

WHEN
GODLY
PEOPLE DO
UNGODLY
THINGS



BETH MOORE

LifeWay Press®
Nashville, Tennessee

© 2003 • LifeWay Press[®]
Fifth printing August 2007

No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or by any information storage or retrieval system, except as may be expressly permitted in writing by the publisher.

Requests for permission should be addressed in writing to
LifeWay Press[®]; One LifeWay Plaza; Nashville, TN 37234-0175.

ISBN 0-6330-9035-2
item 001205314

This book is the text for course CG-0822 in the subject area
Personal Life in the Christian Growth Study Plan.

Dewey Decimal Classification: 235.4
Subject heading: SPIRITUAL WARFARE \ TEMPTATION \ CHRISTIAN LIFE

Cover photo: Howard Bjornson/Photonica
Inside photos: p. 6—Susan Cato; all others—Jon Rodda
Apple illustration: Linda Holt Ayriss, Artville

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the Holy Bible,
New International Version, © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society.

Scripture quotations identified KJV are from the King James Version.

Scripture quotations identified AMP are from The Amplified New Testament
© The Lockman Foundation 1954, 1958, 1987. Used by permission.

Scripture quotations identified NASB are from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE,
© The Lockman Foundation, 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995.
Used by permission.

Scripture quotations identified CEV are from the Contemporary English Version
© 1991, 1992, 1995 American Bible Society. Used by permission.

Scripture quotations identified HCSB are from the Holman Christian Standard Bible[®]
© 2001 Holman Bible Publishers, Nashville, TN. All rights reserved.

To order additional copies of this resource: write LifeWay Church Resources Customer Service;
One LifeWay Plaza; Nashville, TN 37234-0013; FAX (615) 251-5933; call toll-free (800) 458-2772;
E-MAIL to orderentry@lifeway.com; order online at www.lifeway.com;
or visit the LifeWay Christian Store serving you.

Printed in the United States of America

Leadership and Adult Publishing
LifeWay Church Resources
One LifeWay Plaza
Nashville, TN 37234-0175

CONTENTS

FOREWORD 6

INTRODUCTION 7

Week 1

THE WARNING 10

Week 2

GOD'S PERMISSIVE WILL 32

Week 3

THE WATCHMAN 54

Week 4

WISE UP! 78

Week 5

THE WAY HOME 102

Week 6

SAFE IN HIS EMBRACE 124

CHRISTIAN GROWTH STUDY PLAN 151

FOREWORD

When Beth and I first met several years ago, it didn't take us long to become deeply engrossed in conversation. Our discussions were lively and energizing. They never were boring but neither were they very personal. We knew we both had an avid interest in helping people live in truth. After all, Beth was a Bible teacher and I was a therapist working with a Christian psychologist and seeing more Christian castaway church members than I cared to acknowledge. Clearly, we agreed, Satan was lying to our sisters and brothers and many were falling prey to his devices on a regular basis.

I don't remember at what point in our relationship that it became obvious that separately and prior to when we met, we both had been Had. We had experienced the seduction of the enemy up close and personal in our own lives, and we both had been horrified by it. We never talked specifics. We didn't need to. We just had "a knowing" that explained the passion we shared for the subject. When you have been Had and have found your way back, your heart's desire is that others would find their way back, as well. That is why I was so thrilled to learn that my friend Beth was writing *When Godly People Do Ungodly Things*. I was so aware that the need was great and I knew her passion for God's truth was greater. This was a topic she could not avoid. This was a book she had to write.

In this powerfully effective work, Beth has trumped some of Satan's most damaging lies with God's unalterable truth that there is a way back. His godly ones will not be lost without hope. Repentance, redemption, and restoration are available to His beloved.

Granted, there are those in the faith who believe that if you sin, you are removed from the list of those God uses. You have taken the grace of God too far. You have proven

yourself unfaithful. You have shamed your Father. You have brought disgrace on your elder Brother. You have blown it now and forever more! You are done. Because you have 'been had,' you have forfeited your right to a fulfilled life and ministry as a believer.

Those voices have held sway for a long time with little sound teaching to counteract their reasoning. In her straightforward, inimitable style, Beth has uncovered the major flaw in that way of thinking. It is this: people want to be seduced by the evil one. There is nothing further from the truth. No one in their right mind wants the pain and insult that the seduction of the evil one incurs. Christian people, who know and love God, don't go looking for that kind of punishment.

Beth lays out a clear, understandable, supported case for offering hope to godly people who find themselves seduced by the enemy. I believe this work is a godsend for our age. I recommend it without reservation to all serious Christians, whether or not you believe godly people can do ungodly things. Give this study a chance to raise your awareness of the 'stuff' that is going on around us in these days. Take to heart the Scripture that says, "Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (1 Pet. 5:8).

May you be blessed beyond measure as you find hope and healing in *When Godly People Do Ungodly Things*.

Jan Silvius lives in Chattanooga, Tennessee. She is the author of *Foolproofing Your Life* and *Please Don't Say You Need Me*.

W E E K O N E
THE WARNING

DAY 1
Prime Targets

DAY 2
Background on Satan

DAY 3
Sexually-Oriented Bondage

DAY 4
Common Claims of the Seduced

DAY 5
Common Claims of the Seduced, Part 2

I hope you take part in weekly small-groups, video presentations, and discussions. If not, you can work through this study by yourself. However, the accountability, encouragement, and shared experiences of a small group create an ideal learning process.

The Principle Questions will guide your discovery in the Word each week. Each day also provides a Personal Discussion Question (designated by an apple in the margin) that you will apply to your life and discuss with your group.

PRINCIPAL QUESTIONS

Day 1: What does 2 Corinthians 11:3 say Paul feared for the Christians of his day?

Day 2: What does Luke 10:18 suggest about Satan's present power?

Day 3: According to 2 Timothy 2:26, what is Satan's objective?

Day 4: What does Hebrews 10:24-25 tell believers to do?

Day 5: According to 1 John 5:18, how would you explain the difference between Satan's being able to attack us and not being able to grasp us?

1

PRIME TARGETS

I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

—2 Corinthians 11:3

A strange thing began to happen soon after my books, *Breaking Free* and *Praying God's Word*, were released. Probably because I admit to such a flawed and sinful past, letters began stacking on my desk from Christians confessing, often for the very first time, to harrowing rounds of defeat at the hands of the devil.

You may be thinking, *So what else is new? Satan has attacked man since his creation.*

I'd like to suggest that something about this spiritual phenomenon might just have taken demonic assault to a whole new level. In the course of this ministry I've read countless letters, and I have come to discern the difference between blatant accounts of mercifully forgiven rebellion and the testimonials I'm talking about here. Why do you think Satan may be more active today in attacking Christians than ever before?

THREE STREAMS OF EVIDENCE

I need to clearly state that three streams of evidence lead me to believe Satan is on a rampage. As we proceed, I want to ask you to consider the significance of each.

1. A Growing Stack of Testimonies

What has terrified me is the growing stack of letters from believers who loved God and walked with Him faithfully for years then found themselves suddenly overtaken by a tidal wave of temptation and unholy assault. Many believers are convinced such things can't happen. "Not to good Christians." They are wrong. And through the course of this study, I hope to prove it.

Just as we teach our young daughters how to guard themselves against sexual assaults, the body of Christ has got to be taught how to guard her virginity. Oh, that the church would start dealing openly and honestly with crimes against itself! It's time we dump the denial, pick up the Sword of the Spirit, and learn how to use it.

As you close your study today, would you be willing to pray the following prayer with me? Personalize the prayer by using the pronouns *me*, *I*, and *my*.

Oh, God, please help us. We are under such attack. Far too many believers who have histories of faithfulness with You are falling for the devil's schemes. Please open our eyes and show us the way! Hear the desperate cries of Your children.

4

COMMON CLAIMS OF THE SEDUCED

"We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."

—Hebrews 4:15-16

I told you on day 1 how my concern grew out of reading a stack of unnerving testimonials from people who had devoted their lives to Christ and walked with God consistently for an extended period of time only to be suddenly seduced into ungodly behavior. I knew I was looking at the very essence of 2 Corinthians 11:2-3. I poured over their stories with great attention and growing alarm, all the while asking God to give me discernment. As I read their stories and reflected on my own, I kept thinking, *Do you know how many Christians don't believe this is possible?*

I have since made a case study of sorts out of many of their experiences. I met with a substantial number of them face-to-face, not as a counselor but as a researcher. I asked some hard questions and got what I believe were some very honest answers.

By no means do I suggest that all seductions share these commonalities. We have no idea how many shapes, sizes, and forms seductions can take. I have been shocked, however, by a number of common claims that I think are worth our notice. I have three reasons I consider exceedingly important to share with you.

1. If you love someone or you're counseling someone who is making similar claims, you need to know that many others have described the same things. Your loved one or your client may not be crazy after all! They may be beguiled!

2. I am hoping and praying with all of my heart that those persons who are presently being seduced and taking this study will use the following claims as a checklist of sorts to help them recognize their seduction. Recognition can be the first sign of light in this dark encounter.

Please don't think for a second that if one or two of these common denominators don't fit that you are not being seduced. I'm certain this list is incomplete and inconclusive. If the majority of these fit, Beloved, you are most likely being seduced. Cry out to God with everything that is in you! Remember, you can't trust your feelings, so if you don't feel like you want to be rescued, reason with yourself and admit that you need to be rescued. Lastly, keep in mind that some of the common claims came in the aftermath of the seduction, so if you are still actively in the stronghold of seduction, you haven't experienced them yet.

3. If you've been through a similar nightmare and have told no one, it's time you had a name for it. Dear one, you've been seduced.

One last reminder before we begin the list. Please remember not to assume that all seduction is sexual in nature. After our last day's homework, you might be inclined to read it into every story. Please think far more widely as you try to grasp the breadth of Satan's expertise. Remember, he's simply after whatever works. Those who were enticed to do ungodly things after living godly lives shared many of the following 16 claims. We will look at them over the next two lessons.

COMMON CLAIMS

1. *Individuals were caught off guard by a sudden onslaught of temptation or attack.*

Not one planned his or her season of ungodliness. Virtually all of them felt as if they were hit so hard and so fast that their heads were spinning. Many described having already sinned before they even knew what hit them. Sound impossible? Actually, the possibility is stated unapologetically in Scripture. Galatians 6:1 says, "Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted." Concentrate on the word *caught*. One of the definitions of the Greek word *prolambano* describes the sin like this: "catches the individual by surprise, suddenly, without notice, i.e., before he is aware of what has happened."³ In fact, the *pro* in *prolambano* means "before."

We would not abandon sound theology to say that these kinds of sins can overtake individuals before they realize what is coming against them and put up their guard. Several other versions translate *caught* as "overtaken." After catching his prey off guard, the enemy does all he can to make the victim feel completely trapped; but, as we'll discover, he can't keep up the facade indefinitely.

Have you ever been caught off guard by a sudden onslaught of temptation or attack?

Yes No Not certain If so, describe below.



2. *The season of overwhelming temptation and seduction often followed huge spiritual markers with God.*

These godly people who then did ungodly things were not walking in sin when the wave of seduction hit. I was amazed how many felt they had just entered a new season of growth in their relationships with God—if not a near spiritual euphoria—when the unimaginable happened.

Remember, Christ Himself endured a dreadful time of testing after receiving great blessing. After He was baptized by John, He heard the glorious words from His Father in heaven: “ This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.’ ” The very next words? “Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil” (Matt. 3:17—4:1). Of course, Jesus endured His season of temptation without sin, but the experience was inconceivably brutal. Knowing all that would come upon us, our faithful God made every provision, even in our temptation.

Have you ever experienced temptation or seduction after a spiritual high?
 Yes No Not certain Explain briefly.

Why do you suppose we are vulnerable at spiritually high times?

Though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.

—2 Corinthians 10:3-5, KJV

3. Everyone described a mental bombardment.

Another way to describe the same thing is obsessive thinking. This one isn't hard to understand. Indeed, it is one of the clearest signs of a fierce demonic stronghold.

Remember our key verse? Second Corinthians 11:2-3 specifically states that believers can be devoted to Christ with their whole heart, yet Satan can corrupt and seduce their minds. In the previous chapter of Scripture, Paul had just described a stronghold.

Read 2 Corinthians 10:3-5 in the margin. Underline the descriptive words.

The very nature of a stronghold is that something is exalted in our minds contrary to the knowledge of God. Breaking free from these mentally obsessive strongholds always requires bringing those previously exalted imaginations into the captivity of Christ's authority. No small challenge—one the enemy hopes we're not up to. We have to prove him wrong. We have divine power to demolish strongholds. Only in our own power is the task too much for us.

Have you ever obsessed about something or someone? Yes No Not sure
How did it affect you?

Do you believe that obsessive thinking can be a stronghold? Yes No
Why or why not?

4. *Many of those caught in relational seductions (not all seductions are relational) testified that Satan got to them through someone close by.*

When Satan is trying to wreak havoc on the godly, he isn't always successful with a blatantly ungodly approach. Remember, we're talking seduction here. The nature of seduction implies an unexpected, well-disguised lure. Satan looks for ways he can get close to the godly and gain trust.

The last thing I want to do is suggest that we cease trusting people, but be warned that not everyone who appears trustworthy is. Perhaps we've all had times when we weren't terribly trustworthy ourselves. Again, we should be desperate for discernment. Thankfully, God is willing to supply it. Part of our fortification against seduction will be making sure a door in our lives has not been opened through unhealthy relationships.

God is willing to supply discernment.

Have you ever been caught in a relational seduction? What do you feel lured you into the relationship?

5. *Many testified to early warning signals.*

Early warning signals are not surprising, of course. The Holy Spirit does not fail to do His job. Over and over I have asked, "Did you ever get a flag of some kind that caused you to think you ought not to proceed in that relationship or situation?" Almost invariably everyone said yes. It came while they were still walking faithfully with God. I asked why they didn't heed the warning, and virtually all of them said they rationalized it away.

Have you ever experienced a situation where you discerned that maybe you ought not proceed, but then you went ahead? Did your poor decisions result in any consequences?

6. *Many described their sudden behavioral patterns as totally uncharacteristic.*

I can't tell you the number of times I have heard statements like: "I kept thinking, What in the world am I doing? I've never acted like this in my life!" Most mentioned that family, close friends, and associates also noticed uncharacteristic behavior. Anyone who confronted them, however, faced their defensiveness and rationalizations.

Have you ever gone through a season in your life when you exhibited uncharacteristic behavior? Did anyone confront you? How did you respond?

7. *Virtually all of them described feelings and practices of isolation.*

Satan's temptation of Christ is certainly not the only example of isolation. The Old Testament prophet Elijah fell into a terrible time of depression in isolation after a vivid mountaintop experience with God.

Let's beware of anything that separates us from godly people.

Satan loves isolation. He wants to draw the believer out of healthy relationships into isolated relationships and out of healthy practices into secretive, unhealthy practices. He purposely woos us away from those who might openly recognize the seduction and call his hand on it. Let's beware of anything that separates us from godly people.

What does Hebrews 10:24-25 tell believers to do?

Can you think of someone in your life right now who needs some encouragement? If so, write their initials here. _____ What could you do to encourage them today?

8. *Without exception, deception and some level of secrecy were involved.*

Remember that the "secret power of lawlessness is already at work" (2 Thess. 2:7). Satan loves secrets and often works through disguises, masquerades, and shrouds. He wants things to stay in the dark because he knows the moment we expose it to the light of God, he's finished.

Deception is an absolute in every stronghold, but the nature of seductive deception is that the lies are often well masked for a while. We are undoubtedly caught in a stronghold of deception when we realize we're starting to "have to lie" to explain our behavior. We reason with ourselves that others just wouldn't understand, but the real reason is that the deceived soon deceive.

Out of the eight common claims that we have studied today, do you relate to any? If so, which ones?

- Similar claims
- Recognition
- Mental bombardment
- Relational seduction
- Early warning signals
- Sudden totally uncharacteristic behavioral patterns
- Feelings and practices of isolation
- Deception and some level of secrecy

W E E K F O U R

WISE UP!

DAY 1

Warm Heart, Wise Heads

DAY 2

Sanctified Through and Through

DAY 3

Clean Ties

DAY 4

Beware of the Web

DAY 5

See-Through Lives

If we are not careful, out of fear we will become paranoid about developing relationships with others. Believer, beware! That is exactly what the enemy would like for us to do. Jesus came for the express purpose of connecting with people. If we are going to connect, we must learn to develop godly relationships instead of spiritual relationships. As the world grows more depraved, the church must grow more alert, more equipped, more sanctified, and more unified. Join me as we wise up to the enemy's schemes.

PRINCIPAL QUESTIONS

Day 1: What does Paul say about Satan and his servants in 2 Corinthians 11:14-15?

Day 2: In John 17:23, why did Jesus pray for unity among believers?

Day 3: In what ways was the man in Proverbs 7 seduced?

Day 4: What did Jesus warn us about in Matthew 24:4-5?

Day 5: According to Philippians 2:15-16, what is our goal as believers?

1 WARM HEART, WISE HEADS

“As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.” —John 17:18

Our focus this week will be guarding against relational seductions and perhaps a host of other kinds of unhealthy relationships by making sure we are healthy, or what the Bible calls sanctified through and through. Keep in mind four important facts to help you avoid making wrong assumptions as we consider this dimension of our study:

1. Seduction does not always involve personal relationships between people. For instance, people can be seduced by false doctrine, money, position, power, or any number of secret addictions to things.
2. By no means are all unhealthy relationships demonic seductions.
3. Not all relationships are breeding grounds for seductions. So don't get paranoid and start looking for a demon behind every friend!
4. Relational seduction certainly does not always involve physical or sexual impropriety.

Satan can use relational seduction to promote all kinds of evil, not just those of a sexual nature. He preys upon people's basic bent toward socialization.

In Matthew 24:12, what did Christ say would happen?

End today's study by praying for the strength and courage to do what you must do in order to be obedient to God. Write your prayer below:

5 SEE-THROUGH LIVES

Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.
—Hebrews 10:24-25

Believers have never needed one another more than they will in the latter days. As depraved as our world is today, can you even imagine what life will be like in one hundred years if Christ tarries? We are foolish and biblically off base if we think the church and individual believers will remain unaffected by ever-increasing wickedness. Yesterday's war tactics are not going to work today. Today's war tactics are not going to work tomorrow. If we're going to stand firm, we can no longer react. We must pro-act. As the world grows more depraved, the church must grow more alert, equipped, sanctified, and unified.

According to Philippians 2:15-16, what is our goal as believers?

Christ is returning for a pure bride who will be living in the most impure world in human history. Her purity will not develop accidentally. As wickedness increases, our only wise recourse is to increase our pursuit of God and godliness all the more. We've got to wake up and get fortified!

Hebrews 10:24-25 addresses one vital method of increasing our fortification. Read *The Amplified Version* in the margin. Underline how we are to respond to other believers.

Based on these verses, list ways to fortify ourselves as we see the day approaching.

Let us consider and give attentive, continuous care to watching over one another, studying how we may stir up (stimulate and incite) to love and helpful deeds and noble activities, Not forsaking or neglecting to assemble together [as believers], as is the habit of some people, but admonishing (warning, urging and encouraging) one another, and all the more faithfully as you see the day approaching.

—Hebrews 10:24-25, AMP

These verses are not just telling believers to keep going to church! Far more is implied than filling our place on the pew. Medals for perfect church attendance will do very little to protect us. We need shields and swords and the guts to help each other get armed.

I practically grew up in church and on a weekly basis easily attended a minimum of four events, yet I was the poster child for defeat. This Scripture is talking about deliberately involving ourselves with one another for the specified purpose of aiding and abetting each other's victories. Warning, urging, and encouraging one another. As the return of Christ draws near, those who isolate themselves from the involvement of the body of Christ will be at great risk for personal disaster.

God asked Cain, "Where is your brother?" (Gen. 4:9). I believe God's question will become increasingly viable to us as surrounding wickedness grows more threatening.

Cain sought to evade responsibility of killing his brother by demanding, "Am I my brother's keeper?" (v. 9). I think in many ways God's answer to that question is Yes, as a matter of fact, you are your brother's keeper. Particularly as the Day is drawing near.

Check out parts of Hebrews 10:24-25 again: "Let us consider and give attentive, continuous care to *watching over one another* ... and all the more faithfully as you see the day approaching" (emphasis mine).

Some Christians are so watchful of others that they don't watch over themselves. They see specks in others' eyes and miss the planks in their own. That's not the kind of thing the writer of Hebrews is talking about. He's talking specifically about "studying how we may stir up (stimulate and incite)" one another "to love and helpful deeds and noble activities" (Heb. 10:24). His exhortation is about love, helpfulness, and nobility between believers. These verses are about encouraging one another and watching out for one another, not bulldozing down appropriate boundaries.



What are some ways you can "stir up [one another] ... to love and helpful deeds and noble activities"?

Since you and I and all future believers will need one another all the more as the day approaches, we need to grow in our trustworthiness and in purity of heart and motive. We have a responsibility to one another—which means we have a responsibility to become the kinds of persons who can help one another responsibly. I'd like to suggest two ways we can help one another more responsibly:

- Develop and practice godly discernment from a broader base.
- Develop and practice deliberate accountability from a narrower base.

Buy the truth and do not sell it; get wisdom, discipline and understanding.

—Proverbs 23:23

We've already established that for those of us who are surrounded by ever-increasing depravity, deception, and satanic seduction, one of our greatest needs is godly discernment. We can't afford to say it's not one of our spiritual gifts. God instructs us to pray for what we lack. Furthermore, the Book of Proverbs exhorts us to seek discernment, prudence, and wisdom.

According to 1 Corinthians 14:12, what are we to excel in?

Discernment will be needed to build up the church, particularly in the latter days. Discernment does not mean a critical or judgmental spirit. Those are nothing more than fleshly counterfeits.

Embodied in the concept of discernment is the ability to see through what may not be completely obvious to the eye. Among other vital empowerments, discernment sees trouble, senses a warning, and cites the need for caution. One rule of thumb we want to establish adamantly is that we can't practice godly discernment if we don't walk in the Spirit (see Gal. 5). We can't trust what we're sensing in the spirit if we're not filled with the Holy Spirit.

Notice that I have broader base by the practice of discernment and narrower base by the practice of accountability. Let me see if I can explain why. One of the wisest protections you and I can possibly have is an active, deliberately formed small group of people to whom we are accountable. We'll discuss that narrow base in just a moment.

What if I sense something overwhelming in my spirit about a brother or sister in Christ, but that person is not part of my accountability group? Do I ignore what I'm sensing because that person's life is really none of my business, or do I go to them? What would I want if the situation were reversed and someone sensed something wrong in me? Would I care about my pride more than I care about avoiding a potential collision with disaster?

Have you ever been in a situation similar to the one mentioned above? If so, how did you respond?

The rules are far more clear-cut when a brother or sister has fallen into sin, but I'm hoping to help us avoid a few plummets!

What does Hebrews 3:13 say we are to do daily?

Why?

So, what do we do if to the best of our understanding we are filled by the Holy Spirit and we sense something is wrong with a fellow believer? What do we do when we fear she (or he) might be falling for a snare of sin's deceitfulness?

First, we'd better spend serious time in prayer! Needless to say, we are taking a big risk of offending a brother or sister, especially if we're off base. If God does not seem to release us from our concern, and particularly if we discern a problem the next time we're around the person, God may have an appointment for us.

God may desire that we make a loving approach at an appropriate time just to say we've had him or her on our minds and ask if everything is all right. Then leave the

In addition to being directly accountable to God, we are wise to have godly people to hold us accountable.

results up to the Holy Spirit. I can't count the times that I've approached a sister in this way and been told that everything was fine ... only to hear from her several days later.

Whether the problem turned out to be a heavy heart, discouragement, temptation, or a besetting sin, my sister needed encouragement and lots of love. I've needed it, too, and God has never failed to bring someone into my path who discerns when something is wrong. Often God may appoint a person I'd never suspect. You see, sometimes our discernment can be clouded by strong feelings in closer relationships, but it works with startling clarity around those with whom we are a little less emotionally involved. Odd, isn't it? That's why discernment can and needs to be exercised in a much broader base.

Is someone in your life right now who you discern is struggling in a situation? If so, write their initials here and begin to pray for them. Ask God to show you when and how to approach them. _____

Let's throw out another hypothetical situation. Let's say I have no hard evidence, but I discern something wrong in a fellow believer or in a relationship between believers. After much prayer, God appoints me discreetly and lovingly to approach the person with concern.

What if my discernment only seems to be confirmed in the encounter but he or she rejects the concern or warning? I've had that very thing happen just recently. My heart broke as I feared impending disaster in a relationship a sister in Christ was developing. I did not go to her until the Holy Spirit seemed to overwhelm me with concern and bring me to a place where I could not remain silent. I went to this precious sister very discreetly and lovingly on two occasions, but both times she assured me the relationship was safe.

What am I to do? First of all, I hope she's right and I'm completely off target. I'd rather my sister be perfectly fine than me be right. Secondly, I'm just going to have to continue to pray until God releases me, and I must entrust her to her very faithful Father in heaven.

Jude 22-23 says, "Be merciful to those who doubt; snatch others from the fire and save them" (AMP). Some people won't let themselves be snatched from the fire. Tragically, I can think of a few times someone tried to snatch me from a fire, and I thought the person was overreacting. Boy, did I end up getting burned. Thankfully, I can think of other times I received a word of caution and jumped like a maniac from the rising flame.

Have you ever received a warning, dismissed it, and then realized the person was right? Yes No If so, how did you respond?

We usually hear the warning whether or not we heed it.

One thing I believe I can say with confidence and based on personal experience is that we usually hear the warning whether or not we heed it. Even though I rejected a sound word of warning at a critical time in my life, I was unable to forget it, and God used it later to keep me from being deceived even further by the enemy. Likewise, I don't believe my sweet sister in Christ has forgotten that I came to her in concern. What if God simply uses the warning to give her extra caution in the relationship and all turns out well? So be it!

We are going to need wisdom, spiritual sensitivity, and spiritual sensibility like never before as Satan enlarges his seductive attacks against believers. Yes, in some ways we must become our brother's keeper, but if we are not motivated by love and encouragement, we're not moving at the impulse of the Holy Spirit. Witch-hunts or our own Christian version of McCarthyism is out of the question. If we are not motivated by the

Spirit through love, God is not the one calling us to get involved in someone else's business. Oh, God, help us to know the difference and not to use our freedom as a license for sin. We are desperate for the mind of Christ, the heart of Christ, and the direction of Christ.

A second suggestion for helping one another responsibly involves developing and practicing a narrower base of accountability. If we're going to be fortified against seduction, you and I urgently need a small group of people we invite to hold us accountable to the pursuit of godliness. Accountability partners mean individuals we invite to see through us.

Everyone from the pastor to the church doorkeeper needs accountability, but none of us can be forced into it. The structure can be placed around us and the process even demanded of us, but how transparent we are with others will always be a choice. Transparency for the believer is a wise choice. Only those who are willing to be vulnerable will experience the protection accountability can bring.

Our accountability partners are so important that we want to choose them prayerfully and soberly under the leadership of the Holy Spirit. We may find that the best accountability partners are not necessarily our best friends because sometimes we need more objectivity than close friends can provide. Those we ask to hold us accountable should be people we deeply respect and who have proved trustworthy over a length of time. (Beware of instant intimacy with anyone! Instant intimacy is one of the leading warning signals of a seduction!)

Although I am very public about general confessions of sin, weakness, and fault, God calls me to be far more specific with the handful of people He has placed around me for accountability. Several staff members and directors on our board as well as my husband and a personal friend know everything there is to know about me. The good, the bad, and the ugly. They have open access to question me about absolutely anything. How I thank God for them! Only heaven will prove how they have aided and abetted my pursuit of godliness and my protection from the evil one.

What about you? Do you have an accountability group who has permission to see through you? If so, list their names below and thank God for them.

The apostle Paul taught volumes about good accountability partners because he assumed that role with his young churches through his epistles. In fact, our key verse for this study implies several descriptions of the kind of godly accountability we need in the increasing wickedness surrounding us.

Read 2 Corinthians 11:2-3 in the margin and underline descriptions of godly accountability.

Paul left no doubt in his letter to the Corinthians. He intended to hold them accountable to godliness. He had a godly jealousy for their best.

Please notice a critical element in Paul's accountability approach: his desire was their devotion to Christ—not their devotion to him. God-ordained yokefellows are jealous for us to be God's, not theirs. Godly accountability is never codependent.

Paul demonstrates another wonderful characteristic in a godly accountability partner. He had the ability to recognize and acknowledge strengths in his companions in the faith while still discerning risks. In 2 Corinthians 11:3, Paul commended their sincere and

I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him. But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

—2 Corinthians 11:2-3

pure devotion to Christ. Who wants an accountability partner who does nothing but point out weaknesses and spout warnings? I don't! I need a little encouragement sometimes, and so do you. Surely something is worth commending in us from time to time! If not, we need more than an accountability partner! The last thing Paul wanted was for the Corinthians to lose heart (2 Cor. 4:1). On the other hand, Paul was not blinded to the risks their present weaknesses heightened. He didn't just fret over the fears he had for them. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he spoke plainly and lovingly. They heard whether or not they heeded.

We need see-through lives.

See-through lives. That's what we need. Whether we realize it or not, you and I are desperate for people who can see through our lives. With their help, we can begin practicing lives of inside-out veracity that anybody can see through. What freedom! What peace! Take it from a former cover girl ... and I don't mean the pretty kind. I mean the kind who writes "Keep Out!" across her forehead in permanent marker and keeps herself covered no matter what the cost. Oh, what joy those days stole from me!

While secluded in the mountains writing this book, I opened a gift my staff had tucked in my suitcase. It was a flip calendar spanning the time I was there, and each day had on it an outdoor scene, a Scripture, and a personalized note for me from one of them. The time they had taken and the affection that filled it was so astonishing to me that I cried like a baby. The tears are stinging in my eyes again just thinking about it!

On the very last day, I flipped the calendar to the final picture. This time it wasn't an outdoor scene. It was a picture of all nine of us. My friends and me. My precious coworkers in the gospel. I laughed and bawled at the same time. I sat there before the Lord marveling at the excellence of those He has placed around me, and I heard Him whisper to my spirit, "Look at the kinds of people who love you, Beth. And, yes, they really know you."

They know my past. They know my faults. They know my fears. They know my insecurities. I finally allowed a group of people to see right through me. And they love me anyway. Oh, what joy! A joy I will no longer allow the enemy to steal. Somewhere along the way, the cover girl broke free. She may not be pretty. But she's real.

The accepting love God has shown me through them, through my husband, and through many others who really know me has given me the courage to stand before thousands and be who I am: A ragamuffin pulled from the pit and saved by the grace of an awesome God. And I am no longer ashamed.

Discernment: the ability to see through the masks.

Accountability: inviting others to see through us.

Both help us see this faith thing through with integrity.