

# ESCAPE THE

# LIFE



JOURNEY <sup>TO</sup>  
FREEDOM  
FROM THE  
ORPHAN  
HEART

## WALKER MOORE

WITH MARTI PIEPER

FOREWORD BY BART MILLARD OF MERCYME

## **Praise for *Escape the Lie***

“Drawing from a wealth of ministry experience and stories that will move your heart, Walker Moore’s *Escape the Lie* will give you practical tools for healthy family relationships. With the wit of a Will Rogers and insights of a C.S. Lewis, Walker brings a fresh perspective on the universal heart longing of man, one that needed to be written.”  
—Brian Hobbs, Editor, the *Baptist Messenger*, a statewide newsjournal for Oklahoma

“Once again, as in *Rite of Passage Parenting*, God has given Walker tremendous insight into the Christian life. There is no greater accomplishment than to know and believe the love of God as our Father. And yet so many believers still struggle to receive His love. I will recommend this book to every person seeking to find an answer to the question ‘Is there more to the Christian life?’” —Doug Bischoff, Ph.D., Next Generations minister, Houston’s First Baptist Church

“Hearts are to be molded and shaped into something beautiful and open. Yet too often our hearts are shoved and shattered until we lock the pain deep inside. Walker is handing us a key to return to the heart that beats of beautiful again. With story and teaching, he leads us to *Escape the Lie* and walk in freedom. This is a journey of hope and healing that God longs to walk with us.” —Gregg Matte, Senior Pastor, Houston’s First Baptist Church and author of *I AM Changes Who i Am*

“Have you ever been tempted to perform on the outside and yet felt empty on the inside? Ever wondered whether people would still love you if they knew what was really in your heart? Ever gotten tired of trying to earn the attention and love of those you care about? My friend Walker Moore helps each of us to embrace the truth of God’s unconditional, always-pursuing, thirst-quenching, perfect love that casts out all fear and allows us to escape the lies of our enemy and this world. This book helped me remember that my heart is now fully adopted by the perfect Father!”—Casey Cariker, Lead Pastor, Rejoice Church, Owasso, Oklahoma

“God used Walker Moore to change my life. His ministry has brought millions around the world to the true freedom that can only be found in our Heavenly Father. Walker’s message is a GPS for the soul to help you navigate the awesome journey God has uniquely planned for you. Open this book, unfold the map of truth, escape the lie, and let the journey to freedom begin!”—Ryan Underwood, CEO & Chief Leadership Officer, TRI Leadership Resources

“In *Escape the Lie* Walker reminds us of how the devil is a liar. And he tries to pull us away from the love of our heavenly Father any way he can. That’s why so many people end up buying into the lie of the Orphan Heart: *I don’t have a Father who loves me. I’m not important. I don’t matter.* If any of these describe you or someone you love, read this book. You’ll gain some incredible insights into how to embrace the truth that will set you free. Take Walker’s message to heart—so the Orphan Heart won’t take you.”—Bart Millard of MercyMe, Nashville, Tennessee

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Details in some anecdotes and stories have been changed to protect the identities of the persons involved.

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*“Give thanks to the God of heaven;  
for His lovingkindness is everlasting.”*

Psalm 136:26



# Escape the Lie:

Journey to Freedom from the Orphan Heart

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The message of escaping the Orphan Heart has come to me in bits and pieces. God has woven people in and out of my life to bring different aspects of truth that have shaped and molded it.

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This message has also been honed by the many pastors, church members, and Awe Star missionaries who have given me the privilege of sharing it. God used your incredible response to its truths to move me to put them into print. You'll find many of your stories within these pages.

And of course, I thank my family: Cathy, Jeremiah, Erin, Caleb, Adrian, and Titus, who have not only survived my Orphan Heart but

loved and supported me in spite of it. Every day, you give me a true picture of the Father's love.

. . . and Dad, I love you.

## FOREWORD

I love finding out things I don't know about people. I've known my wife since we were in seventh grade, but I'm still finding out new things about her every day. Those surprises keep life fun and interesting.

You probably know a few things about me. I'm in a band called MercyMe, and we've been blessed with a few songs including "Word of God Speak" and "I Can Only Imagine."

What you may not know is that before there was MercyMe, there was the Awe Star Worship Band. Yours truly traveled with Walker Moore and Awe Star Ministries across the country and around the world. If you want to hear a good story, ask Walker about how I used his yellow rain slicker as a sled one afternoon in Switzerland.

But something else you may not know is that Walker Moore is an incredible Bible teacher. One of MercyMe's gold records hangs in its frame in Awe Star's office because of our love, respect, and admiration for both Walker and his lovely wife, Cathy.

Walker's *Escape the Lie* teaching is also new to me. But like the rest of his teaching, it makes sense out of things I've never understood. Walker reminds us of how the devil is a liar. And he tries to pull us away from the love of our heavenly Father any way he can. That's why so many people end up buying into the lie of the Orphan Heart: *I don't have a Father who loves me. I'm not important. I don't matter.*

Maybe you're someone who loves Jesus but, deep down inside, you know something is missing. Maybe you're someone who has trouble trusting God and other people. Or maybe you're someone with hurts from the past that have left you wounded, weary, and worried about the future.

If any of these describe you or someone you love, read this book. You'll gain some incredible insights into how to embrace the truth that will set you free and live the kind of abundant life Jesus promised.

Take Walker's message to heart—so the Orphan Heart won't take you.

Bart Millard  
Nashville, TN

## Section I. The Lie Begins



# 1—The Orphan Heart:

*The biggest lie starts small.*

“For me a father is nothing more than a character in a fairy tale. I know fathers are not like dragons in that fathers actually exist, but I don’t remember feeling that a father existed for me. . . I don’t say this out of self-pity, because in a way I don’t miss having a father any more than I miss having a dragon. But in another way, I find myself wondering if I missed out on something important.”—Donald Miller and John MacMurray, *To Own a Dragon: Reflections on Growing Up Without a Father*<sup>1</sup>

### My Story

*I loved my dad. Although he’s been gone for several years now, I love him still.*

*For most of his life, Dad worked as a diesel mechanic. I noticed early on that there are two types. One is the “Tidy Tool” kind. His shop is immaculate, his tools neatly arranged, his workbench free of grease and clutter. The other is the type—well, like my dad. Grimy wrenches and parts of all shapes and sizes littered his workbench. A thick coating of oil-soaked sawdust covered the concrete floor.*

*One day when I was about nine years old, Dad’s job took him out of town. I woke up that morning and told myself, “I want to do something special—really special—to please him.” I decided to clean up the garage that doubled as his shop. I hurried out so I could take full advantage of his absence. I hoisted the tall can of gasoline and cautiously tipped it. An uneven stream poured into an old plastic pail.*

*I dipped the first tool. The transformation had begun.*

*Dip. Scrub. Rub. I repeated the process until each one of Dad's prized Craftsman<sup>®</sup> tools shone as never before. Next, I tackled the bulky toolbox (also a Craftsman model). It didn't exactly sparkle after my attention, but at least it didn't grab onto any finger that touched it.*

*The workbench loomed. I took one of dad's scrapers (restored to its original stainless shine) and began to file away years of crud. Back and forth, back and forth. With each scrape I thought about my dad. I could almost see the smile creasing his leathery face. I could almost hear his voice praising "my son" and the "man's job" I had done that day.*

*Almost.*

*Bench cleaning accomplished, I tackled the floor. Scoop. Sweep. Scrape. My small muscles ached, but I pressed through the pain to finish my task. I don't know how many hours went by before I realized Dad would be home soon. I decided that even a grease-stained floor was a huge improvement. He couldn't help but be proud of his oldest boy.*

*Or could he?*

*Dad's battered blue pickup left clouds of dust as it made its way down our rural route and onto the long driveway. I stood waiting beside the workbench, my little chest puffed with pride.*

*The truck rolled to a stop. The door slammed. The big boots trudged across the driveway and up to the open door of the garage. He was home! I could almost hear the words I'd awaited all day.*

*Dad entered the garage and saw the workbench in its shining glory. He opened a drawer and took note of the sparkling tools inside. Next, he rubbed the sole of one boot back and forth as if to check for any grime left behind on the floor. Once again, I anticipated his delight.*

*Instead, he scowled. "It's about time you did something around here." Without another word, he turned and went into the house.*

*Another door slammed. My chest collapsed. The silent messages screamed their way into my heart.*

*Until the day Dad died, I never stopped trying to earn his love.*

Slumped by my dad's sparkling workbench that day, I knew pain. I knew the words I'd longed to hear. I knew they hadn't come. But what I didn't know was that my dad's thoughtless response allowed a shadow to slip across my heart. This unnamed, unidentified *something* would dull my life and my perspective for years to come.

My wife saw the shadow. My sons did, too. And nearly everyone who knew me experienced its effects. It darkened every thought, every emotion, every relationship, and every one of my goals, but I never recognized its presence.

If I stood quietly, it crept out, so I unconsciously filled my life with noise and clutter. I feared silence because it gave the shadow an opportunity to reappear and whisper its words of hatred and deception. *You're no good. What made you think you could do that anyway? You always were the slow one!* And of course, *It's about time you did something around here.*

Do you have a similar story, a story of a painful relationship or experience that cast its shadow across your life? Maybe it entered alongside a physical problem like a serious illness or an emotional storm like a parental divorce. It may have arisen from something that seemed minor (a game night spent on the bench, a harsh rebuke from a parent or teacher) but left a major wound. No matter what that relationship or experience looked like, it became a door. A door for the darkness to enter your heart. A door for the shadow to slip in unnoticed. A door for Satan's lie: "You don't have a father who loves you."

## Shadow of a Doubt

There was a season, though, when there were no shadows. A season before the stars were flung, before light was separated from darkness, before time was measured. A season when a bright, beautiful being roamed the heavens. A season when, some speculate, that being led the throngs in worship before the throne.

This leader, whose name *Lucifer* means *bringer or bearer of light*, became disappointed with his Father. No garage-cleaning incident marred his existence. But somehow, some way, he became convinced his Father no longer deserved his obedient service. In rage and disappointment, he made a silent vow: “I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the recesses of the north. I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High” (Isa. 14:13-14).

When you fail to receive from your father the things you desire, you decide to take his place. You strive to fulfill the obligations you wanted him to fulfill. Lucifer’s perception was wrong. Although he had a perfect Father who expressed His love and delight in everything His son did, that made no difference. The deceptive shadow moved across his heart to dull his spirit and obscure his vision. Ultimately, it led him to rebel against the most loving of Fathers.

He pursued that rebellion with everything he had. The repeated phrase: *I will...I will...I will...I will* implies emphasis. The defiant son now set his face and his heart in opposition to his Father.

Lucifer’s story has no happy ending. The loving Father disciplined him. Cast suddenly out of the heavenly realm, Lucifer lost home, Father, identity, purpose, direction, destiny—he lost it all. But the shadow had already spread to the hearts of others. When he fell, Scripture says that Lucifer took one-third of the heavenly host along with him.

The shadow is dark, desperate, and greedy. Never content with its power in one life, it wants to infect and affect entire families, churches, companies, even regions or nations of the world.

## Last Words

What does this have to do with you or me? In the popular words of Bruce Springsteen, “Everybody has a hungry heart.” Earlier, I called this widespread problem a *shadow*. But a more specific term arises from some of Jesus’ last words to His disciples. In John 14:18, he tells them, “I will not leave you as *orphans*; I will come to you.”

I believe last words are important. I’ve been married close to forty years, and my two sons are married and living on their own. That may be why I’ve begun to ponder my own last words. In one of my worst nightmares, I choke out my last few breaths over a favorite snack food. Down through the generations, my descendants recall my last words: “Please pass the taco chips—ackkk, ackkk!”

This isn’t the way I hope to come face to face with my Savior, and it’s certainly not the way I want friends and family to remember me. I want to say something profound that will impact my descendants for generations. In view of that, I’ve considered the last words of some famous people:

“I die hard but am not afraid to go.”—George Washington, first U.S. president

“Go away. I’m all right.”—H. G. Wells, novelist

“I owe much; I have nothing. The rest I leave to the poor.”—François Rabelais, writer

“It is very beautiful over there.”—Thomas Alva Edison, inventor<sup>2</sup>

The last words we often recall are those of Christ as He hung on the cross. But another of His closing statements, spoken during the final

Supper He shared with His disciples, has intrigued me for years: “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you” (John 14:18).

Why would He say such a thing? Their company included business owners, a doctor, and a former tax collector. Why would Jesus speak about orphans to a group of grown men?

When I first began to study this section of Scripture, these words of the Master to His disciples made as much sense as if I said the same thing to a group of senior adults. Can you imagine the wonder in their faces if I told them, “I will not leave you as orphans”? They’d think I was crazy.

Did Jesus’ followers think the same thing?

## **A World of Orphans**

One of my main roles is that of missionary. I’ve spent almost forty years taking students overseas on short-term mission trips. For several years, my wife and I worked in Eastern Europe, where we served the nationals and hosted groups from the United States. We spent our summers high in the Alps conducting youth camps for the European Baptist Convention.

For the past twenty years, I’ve served as the president of Awe Star Ministries, a student missions-sending organization. When I’m not leading trips myself, I’m speaking about missions in churches across our country or training students to go and tell.

As a missionary, I’ve also done work in orphanages across the globe. As I write this chapter, I’m preparing to take a group of students to Nuevo Laredo, Mexico where we’ll share the gospel through the performing arts. There, we’ll also spend time with some of the many orphans we meet.

Concrete block walls and barred windows define the existence of these little ones. Their parents are either unwilling or unable to care

for them, and they all know it. You can see it in the pain in their eyes and the way they cling to our students (or to anyone who offers them a kind word).

The orphanage workers tell me the hurt also shows in the way the children treat one another, the workers, and anyone else they encounter often. No matter how kind or loving the interactions, the orphans hold themselves back. The depth of their wounds makes them avoid close relationships rather than enjoy the kindness and love that comes their way.

The pain in the lives of these orphans runs deep. Closer to home, I spoke with the good people at the Missouri Baptist Children's Home. They affirmed that orphans have unique needs. "Walker," they said, "We take care of these children, we love them—and they want to hurt us. They lie. They steal little items whenever they can. They mock our value and undermine our authority. They think the whole world's against them so they must fight for their rights. No matter how much love we show them, it's never enough."

Apparently, the Mexico and the Missouri orphans are not alone. Psychologists have now identified a syndrome common among orphans. The diagnosis *Reactive Attachment Disorder* (RAD) refers to the disturbed relationships with others often exhibited by young children who have received little or no parenting.

Children with RAD may avoid forming personal relationships. These are known as the inhibited or unattached type. On the other hand, they may seem overly friendly to everyone, not distinguishing between parents and strangers. These are known as the uninhibited or indiscriminate type. In both cases, there is no real sense of trust. The children treat other people either as threats to be avoided or as

targets to be manipulated. Not all children who are adopted internationally, the so called post-institutionalized children, are destined to have RAD. But the more emotionally and physically deprived they were, and the longer they remained in that environment, the greater their risk becomes.<sup>3</sup>

## **The Orphan Heart**

Do the symptoms of RAD send a shiver down your spine, too? I ache for the orphans and adoptive families it affects. Some of these are my close friends or friends and family members of people I know. But another syndrome carries a much broader and more damaging impact: the spiritual version of RAD, something I've learned to call the Orphan Heart.

As I prayed about Jesus' promise not to leave His disciples as orphans, God brought some new teaching my way. It came from the late ministry leader Jack Frost. Like me, Jack grew up with a controlling father whom he loved but could never please. His book, *Experiencing Father's Embrace* (Destiny Image, 2006) introduces the concept of the Orphan Heart.

I felt like such a failure, yet I wanted Dad's approval so much I kept striving to perform for him. *If only I can hit the ball right*, I told myself, *Dad will be proud of me*. I did not realize that an ungodly belief (stronghold) was growing stronger and stronger in me. I was slowly being consumed by a deep fear of failure and rejection, a fear that caused me to feel worthless unless I performed well enough to win my father's approval.<sup>4</sup>

Jack grew up to become a top commercial fishing boat captain, someone who had to do and be the best no matter the cost. When he came to know Christ in his late twenties, he experienced joy for the first time. The burden of sin and overwhelming addiction lifted and he began to serve God. Eventually, he became a pastor and ministry leader.

But something was missing. Jack continued to live as a driven man. His ministry was a veneer that hid his intense competition with anyone he viewed as more blessed or more gifted than he. Although his family experienced his angry outbursts, in the public arena he became a master of disguise. He hid his selfishness, his hatred, and his envy of others' success.

The difference between the public and the private Jack eventually led both of his children to close their hearts and spirits to his input. His wife, outwardly loyal, experienced inward depression and oppression. And Jack himself? You guessed it. He was miserable. He knew he was living a horrible, painful lie.

How did he escape this cycle of hatred? His book explains that freedom came only through God's intervention. Jack and his wife attended a conference on emotional healing so she could receive the help he believed she needed. Suddenly, a platform speaker asked God to give His love to any men present—to provide the love their fathers had been unable to give. Immediately, his heavenly Father's presence, compassion, and acceptance fell upon Jack as an overwhelming flood.

That prayer and experience changed Jack Frost's life. He finally understood the lie that drove his actions and responses. He'd sought the love of his earthly father when all along he had access to a much deeper, much more powerful love. His Father loved him. He mattered to God.

## **Common Need, Uncommon Love**

The boy who spent all day cleaning his father's shop. The orphans who can't form healthy relationships because of their deep father-wounds. The fishing captain/pastor compelled to perform out of a desire to please an impossible-to-please dad. The twelve disciples who sat around a Passover table. What do they have in common?

As I also reflected on the prayer that changed Jack's life, it all came together. *Each one needed to know the love of a Father.* You see, those orphans in Missouri—and in Mexico, and anywhere else—know they live in an institution for a reason. They have no home because they have no father. Without a father, they have no identity, no significance. They spend their days in search of who they are.

The real or imagined rejection from their fathers has left them relationally handicapped. They live their lives in constant search of love, yet find themselves unable to love God or others as they should. Despite their self-protective masks, deep down inside, they know. Something's missing, and they'll do almost anything, go almost anywhere in an effort to find it.

Deep down inside, Satan knew. He knew what he'd lost. He saw what he became. His bid to take his Father's place failed, so he set about opposing Him in as many ways as he could. Scripture calls Satan the "father of lies" (John 8:44). And what better way for him to oppose a Father whose name is truth (John 14:6)?

The only way an orphan can feel good about himself is to bring others into an orphan state, too. And that statement captures Satan's evil intent.

God loves you so much that He sent His only Son to die for you (John 3:16). He longs to bring you into a father-child relationship. You matter to God. So how does our enemy counteract this truth? By

doing his best to spread the biggest lie, one that produces more and more orphans. It comes in many forms, all with a similar sound and an identical effect: *You don't matter. You don't have a father who loves you. You're a loser. Your ideas are stupid. And Nobody cares about you.*

## **A Tale of Two Orphans**

One of Christ's most famous parables concerns two brothers. Like many brothers, these two were complete opposites. The older brother was capable, responsible, and self-reliant. His father could count on him to get a job done and get it done right. He showed up when you needed him and when you didn't. He took his responsibilities seriously. He took *life* seriously.

The younger brother, however, didn't take much of anything seriously. You know his type. He'd take a wild idea and run. His philosophy: "It's easier to ask forgiveness than to ask permission." The younger brother, like many younger brothers, was the center of attention, the life of the party, and (as his brother saw things) a spoiled brat.

One day, the younger brother needed some cash. Instead of requesting a few shekels, he went for it all. He demanded his inheritance early by thirty years or so. This was a blow not only to his father, but to Jewish custom as well. Nonetheless, the father, as fathers often do, granted his son's request.

Maybe you know the story. Maybe you've lived it yourself. The son took the money and ran as far away as he could. Determined not to follow in his father's footsteps, he drank, he partied, and he chased wild women. He even did what no good Jewish boy should ever do: he lived high on the hog.

But do you know the flip side? The older brother stayed home. He didn't ask for his inheritance. He didn't ask for anything, at least not right away. He plowed the fields. He took care of the herds. He did it

all. He may have muttered under his breath about his spoiled younger brother, but he kept working as though his life depended on it. And in his mind, it did.

And then came a sudden turn of events. The younger brother went from high on the hog to the bottom of the pork barrel. Desperate, he took a job with the worst possible employer for a young Jewish boy: a Gentile pig farmer.

Mud, muck, and manure make great eye-openers. *What a life! Dad's poorest slaves have it better than I do. I get it. I'll go home and throw myself on his mercy. If I can't be a son, I'll be a slave. But I'm going home. Home to my father.*

Meanwhile, back at the kosher ranch, Dad was waiting, watching, and praying. We know this because Scripture tells us he saw his son “while he was still a long way off” (Luke 15:20b). The father ran to his son, embraced him, and ordered his servants to prepare a celebration. Party time!

Party time, that was, for everyone except the older brother. Out sweating in the field, he heard the reverberating thump of the drums, the rhythmic pounding of feet. He finished his final chores and hurried up to the main tent to see what was happening. *Did I forget Mom's birthday? Or maybe—did Dad finally decide to reward me for all that extra work?*

*What?* He rubbed his eyes. *Surely not. Dad would never—but wait. It is him! That little twerp's come running home to Daddy. And now, just look at him. He's got Dad's ring. They've killed the calf I was saving for the temple potluck, and they didn't even invite me.*

*Just wait. I've got something to say about this. Just wait.*

His father's response matched his godly character. He spoke as gently as he could to his disgruntled older son, but he couldn't stop his celebration of the younger. He viewed both his boys through eyes of

love and compassion. He saw their highs and lows, their successes and failures. And he did what God created fathers to do: he loved them.

## **The Rest of the Story**

Although both brothers had a father, they lived as orphans. Somehow, sometime, a shadow had crept across their hearts. The younger brother responded as a rebel who turned his back on his dad. If Dad said it was black, he knew it was white. If Dad wanted him to try it, he made sure to avoid it. The crux of his rebellion came when he snatched his inheritance and got out of town. The shadow of the Orphan Heart convinced him to make the choice: *I'll take care of myself—by myself.* With that one dark decision, he moved himself from life as a son to the life—the desperate, broken, unlovely life—of a slave.

But do you see that the older brother had an Orphan Heart, too? Although he never left the father physically, he'd made his emotional departure long before. He poured out all his labor, all his obedience, all his time in an effort to prove to his father that he was good enough, smart enough, and nice enough to be treated as a son. And in the process, he made himself a slave.

The common element that ties these two different types of orphans together is the key God showed me. It's the common element between the orphan Walker Moore and the orphans who come from Russia or inner-city Nuevo Laredo. The common element is the biggest lie: the lie that says your father doesn't love you. This lie says you don't matter, that you deserve to live as a slave rather than a beloved family member.

The Orphan Heart affects us all in different ways because we're different types of people. Some end up like the younger son. We grab all we can. We take things by force because we can't trust anyone else. Others end up like the older brother. We give and serve others on the outside but remain bitter, angry, and explosive within.

In spite of their actions and responses, both brothers had a father who loved them. Because they bought into the biggest lie, they both made wrong choices. They didn't have to live as orphans, but both of them did just that.

Because I bought into the same lie, I spent many years living an orphan lifestyle. Until I understood the depth, breadth, and length of the Father's love, I believed I had to prove myself in every circumstance. Like the older brother, my perfect exterior hid an angry, bitter interior.

So what happened to change me? No, my earthly dad didn't throw me a big party (although he did other things that showed his love). But he never wrapped his arms around me or announced to others how proud he was of his beloved son.

So how did I grow to understand a love deeper than anything my father could give? How did I learn to escape the lie? How can you? If "everybody's got a hungry heart," how can you escape it? How do you learn to embrace true freedom from the Orphan Heart and its effects? How can you learn the truth that says you have a Father who loves you—and then live as though you believe it?

We'll spend the rest of this book exploring the answers to those questions. I pray you'll join me in the journey: a journey away from the Orphan Heart and into the truth that will set you free. A journey that prepares you to love others in the way God intended all along. A journey that says you matter to God, and you matter to others, too.

**Author's Note:** At the end of each chapter, you'll find an interactive feature called "The Battle." Escaping the lie involves spiritual warfare, and these tools and suggestions coordinate with the teaching of each chapter to help you in your journey to freedom from the Orphan Heart. Please take time to read, process, and participate in each one.

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**The Battle:** Ask God to free your heart from negative memories of your father or other authority figures. If this is an area of special struggle, you may wish to consult a Christian counselor.