, for some reason, that's exactly what I wanted. Perhaps desperate to simply feel something in the middle of my immense pain, I wanted to squeeze every drop of pain out of that day.

So, I waited in the line and handed my check to this incredibly kind middle-aged woman who had brown hair with a touch of gray in it. She asked if I knew my account number, which I was far too irresponsible to recall, and then told me to swipe my card and enter my PIN.

I waited as she filled out the deposit slip, and my mind puttered back into my suicide plans. I pondered about how long it would possibly be before anyone found me and then worried what would happen if someone found me too soon.

Then, something unexpected happened. The teller broke my streaming suicidal thoughts by looking me in my eye and posing a simple question.

"Joshua, are you okay?" she asked.

As I'll explain in the chapters that follow, this moment changed the trajectory of my life, snapping me out of a wave of sorrow I was drowning in and launching me into the beginning of a newfound journey of hope—one that would ultimately lead me to the Lord.

Your Heart Is a Liar

My biggest mistake is the pseudonym Rocco Reed, a really dumb, made-up moniker that combined the name of one of my fraternity brothers (sorry, Don) with a name that started with the same letter.

To this day, this is the identity by which many people on the internet know me. There aren't too many days that pass before someone uses "Rocco" on social media as ammo to deflect from their own issues and to inflict intentional pain by reminding me of who I used to be and what I used to do.

But Rocco is not and has never been my true identity; it was merely my porn stage name, an alias I played on and off camera for several years.

Initially, I saw Rocco as my key to success and meaning; now, I know he was the manifestation of the porn industry's design to put a mask on my true identity and hide the immense guilt and shame that comes with selling yourself for sex.

Rocco was a conjured-up persona my agent helped me come up with in about forty-five seconds. He used Rocco to sell smut and make a lot of money, as he got a cut of every penny I made. Over time, I came to believe I would never break free from that identity—a name that came one day from a brief conversation in an office.

There was a significant period in my life when I was absolutely certain freedom from Rocco would never be possible. It was a name and title that came with a great cost.

After appearing in more than a thousand adult films, traveling the world, and earning well over \$1 million, I thought I had it all. I was desperately trying to measure up to the idea of

success driven by my insecurities and at the same time quiet my own pain, yet the more money and fame I accumulated, the more empty I felt. I was miserable, disconnected, and lost, and I really started to hate myself. I earned money, fame, and all the things that I truly believed would make me happy and put an end to my lifelong struggle with unhappiness—but instead I almost lost my life and soul in the process.

I hated myself and every aspect of my life. Eventually, as we'll explore in this book, I left it all behind, and instead of taking my life, I literally ran for my life.

It wasn't until a few years after I abandoned the wealth, fame, and empty promises Rocco represented that I eventually found true fulfillment in Christ; I discovered *the Truth*.

Most of you probably haven't been on the exact same journey I have, and, in many ways, my story might seem strange or bizarre, but here's the common theme: we all face struggles, pain, and the pitfalls that come when we chase after the empty promises of this world.

Perhaps you, like me, have allowed bad decisions, trauma that wasn't your fault, and pain to cause you to give up on the passions that once burned within your chest.

Maybe you've convinced yourself you are disqualified, it is too late, or you are just too far gone. Maybe you've never thought enough of yourself to get started.

My journey is an extreme example of the dangers that can lead to a prison of your emotions due to trauma and mistakes, but also of the incredible transformation we undergo when we turn to Christ and reject the lies that come with the false promises of the world.

I am certain you have heard the phrase *Follow your heart*

at some point in your life. You may even have heard it from someone quoting Steve Jobs, who was the founder and CEO of Apple when he gave a very memorable and well-documented commencement speech at Stanford University in 2005.

He ended his talk by making a bold statement regarding this proclamation. “Don’t let the noise of others’ opinions drown out your own inner voice. And most important, have the courage to follow your heart and intuition. They somehow already know what you truly want to become. Everything else is secondary.”¹

This wildly popular advice is not only misleading; it is dangerous. Allowing your feelings and desires to be the GPS for your life will most likely lead to places you do not want to go and doing things you regret. I have done that for most of my life.

My heart led me to Hollywood; my heart led me to becoming a highly successful porn star; my heart led me to believe it was a good idea to take my life. As Jeremiah 17:9 (ESV) reads, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?” I followed every desire I had, chasing the things my heart told me would make me happy, but I didn’t realize I had bought into the lies culture was selling me.

It turns out, often your heart is the biggest liar.

Lies Can Be True to You

Modern culture continually sells us mistruths—a series of empty promises that are disguised as irrefutable truths the world is holding on to for dear life.

1 Steve Jobs, “‘You’ve Got to Find What You Love,’ Jobs Says,” Stanford University, June 12, 2005, <https://news.stanford.edu/2005/06/12/youve-got-find-love-jobs-says>.

These empty and fake promises pledge to lead to success, love, affirmation, fame, and even riches. Yet even when these misleading promises do somehow deliver, the results almost always lead to emptiness, destruction, and hopelessness. They leave us struggling with anxiety, depression, and issues of self-worth—all while scrambling to find a hope that will never truly fulfill us.

Just consider a mind-numbing reality: we live in the wealthiest, most privileged society in the entirety of human history, yet we're the most disconnected, disillusioned, depressed, and unhealthy generation imaginable.

Despite all the reasons we have to be overjoyed, many of us routinely grapple with the seemingly foreign concept of happiness, desperately reaching for what seems unattainable as our thoughts and actions bump the hopes of contentment further out of reach.

Why, you ask? Because we too often come to embrace the lies—the false promises designed to trip us up, trap us, and leave us aimlessly wandering through life with an unquenchable desire for something that is not even real.

Unfortunately, many of us are easily duped into believing that these lies will somehow lead us somewhere sustainable. In some ways, it's easy to see how it all unfolds.

Social media and the world around us are constantly screaming about the empty promises of success and fame and the supposed essentiality of riches. And we're told we're the lord of our own ethics and truth—that we get to define who we are and what is “our truth.” We try over and over to be lord over our lives, but we are a terrible lord because we are broken and incomplete.

The problem? These assumptions, as I've learned on my own journey, are misguided and based on twisted truths, and they usually result in self-sabotage. You're creating a reality based on those lies, guilt, and shame. Scripture tells us exactly what's going on, yet we often fail to recognize there is a "father of lies," the devil, in whom one will find "no truth."

As John 8:44 proclaims, "When [Satan] lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies." Sadly, we're prone to allow that native tongue to send us into his plan that leads to death and destruction, especially when we're entrapped in living our best lives for ourselves based on the lies that the world advertises.

Many of us have become unknowingly numbed, failing to recognize we've been tricked into creating an entire life designed by deceitful and empty dreams, integrating them into our lives and risking catapulting ourselves into a life that leads down a road of brokenness, tears, and regret.

In *7 Lies That Will Ruin Your Life*, I'll explore how these lies took root in my own life, as I allowed being in the pornography industry to envelop my heart and mind and the identity the industry created, eclipsing the person God had created me to be.

I'll also explore seven of today's most dangerous lies, dismantle them, and give you a road map toward the healing and truth that worked in my own life. My life was radically transformed not by following the rules of religion but by experiencing the joy and satisfaction of the love of Jesus—and yours can be too.

I'll start by exploring one of the worst lies: *false approval*. As we journey through life on a quest to find meaning, we often find ourselves adrift and looking for validation in all the

wrong places. From there, I'll look at culture's "look at me, it is all about me" *synthetic God (of the self)* complex, with humans increasingly worshiping and turning to the self rather than God, who has an incredible plan for each and every person.

The third lie we'll explore is the *counterfeit cleanup*. Too many of us become entrapped once we make a decision to change, yet still remain trapped in our pasts. That will lead us to delve into *faux freedom* and the inverted truths that can leave us entangled in ideological and even theological prisons.

And as we change our lives, it is essential to dismantle the *lie of false purpose*. We must recognize that we still need to put in the necessary effort, and invite the right people into our lives to help us do it. This chapter will help us look past the world's lies when it comes to purpose to more readily discover what the Lord truly has in store.

From there, I'll look at *imitation intimacy* and the lies about sex and love we're so readily told in culture today. We'll explore society's distorted views on the matter. Entertainment and media have sold the lie that sex is a hobby to be enjoyed and whatever feels good should guide our relational decisions; I'll break down why these mistruths leave us bound to chaos and brokenness.

And the final lie I'll untangle centers on *hijacked healing* and the mistaken belief that cancellation and retribution are the keys to making our wounded hearts heal. This chapter—perhaps one of the most important explorations of the lies harming individuals and culture—will challenge us to look back to Jesus to truly learn how to love our enemies.

Along the way, I'll tell my own journey, reflecting on each of these lies and how they in fact did contribute to ruining my life

for a season. The details in this book were, at moments, near impossible to share, especially as I recounted the hurt and pain I caused others and myself.

Confronting Our Blunders

Changing my life wasn't easy, and it didn't happen overnight, but I learned something essential as I escaped the grips of my former existence: the ability to see what was a lie and what was true and then to live in that reality.

You can ask my wife, and I will gladly tell you—I am still a work in progress! I am not perfect by any means, but I wake up with joy each day looking forward to what it may bring.

Through many years, tons of prayer, building a foundation of biblical truth to replace the lies, many conversations with trusted people, counseling, deliverance from much brokenness, and an ongoing process of self-reflection, I have been able to peel back the layers to see who I was, how I got there—and how God chose to rescue me from unimaginable pain.

I eventually came to realize that what you think about yourself seeps into everything you say and do. And what you accept about the big, important things in life determines how you regard every facet of our world. What you believe to be true impacts how you see and how you live.

Why am I here on earth? What is my purpose? Your answers to these questions and others like them reveal the state of your heart and provide a look at the path you are likely destined to take—a course of life change and inspiration or a journey of self-deprecation and surrender to culture's ongoing lies that you see trending on every social media platform.

What you believe about why you are here on earth and your purpose overflows into everything you do and experience. And, in turn, it impacts how you see and process your mistakes.

You might feel stuck and overwhelmed, like you've made too many mistakes to turn back. Maybe you've isolated yourself from the people and things you so dearly love. This book and my story will prove that it's never too late, through Christ, to start over.

And once you do, you are like a blank canvas—you have endless potential to pick up the brushes, gather the needed supplies, and transform that blank slate into something beautiful. In a culture that seeks to “cancel,” it's easy to forget that our past doesn't have to define our present—or our future.

As a former porn star, master liar, manipulator, and just overall broken person, I've made massive mistakes that have deeply hurt people—even those I love most.

I love reading about the apostle Paul, the same person who became a hero in the faith and wrote a significant portion of the New Testament, because he remembers where he comes from and says things about how he was the chief of sinners.

I am saying I was not a very good person, and I was so incredibly shattered. Like so many, I have endured incredible suffering and pain, but, through Christ, I've learned that those broken pieces of my life cannot control or define what I do next or how I live my life today.

You can either let your past own you, or you can choose to own it.

In the same way, you are not the abuse you suffered or watched someone you love endure. Your trauma and your mistakes, particularly your big ones, are often catalysts that can change the trajectory of your life—if you let them.

We all have a choice in life: to see through the lies or to believe them. We can opt to heal in Christ or drown in our pain. We can opt to hurt those around us and suffer from depression or to seek out healthy relationships.

The choice is ours. On my journey out of porn, I was sure my future was an anchor thrown to the bottom of the ocean floor. I had no hope, no vision for what was to come. I thought, *This is just who I am*. I assumed no woman who had their life together would marry me and that I'd never get to experience the joys of being a father.

I mean, I never saw fatherhood modeled or experienced it for myself. Maybe I could get a woman pregnant, but truly be a father? *No way. Absolutely not happening*, I was sure.

But I was wrong.

And if you believe similar lies, you're also mistaken. You matter and you have so much to offer the world; no matter what errors you've made, failures you've experienced, or trauma you've endured, your life is worth living. By recognizing and rejecting the lies that make up culture's empty promises that keep you stuck, you can find the freedom to pursue a better hope, fulfill your dreams, pursue your passions, and turn your life into one where you wake up with a smile because you are so thankful for what you have.

God stands ready to do exceedingly and abundantly more than you could ever hope, dream, or imagine. That is a promise.

As Dr. Seuss, one of my favorite childhood authors, wrote in *Oh, the Places You'll Go*, "You have brains in your head. You have feet in your shoes. You can steer yourself in any direction you choose." As much as I love this proclamation, I'd add another line: "*But go whichever way God desires you to choose.*" God has a better plan for your life than you ever could.

After all, that's the missing puzzle piece so many of us aimlessly struggle to find—seeking His will for our lives.

I desperately need you to know that you can always choose to get up, dust yourself off, and live a life that brings you joy each day. It is my greatest hope that you both experience the love of Jesus and grow close to Him as you read this book.

I pray that you keep an open mind, regardless of where you are on your faith journey. If you don't have a faith right now, know that I am so glad you are here, and hopefully this book will challenge you in the best of ways.

But I firmly believe the Lord will use my journey to help others step into their God-given identity, and I look forward to going on this journey together. Let's unveil the lies our heart longs for and the world promises to bring—and explore the ultimate satisfaction and victory that's only available to us all in Christ Jesus.

As I reflect on my past of compromise after compromise, I am amazed by how God has changed my life and set me free from the lies that became my reality. The dangerous thing about a lie is that if you believe it to be true, it actually becomes true to you. This book is not just about exposing the harmful lies that can ruin our lives, but also about finding hope and forgiveness.

Through my own story, I want to show that no matter what we've done, God's love can heal and restore us. As we explore the seven lies that can trap us, let's seek God's truth and experience the freedom that only comes from allowing that truth to change how we see everything and everyone, including ourselves.