

CHAPTER 1 THE NIGHT OF DISCOVERY

“Is Papa in jail?”
—Josh Worrell

Gary:

The police officer tapped on my car window, motioning for me to get out of the car. As I opened the car door, I noticed another officer standing behind the car, watching me. As I stepped out of the car, the first officer asked me my name and then said, “I’ll need to see your drivers’ license.”

“My name is Gary Worrell,” I responded as I handed him my license.

“What are you doing here?” was the officer’s next question. I fumbled for words. I noticed him motioning to the second officer to come closer to me, as if I might make a move that could be considered threatening. Was I being treated like a criminal?

“What’s the problem with sitting in my car, talking to a woman?” I inquired.

“It didn’t look like talking to me,” the officer replied. “You are under arrest for the solicitation of a prostitute. I need you to face your car, place your hands on the roof, and spread your legs.”

I had seen similar scenes play out on countless television programs, but how could this be happening to me? The officer began to read me my rights: “Gary, you have the right to remain silent...” I didn’t hear the rest of it as terror descended into my soul.

The day had started out just like any other day, working at my corporate consulting position. The day had dragged on, uneventful and boring, fueling the uneasiness within me. Work brought no satisfaction or contentment. I rarely thought about any one thing for very long. However, my restless mind constantly came back to one theme that day: how to satisfy my craving for sexual gratification.

Lately I had been finding myself more and more often in places and situations that were neither respectable nor appropriate, frequenting strip clubs and parts of town where the value of a human being was equated to a few bucks for a trick or a trade. My compulsion to gratify my lust tore me apart as I struggled within. I was lost in an unquenchable striving to find a thread of inner fulfillment or acceptance. Meanwhile, the sense of emptiness I felt as I tried to satisfy these sexual desires was overwhelming.

At the end of my workday, that inner struggle led me to the streets in search of a woman's company. Deep inside I knew I was digging myself into a deep spiritual and moral dilemma with my actions, but I quickly put that nagging thought out of my mind.

I soon found myself in the red-light district of town. I was driving the streets when I caught a glimpse of a woman's long, shiny blonde hair as she stood on the side of the road. I told myself we would just talk as she climbed in the car.

The officer pulling my arms behind my back jolted me back into the moment. He placed the handcuffs on each wrist. Everything was happening so fast, I couldn't think straight. Fear-ridden thoughts bombarded my mind: *How can this be happening? I'm an upstanding citizen with no criminal record. I'm a Christian with a family and a good job. Where are they taking me? What will I tell my wife? How will I explain this to her or to my son? How will I explain this to my family and friends? How long will they keep me locked up?*

As the police officer placed me in the van, my mind began to swirl out of control and fear took over within me. I started to sweat, and my breathing was labored. I tried to take a deep breath to calm myself, but it was as if my lungs had weights in them. I started to justify why I was downtown talking to this woman. I began formulating my story. I told myself that I was just trying to help her get out of a hard place in her life and find a better future. I was going to take her to the rescue mission to get help. I was concerned for her soul and her welfare. I was completely blind to what was happening inside of me. I was trying to rationalize away the fact that I was on my way to jail—but that didn't change the facts.

Once the van arrived at the police substation, the officers took me, still handcuffed, into an area where they fingerprinted and photographed me and then removed all my personal belongings. They led me to a cold, gray cinderblock holding cell with nothing in it except a stainless steel slab they called a bed.

Slumping down onto the cold steel bed, all I could do was beg God for mercy and forgiveness. I cried and cried until there were no more tears left, and then I tried to pray. But my prayers were drowned out by the desperate thoughts that raced through my mind. *How can I expect God to remove all consequences? Do I have to face the penalty of my behavior? But how could God allow this to happen? Why hadn't He warned me so I wouldn't have been arrested?* I even began to question as to whether there really was a God. The more I grappled with these issues, the more reality began to slip further away.

I didn't want to believe that the consequences of my choices had finally caught up with me. I'd been doing this for so long, without any thought of how it was affecting me, my marriage, and my family.

After I was processed into the court system, the police transferred me to the city jail downtown. Transported to the jail in a windowless van, I had no idea of where I was going or what the facility looked like. I was told this building was the overnight or short-term detention center for all those accused of violating the law or awaiting a court hearing.

Before the officers placed me in what was called the "holding tank," they said I could make one phone call. Terror gripped my soul. I knew the person I needed to call was my wife Sharon. I dialed our home number, knowing I couldn't hide the fact that I was in jail for the solicitation of a prostitute.

Sharon:

The telephone rang. It was my husband Gary, and the fear in his voice was alarming. "There's been a big misunderstanding, Sharon. I've been arrested!"

"*Arrested!!!* For what?" I exclaimed.

As I waited for Gary to answer, I felt like I couldn't breathe. After a long pause, he answered hesitantly, "The charge is '*solicitation of a prostitute.*'"

"Solicitation of a prostitute?" I cried in disbelief, and as I turned around, I realized our adolescent son, Josh, was listening to every word. I went into my bedroom and closed the door.

I felt myself slipping into the kind of shock that happens when someone you love dies. Attempting to grasp the reality of what Gary was telling me, I kept asking questions without giving him time to answer.

"Sharon, it's a misunderstanding. I didn't know she was a prostitute. I was trying to help her," he explained in a panicked voice. "You *have* to believe me!"

I desperately wanted to believe he was telling the truth. My heart pounded in my chest, its thud echoing in my ears. I wanted to step away and pretend this nightmare wasn't happening. A few moments before, my life had been comfortably intact. I had a Christian husband with a good job who was home for dinner every night. He was the best friend I'd ever had. We seemed to have good communication, and although the marriage wasn't perfect, I

considered it way above average. Our activities centered primarily around the church, where I had met Gary years earlier.

This doesn't happen with Christians, does it? In a second's time, my thoughts raced through the gamut of our 19 years of marriage as my world began to break apart. There had been unspoken questions about Gary's odd behavior, but I hadn't known what to do with them.

I shook off the mental haze I'd lapsed into as I heard Gary's voice: "Sharon, are you still there?"

"I'm here. Gary, what's going to happen now?" I asked.

"I'll see a judge in the morning," he said, starting to choke up. "The car has been impounded..." The fear I heard in his voice as it trailed off added to my own insecurity. Desperately I tried to stuff down the terror that was rising up inside of me.

The end of the conversation was a blur as my thoughts kept racing. I had a sick feeling in the pit of my stomach, yet I felt no emotion. I was numb. Thirty years in the church had left me totally unprepared for dealing with this kind of crisis.

I walked out of my bedroom to talk with my son, wondering how much he had heard. "Josh, come and sit down. We need to talk." We walked into the living room, and he took a seat across from me.

Groping for a way to broach this difficult conversation, I said, "I think you heard me say that Papa has been arrested."

"Is Papa in jail?" Josh questioned. "When is he coming home?"

"Papa is there overnight. What else did you hear?"

"What is soliciting a prostitute?" Josh asked.

I winced with pain. With my whole being, I wished Josh hadn't heard that. He was only 13. How could I explain to my son what I didn't understand myself? I looked deep into Josh's eyes, searching inside myself for the wherewithal to answer his question. I chose my words carefully as I began. "It means that the police think Papa was paying a woman to have sex with him." I studied my son's face for a response.

“Did he do what they said he did?” Josh asked.

“Papa says that it’s a misunderstanding and that he didn’t do it. Right now, we’ll choose to believe him, because we don’t have enough information to do otherwise.” I cut the conversation short, not wanting to go any further with that line of questioning. “Josh,” I said, “I need you to finish your homework and get ready for bed,” as I walked out of the room to collect my thoughts.

