



# A Rebel's Manifesto

*Choosing Truth,  
Real Justice,  
& Love amid  
the Noise of  
Today's World*



**Sean McDowell**

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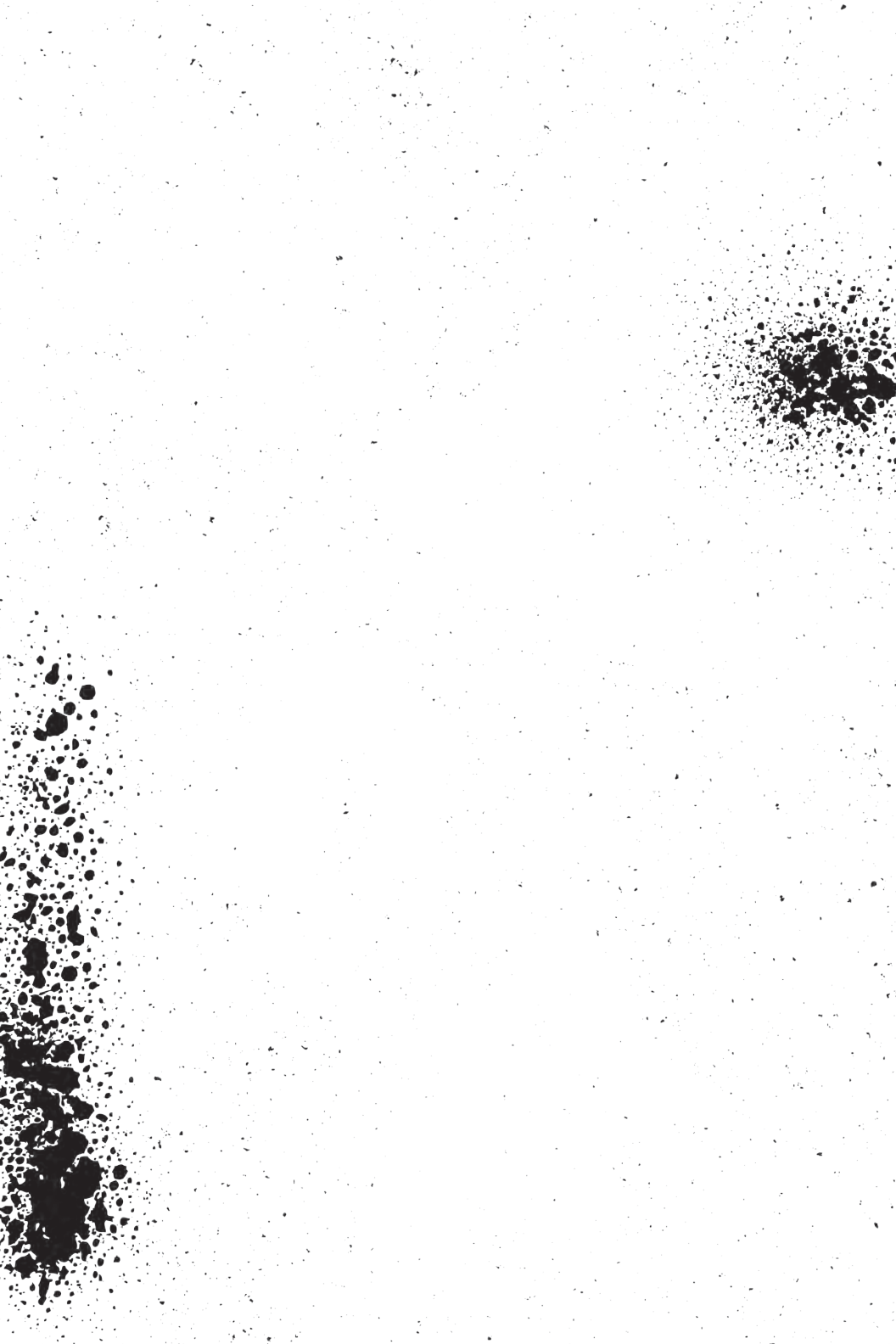
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To my son, Scottie.  
As you head out into the "real world,"  
I pray you will continue to care about  
truth, justice, and loving those around you.  
I could not be prouder to be your dad.





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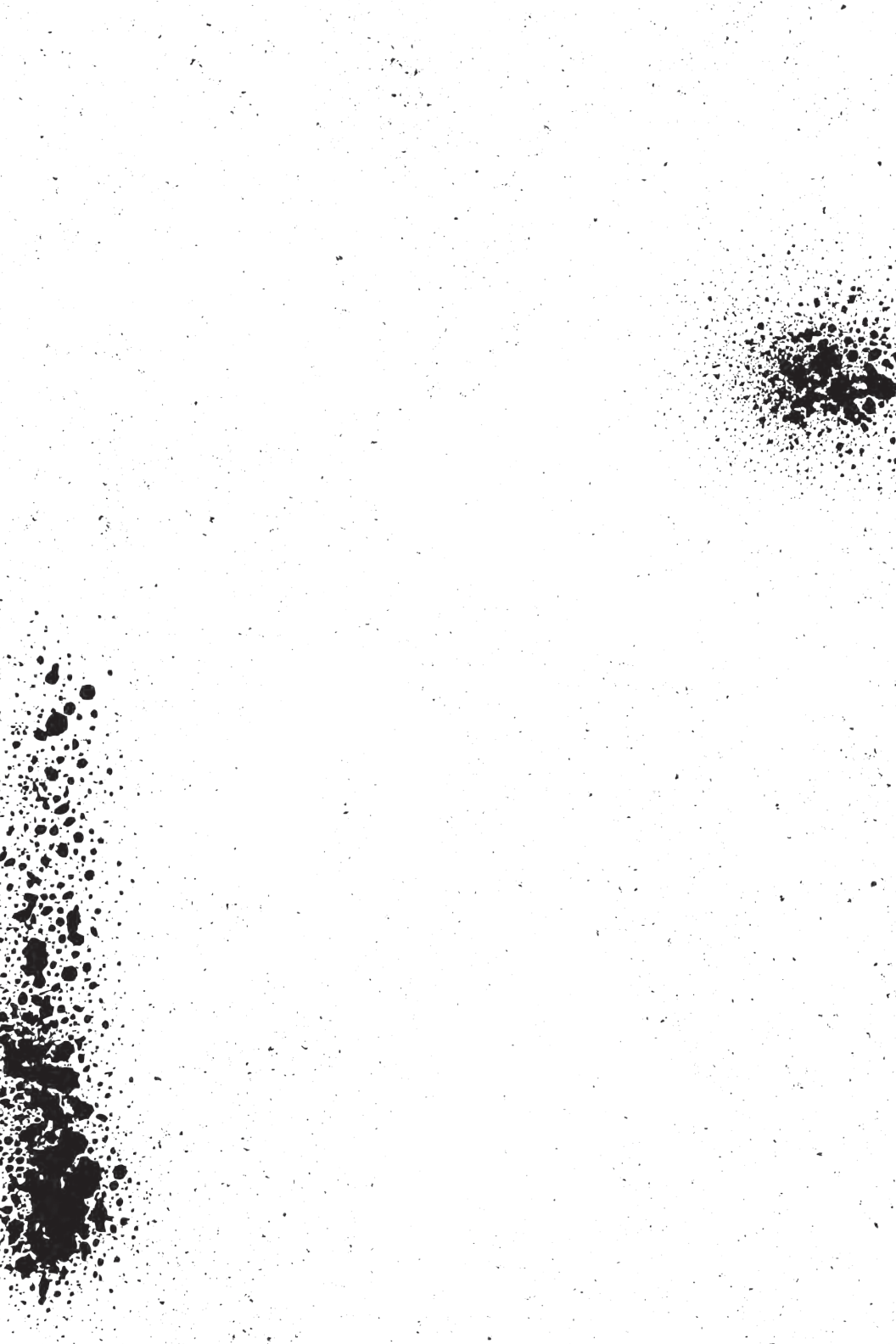
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PART 1

# The Challenge



1

## Standing for What Is Right



JANA HAD NEVER IMAGINED SHE WOULD be facing the decision that was before her today. As a former member of a high school youth group, she had learned much about making right choices in the areas of sex, love, and relationships, but this was beyond anything she had been tested with before. *How can I possibly do the right thing*, she wondered, *when my college psychology professor has assigned me to review a porn film as part of my grade?* Without this assignment, Jana's grade would suffer greatly, but she also knew that God wanted her to be sexually pure. What could she do in this situation? What would *you* do?

Jaelene faced one of the toughest decisions of her life.

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Would she wear a US national soccer team jersey sporting rainbow numbers to celebrate gay pride? Or should she decline and jeopardize her position on the team? You might not think this is such a big deal. After all, it's just a jersey, right? But because of her Christian faith and her convictions about God's design for sex and marriage, it *was* a big deal for Jaelene. After the Supreme Court ruling legalizing same-sex marriage, she wrote on her Instagram page, "I believe with every fiber in my body that what was written 2,000 years ago in the Bible is undoubtedly true. . . . This world may change, but Christ and His Word NEVER will." What should she do? What would *you* do?

These are not easy situations to be in. Can you imagine the pressure Jana and Jaelene would feel to compromise their Christian convictions? After all, both had worked hard for their success. They wanted to succeed in life *and* they wanted to honor the Lord. Is there a way to do both? Should they really be expected to suffer for doing *the right thing*? Doesn't God want them to be happy?

In Plato's *Republic*, Socrates says, "We are discussing no small matter, but how we ought to live." His point is simple and powerful: the most important questions we ask are not about what we accomplish but how we live. The most important questions are not related to what career we choose or what college we attend but, rather, what or whom we live for. Life isn't about what we do as much as why we do it.

Every day you face moral choices: *Will I respect my parents?*

*Should I post that on social media? How far should I go with my boyfriend or girlfriend? Will I use the preferred gender pronoun for a classmate? Should I join a protest for climate change, racial reconciliation, immigration, or some other pressing issue?*

The question is not *if* you will face a challenging situation like Jana or Jaelene but *when* you will face it. How you respond to moral dilemmas reflects who you are right now and, in turn, shapes who you become. Will you follow the example of Jesus, or will you follow the pattern of the world? Our world often says to criticize and cancel others when they fail or when they offend you. Jesus calls us to rebel against this approach by lovingly standing for truth and justice. Jesus never compromised his convictions. But he was kind and gracious toward others. That's what it means to rebel today.

Will that be you?

### **Times Are Challenging**

In 1958, a group of high school principals was asked the following question: What are the main problems among your students? The top answers were

1. Not doing homework
2. Not respecting property—e.g., throwing books
3. Leaving lights on and doors wide open
4. Throwing spitballs in class
5. Running through the halls<sup>1</sup>

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While life was probably not quite *that* simple in the late fifties, the same question today would undoubtedly elicit a very different response from a group of high school principals. In my experience, students today fret about climate change, racism, sexism, the economy, managing a social media identity, terrorism, school shootings, and much more. Your generation faces greater moral challenges *just one click away* than any generation in history.

Christian moral standards used to be considered good. Now the moral teachings of Jesus (especially in areas of sexuality) are increasingly considered bigoted, harmful, and hateful. Depression and loneliness are rampant. Fatherlessness and divorce are off the charts. Pornography use is pervasive. People are addicted to social media. Hundreds of thousands of preborn humans are aborted every year. And our culture seems more racially divided than ever.

You may feel so overwhelmed with your responsibilities, and the myriad of moral issues that you are expected to opine about on social media, that you hardly have time to slow down and grow up. Bombarded by endless messages of promiscuity and compromise, who can honestly expect you to make right choices today?

The answer to that question is simple: *God*. God expects you to make right choices. As Jaelene pointed out, God's standards never change, even if ours do. And God not only expects you to stand up for what is right; he also will empower you with the strength to do so. How can you possibly do that *today*? Let's start by looking back at the story of

Daniel, a young man who rebelled against the expectations of his culture and refused to back down from his convictions.

## Following Daniel

Because of his boldness and faithfulness, Daniel is one of my favorite characters in the Bible. Yet long before he interpreted Nebuchadnezzar's dream or survived the lions' den, Daniel faced a tough decision: Would he unfollow God in order to follow the king?

King Nebuchadnezzar had assigned Ashpenaz, his chief eunuch, to select smart, handsome, and noble young Israelites from among the exiles. They were to learn the language, literature, and traditions of the Babylonians for three years so they could serve in the king's palace. But there was one *big* problem for Daniel and his friends: they had to accept the royal food and drink, which violated the law God had ordained for them as his holy people. In other words, they had to choose between pleasing the king and honoring God.

What could they do? Daniel wanted the favor that came along with serving the king, and he certainly didn't want to offend him, but how could he partake of food and drink that the Old Testament law prohibited? Like Jana and Jaelene, he found himself in a seemingly lose-lose situation.

You can read Daniel 1 to see his creative solution, which ended up honoring God *and* the king. But there's an important verse we must not miss. Daniel 1:8 says, "But Daniel

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*resolved* that he would not defile himself with the king's food, or with the wine that he drank" (emphasis added). The word *resolved* is past tense. In other words, even *before* Daniel knew the outcome, he had determined that he was going to honor God. He refused to defile his body even before he knew what the outcome would be. Now *that's* conviction.

### The Cost of Following Jesus

Determining that you want to honor the Lord *before* moral challenges come is important for standing strong today. It is often too late—although not impossible—to do the right thing without developing convictions beforehand. Have you done that? Have you resolved, like Daniel, to honor God regardless of the cost?

I can't make this decision for you. And neither can your parents. Only *you* can make it.

If you do, I can't promise that your life will be easier. The apostle Peter indicated that it may be God's will for believers to suffer (see 1 Peter 3:17).

In the case of Jana, things worked out well. After prayer and counsel, she proposed to her teacher that he allow her to write a persuasive paper on why she should be excused from the assignment. He reluctantly agreed.

She wrote a four-page paper on why, as a Christian, she should not watch pornography. Can you guess what happened? Not only did he accept the paper, but he had her present it to the entire class and allowed other students to opt

out of the assignment as well. Nearly half the class followed her lead. One person *can* make a difference.

Jaelene was not so fortunate. After three days of prayer and reflection, she chose to withdraw from the women's national team rather than wear the jersey supporting gay pride. "If I never get another national team call-up again then that's just a part of His plan, and that's okay," she said. "Maybe this is why I was meant to play soccer, to show other believers to be obedient."<sup>2</sup>

Jaelene was arguably the best fullback in the game at the time of the US Women's World Cup tryout, yet because of her convictions, she wasn't given a slot on the roster. And she regularly received jeers and boos when she played in the National Women's Soccer League.

Yet although Jana and Jaelene experienced different outcomes, they both chose wisely. They both honored the Lord, like Daniel, regardless of the consequences.

Will *you*?

