

## 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

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# 1

## THE 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.