

secrets

a true story of addiction,
infidelity, and second chances

Jonathan Daugherty

“Sexual addiction is devastating—to the person who is addicted as well as to those who love them. It’s a difficult topic to address, but one that has to be met head-on. Secrets must be revealed for healing to occur. If you or someone you care for is struggling with sexual addiction, take hope in Jonathan Daugherty’s transparent example.”

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“Finally, a book that poignantly portrays the honest struggles of a man’s heart, the desperate cries of his soul, the longings of his hopes and dreams, and the unending grace of the God that saves him. Jonathan gives a step-by-step account of the bondage he experienced as a result of hiding and what it took to find the truth about himself. *Secrets* brings it all into the Light!”

Lee Preston, Director & Counselor, Shadow of His Wings Ministry

“It’s no secret. There is always a different kind of credibility, and a different kind of hope, when you hear the words of someone who has been to the dark side and returned. Jonathan Daugherty has been there, but God himself brought him back. If you want hope and insight for your life, a loved one, or your ministry—why not get it from one who has experienced the solution? Why not learn how to escape the death-roll of a life trapped in the chains of secrets? Help is here.”

Dr. Fred Lybrand, Senior Pastor, Northeast Bible Church, San Antonio

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A TRUE STORY OF ADDICTION,
INFIDELITY, AND SECOND CHANCES

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To my wife, Elaine.

You show me that, in spite of my history of keeping secrets, true
love conquers all. I love you, and that is no secret.

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Acknowledgments

This book has been my first venture into the world of “real” publishing. In other words, it has been unfamiliar territory. Any journey into the unfamiliar is a scary one, riddled with various degrees of anxiety concerning all the uncertainties ahead. Despite all the unknowns, I am glad I took this journey. My knowledge has been increased and my horizons of dreams expanded. Yet, the journey never would have started (or finished) without the help of some key people along the way.

The seed for the start of this journey was planted in me even as a child because of the value and importance my parents placed on reading. Although I wasn't a heavy reader as a kid, I have grown in my appreciation of the written word over the years. This desire to communicate through words was planted in me by my parents, and I am grateful for their influence.

There isn't nearly enough room in this book (especially in a short little thank-you section) for me to adequately express my appreciation to my wife, Elaine, for all that she has contributed in my life. She has patiently and graciously been my suitable helper through the ups and many downs of our relationship. She has offered valuable insights into the editing and polishing of this manuscript. She has picked me up when I felt down and didn't think this project would ever come to completion. She has cheered for me, challenged me, and comforted me in all of life's adventures. Thank you, Elaine.

I want to thank all my friends who were willing to read through the very rough drafts of this manuscript and for their wise insights offered along the way. Also, my dear friends at our church who encouraged me to keep pressing on, never allowing me to believe this wasn't a story that needed to be told.

A very special thank you to Jeff Gerke for his insightful editing. Jeff, I appreciate your honesty and uncompromising integrity in telling me like it is.

Finally, I want to thank God for mercifully bringing me to a point in my life where I could tell the story, no longer bound by the shame of my past. I thank him for giving me the ability and desire to write. I pray I use these gifts in a manner that brings others to a point of brokenness and surrender, a place where they can know Life.

I am glad I stepped into the unfamiliar. I hope all who read this book will gain that same courage.

Introduction: A Letter from the Author

Dear Reader, I know we haven't met, but I hope we can become friends—fast. The reason we ought to become friends is because what I have written in this book isn't really for strangers. It is the kind of information one might only feel comfortable sharing with a close, personal friend. So, let's be friends, OK?

I wrote this book for two main reasons. First, I wanted to share the many secrets I have kept over the years and uncover how they got there and why I hid them. I think we all keep secrets, but we don't always know how they got there and why we keep choosing to cover them up. By sharing my story my hope is that it will help you understand yourself better, thus encouraging you to bravely enter those dark corners of your soul that have grown musty and stale from years of untouched secrets.

The second reason I wrote this book was to invite you to embark on a new journey, a new life that doesn't hide who you really are. We are all prone to want to hide, whether it is something "small" like having a crush on someone in high school or something "big" like lying to your spouse about an affair, pornography, or cheating on your taxes (yes, I consider that a big one). But by keeping secrets our lives tend to drift off course. We hide our flaws and overly accentuate our strengths, believing

this will enhance our lives and relationships. Yet in doing so we never find true, lasting fulfillment. That is why I want to invite you to a new direction in life, one that is not always comfortable or fun, but does provide opportunity for experiencing true contentment and peace.

This book is very personal, maybe too personal. But I wrote it this way on purpose. I want you to see how bumpy, jagged, and unpredictable my life has been—just like yours.

I want you to know that you are not alone on this journey called life. I want to embolden you to reach in and deal with the pain and confusion in your life, to reach up and connect with the Lover of your soul, and eventually to reach out and share who you really are with those you love, those who need to know the real you.

This book is not a “teaching book” *per se*, although I am sure there will be nuggets of insight you gain along the way (like the truth that keeping secrets hinders your ability to connect with others on an emotionally significant level). In fact, I have included at the end of each chapter a short segment entitled *Living in the Light* that will share relevant teachable points designed to encourage and equip you in uncovering your own secrets so that you might live free from them.

But beyond these helpful teaching points, I like to think of this book as more of a “story book,” simply inviting you to peek in on the story of my life, in hopes that such a viewing might light a spark in your own heart to live from this moment forward with no more regrets. I really want to inspire you to embrace life and live it richly, not bound by secrets, perfectionism, or sin.

One other note about this book that you might need to know is that, while I deal with many “heavy” topics (i.e. pornography, addiction, betrayal, lying, death, etc.), I do not lose my sense of humor, albeit a somewhat dry, sarcastic wit. I hope

this doesn't offend you, but instead provides an appropriate balance to dealing with some of life's most difficult circumstances and events. Just thought you should know this before you dive in. I am glad we are friends (that really was fast!). Now you can read my book.

No more secrets,
Jonathan

(By the way, my birthday is March 7th . . . and I *love* chocolate.)

The Secret

I wish it never happened. I remember the day very well. It was 1986 and I was twelve years old. A friend and I were playing in the woods behind his house. It was a hot, steamy summer day. We were pretending to be Rambo, saving captive villagers and waxing the enemy. It felt like boyhood innocence at its best. Then it happened.

“Hey, Jonathan, are you thirsty?” “You bet I am.”

We headed off through the woods, back toward my friend’s house. We swung our play rifles by our sides, kicking rocks along the way, heading from one point to another in a zigzag manner as adolescent boys are prone to do. My friend was walking a few paces in front of me when he suddenly stopped, turned around, and with an expression on his face like he just calculated the square root of pi, said, “Oh, I just remembered something I wanted to show you.”

At that, we changed direction and began marching out into an open field covered with tall alfalfa grass. I still remember the musty smell of that grass, so thick I felt as if I could choke on it in the air. The grass coarsely slapped at our jeans as we waded our way out into the field. I remember how hot it was as we walked out from under the cover of the trees. I felt the sun beat down on my neck and sizzle the beads of sweat as they formed there.

As soon as we entered the field, my friend picked up the pace of his walking. I, however, maintained my slower pace,

content to take my time, not thinking there should be any hurry to what we were going to do—whatever that might be.

As my friend went on ahead I could see that he was walking toward a tree stump in the middle of the field. My innocent mind began to imagine what “treasures” that stump might hold. Maybe it contained the carcass of a raccoon or wild dog. Or maybe there was some hidden jewelry or other loot left by Gypsies. (Sure, Gypsies in central Texas. Who knew? This is the way my twelve-year-old mind worked.) Nonetheless, I simply kept walking where my friend was leading.

My friend reached the tree stump first and turned to make sure I was still following. He waited eagerly for me at the stump, and as I got closer I noticed a wry smile stretch across his face. I thought nothing of it, but when I reached him I did get more excited as I anticipated the unveiling of the hidden treasure that lie beneath the stump.

“Are you ready?”

“Sure, I guess. Ready for what?” I said. “Ready for this?”

My friend reached his hand down into the tree stump, feeling around for something. All I could hear was what sounded like dry leaves crackling. Then, triumphantly, he lifted his hand out of the stump, grasping what looked like a tube of glossy paper. I couldn’t quite make out what it was. It appeared like it might be a magazine or binder of some sort. He turned toward me, stretched out the cylinder, and opened what he held.

There have been moments in my life that have attempted to define me as a person, either positively or negatively. I couldn’t always see these moments coming. They just seemed to “appear” without warning. And when such a moment arrived, if I was unprepared to deal with it, I simply got swallowed by it. And, thus, the moment changed me, or at the very least changed my

direction. In the case of what I encountered in that open field, my direction was certainly going to be changed.

I am sure my friend had no idea that what he was doing would impact my life the way it eventually did. He never could have imagined in that instant how this seemingly ignorable moment in history would obsessively drive my life for the following thirteen years. Moments do matter. And some matter more than others. This moment crippled me in ways I couldn't realize at the time.

In order to understand the magnitude of this moment, I need to share an incident from earlier in my life. I was six years old. My family was visiting my mom's parents. I loved my Granny's house. It always smelled good, like something sweet was around every corner (except the bathrooms, where it always smelled like old people).

One day I was playing in the corner of the living room while my parents and grandparents were talking. I don't remember what toys I was playing with, but I remember becoming interested in the grown-up conversation on the other side of the room.

“Heaven.”

“Hell.”

“Sin.”

“Jesus.”

These were the words I heard as they talked. Periodically, I would toss a question their way, not so they would direct their attention toward me, but so I could understand this story they were telling. What they said sounded so real, so attractive. They spoke of all the bad things people did, and called this sin. They talked about God loving us, his precious creation. They shared how God's heart broke because of our sin, but that he had a plan to fix it. The plan was Jesus paying the penalty we deserved for our sin by dying on a cross and coming back to life. Then they

explained how anyone who believed in Jesus would live forever in heaven. I wanted in!

Without drawing attention to myself, I slipped out of the living room and hurried down the hallway. I darted into the bathroom and locked the door behind me. My heart was beating fast, I was nervous about talking to God. But I wanted to go to heaven. I wanted all my wrongs to be covered. I walked over to the toilet and knelt down. With my left arm draped over the toilet seat and my head bowed just below the rim, I prayed.

“God, this is Jonathan. I know I do bad things that you don’t like. I heard my parents talking about the plan you made to fix my bad stuff. I don’t want to go to hell for being bad. I believe Jesus died for all the bad I’ve done. Will you save me?”

Nothing happened. My heartbeat did slow down a bit, but I didn’t see angels or hear voices. The only sound was coming from water slowly dripping in the toilet. I then realized where I was, the smell of old people jolting me back into the moment. I unlocked the door, walked back down the hallway to the living room, and continued playing in the corner. I had no idea of the significance of my seemingly inconsequential moment in the bathroom. I didn’t realize I had just become the newest citizen of heaven.

For several weeks after my bathroom conversion, I prayed every night for Jesus to save me. I kept thinking that I was doing something wrong. I just knew I was supposed to *feel* something. But each time I prayed, I didn’t experience anything out of the ordinary. I eventually told my parents what I had done and they were very excited for me, smiles from ear to ear. This helped me feel better. After all, I didn’t figure they would be that excited if I had “done it wrong.”

If there was anything I did notice change, it was my awareness of right and wrong. It seemed I became more sensitive in recognizing when something was wrong, like there was an

internal nudge or twinge when something in life wasn't lining up quite right. While I didn't recognize it immediately, or even know that it had anything to do with what happened in my Granny's bathroom, it was there.

And it was this change that caused the moment with my friend in that field as a twelve-year-old kid to leave such an indelible mark on my life.

Pornography.

That is what my friend pulled from the tree stump and so gleefully presented to me. "Pretty cool, huh?" my friend beamed.

I thought my heart stopped when he cracked open those pages. The image printed on that first page I saw was immediately seared into my brain. It is still locked away in the dark recesses of my mind, and could probably be recalled if I chose to pull it up again. I had never seen anything like it, and it caused some very strange reactions in me. Immediately upon seeing the porn I felt the urge to look over my shoulder, as if I knew I was getting away with something. Guilt seemed to spring to life in me and push me toward a "run for the hills" response. But I didn't run. I stared. I wanted to look, even as the guilt pounded at my mind. I felt a rush course through my body that felt amazing, exciting, and arousing (even though I didn't know what that meant at the time). What my body was feeling quickly overpowered any sense of guilt I had, and I craved seeing more.

"Yeah, pretty cool," was all I could utter in response to my friend's question.

We thumbed through the magazine for another few minutes, trying to make out images on some pages that had been rained on. I tried to play it cool, responding to the pictures by taking cues from my friend since this was all new territory for me. But what I really wanted to do was shout Holy cow! This

is the wildest feeling I have ever had! My head is spinning, and I'm teetering on the line between vomiting and ecstasy, but this is amazing. How can I reproduce this rush tomorrow and the next day? Instead, I coolly nodded my head, giggled when my friend did, and focused on keeping my jaw from dropping too closely to the ground.

Eventually, my friend rolled up the magazine and stuffed it back down inside the tree stump for some other neighborhood kids to find. We then began to walk away from the stump, through the field, heading in the direction of his house for something to drink. But I wasn't the same. Something had changed. As we marched off that field, I was oblivious to the grass brushing against my jeans or the sun scorching my neck. Instead, my mind was spinning with the naked images I had just seen. In that moment, innocence had been lost. A door to another place had been opened and I had walked through it. I possessed something I did not have before: a secret. And it was a big one.

I wish it never happened.

Living in the Light

What have you experienced in your life that you regret? Is there something that remains hidden, something that happened that frightened you or hurt you? Is there anything that you have gone through in your life where you say today, "I wish it never happened?"

The fundamental first step to living life "in the light" is to acknowledge and confess those things that remain in the dark. I invite you to spend some time conducting a "historical inventory" of your life, maybe even journaling some of your secrets and the experiences you faced. Then, in the presence of a trusted friend, family member, counselor, or clergyman, share your story.

You don't have to share it all at once, but the journey to a life of no more regrets starts by bringing to light what has been in the dark. You can do this!