

Set Free *to* Live Free

Breaking Through the
7 Lies Women Tell Themselves

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11 12 13 14 15 16 17 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Contents

Acknowledgments 9

Part 1 Freedom Is a Choice

1. Strange Medicine 13
2. A Prescription for Living Free 21

Part 2 The Seven Lies Women Tell Themselves

▶ Lie #1: Perfection

3. Perfection Is the Goal 36
4. I Am Perfectly Imperfect 47

▶ Lie #2: Envy

5. I Would Be Happy Too If I Had Her Life 58
6. I Am Too Unique for Comparisons 68

▶ Lie #3: Image

7. If I Do This, I Can Look Like That 79
8. My Body, My Temple, God's Choice 91

▶ **Lie #4: Balance**

- 9. Life Is an All-or-None Activity 105
- 10. My Balanced Life Requires Addition and Subtraction 116

▶ **Lie #5: Control**

- 11. Being in Control Is Better Than Spontaneity 130
- 12. Spontaneity Is God's Opportunity to Surprise Me 142

▶ **Lie #6: Emotions**

- 13. Emotional Imbalance Is Only for Crazy Women 154
- 14. My Transparency Opens the Door for Soul Connections 165

▶ **Lie #7: Limits**

- 15. Everything Comes with Conditions 180
- 16. My Only Limitations Are the Ties I Allow to Bind Me 191

Part 3 The Free Woman's Creed

- 17. The Diamond Society 205

Eight-Week Group Study Guide 213

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PART **1**

Freedom Is a Choice

1

Strange Medicine

“Is this the last patient?” I asked my nurse, Shannon.

The lingering caffeine high of my morning coffee pushed me toward completing the morning roster of patients. I flipped through the notes for my patient in exam room seventeen.

“What is her complaint?”

“She says she’s here for a checkup, nothing more,” Shannon offered as she collected charts from the finished bin.

I may be able to have lunch with my husband today, I thought as I walked through the door, unaware that the next few minutes would change how I practice medicine.

“I don’t know why I’m here,” Cameron sputtered, her words racing out in one breath. “I thought maybe there would be something that could help me. I should probably leave before I waste any more of your time.”

Cameron’s thirty-eight-year-old frame was ample but carried a heaviness that had nothing to do with physical weight. This was her third office visit with me. The first two were basic visits detailing her general health issues. High blood

pressure, headaches, and weight were her main areas of concern. Nothing about her prior visits prepared me for this one. The atmosphere around today's visit had a tangible charge that threatened to ignite at any moment.

"Why don't you tell me what's going on. Who knows—maybe I will be able to help. You'll never know unless you give me a chance." I smiled patiently.

"I think I'm depressed," Cameron confessed. "I just don't find any happiness in my life anymore. It seems that everyone else is enjoying their life while I just exist day-to-day."

"I understand," I said with empathy.

"How could you possibly understand?" she spat out with a shudder in her voice. A single tear betrayed the personal boundaries she attempted to maintain. "You've got it all! How can you possibly understand what it feels like to go to bed beside a man who doesn't find you physically attractive? How could you know what it's like to feel like an outsider, like you are not good enough? When I pick up my kids at school all the other women look at me like I'm worthless, like I'm not even visible."

Self-pity moved into open anger as her voice rose with each word. "I just don't see the point of even trying. Nothing I do is ever good enough. I try to be like those other women. I really do want to lose weight, but it's just not easy for me. I don't know what I am doing wrong. Why can't I be happy and have friends like everyone else? Why does my life have to be so hard?"

By now Cameron had relinquished all pretense of control, and the tears flowed freely down her face. Years of frustration washed out of her psyche, if only for those few brief moments of transparency. The intimacy of the emotions on display was in direct contrast to the coldness of the small medical exam room. I placed my hand on Cameron's shoulder in an attempt

to comfort her. But before I could speak she shrugged off my gesture and said, “I don’t need your pity.”

Cameron’s eyes never left the ground. I realized that throughout our whole interaction she had not looked directly at me, not even once. She sat with her hands in her lap, silent. Not a glance in my direction. Fortunately, Cameron was my last patient for that morning and had happened into my life at a time when I actually could help her, but not in the way she expected.

“No, you don’t need my pity; you are doing a good job pitying yourself,” I said with a calmness that surprised even me. I didn’t say it to be spiteful but just as a matter of fact.

My statement caught Cameron off guard. Her eyes were like large brown marbles, glossy from the pain they echoed. Obviously I had hit a soft spot, and in her fragile state she was not able to contain herself. It was as if in one sharp blow I cut through the fragments that held her together. The sobs that left her body caused her entire being to shake from the force.

I don’t know if we stayed in that position for five seconds or five minutes, but it felt like hours. Silently I watched the young mother and wife digest the strange medicine I was administering. *Please, God, help her receive this the right way*, I silently prayed.

As the sobs quieted down to sniffles, I handed her a box of tissues and for the first time Cameron looked directly at me. “I don’t know what’s wrong with me. I’m never like this. I’m not some emotional crazy woman. It’s just been a hard few months.”



Cameron and her family had lived in the area for ten months. She and Roger had two children, Rachel who had just turned five and Jacob who was three. Five years ago Cameron

quit her job to become a stay-at-home mom. She loved her kids and had not regretted for one second her decision to be available to them around the clock. But with Rachel starting kindergarten and Jacob going to preschool, Cameron knew she needed to transition into the next phase of her life.

Cameron was excited that she had done such a great job raising confident and happy kids. She was ready to find a part-time job while the kids were at school. She had felt certain she wouldn't have any problem landing a job with her excellent work history, but five resumes had not elicited a single callback. *They must have misplaced my applications*, she thought. However, calling one of the agencies confirmed her worst fears.

The man on the other end of the line stated in a clipped voice, "I'm sorry, but you've been out of the business for over five years, and we need someone with current experience." As she placed the phone back on the hook, a wave of nausea overtook her. She sat with her head resting on the toilet seat, a feeling of defeat washing over her.

The next morning she headed to the school library where she volunteered a few days a week in an attempt to meet new friends. But the other moms treated her as if she were the help and not an equal. It was as if they were able to look directly past her. No hellos, no invitations to coffee or lunch. Today was her second month volunteering, and she was determined to meet someone.

As a group of volunteer moms set off to reshelv books, Cameron approached one young mother with a daughter in Rachel's class. "Hi, I'm Cameron," she muttered.

"Oh, hi," responded the young woman with a giggle. "Is this your first day volunteering in the library? Why do you think they put some books up so high? How could a child ever reach them?" And with that she marched off to regroup

with her friends, waving as she said, “Bye Carol, it was nice meeting you.” Despite the fact that the young woman had forgotten her name, Cameron was more disturbed that the woman hadn’t even told her *her* name. *Am I that insignificant?* she thought.

Roger returned home that night to find the house disheveled and Cameron munching on chips with the kids. His glib statement about the dirty dishes in the sink was not meant as a personal attack, but that’s how Cameron saw it. Dinner was a silent exchange as Cameron mentally pored over all that had gone wrong. That evening Roger fled into the living room to watch television.

Cameron put the kids to bed and began her nightly routine. Her glance fell upon her reflection in the mirror. Where had those lines come from between her eyes? When did her hips begin to spread like her mother’s? Why was it that everyone else seemed able to bounce back to their prepregnancy bodies but she had to deal with her C-section bulge? Life just didn’t seem fair. She did her best to freshen up. She knew it had been over a week since she and Roger had been intimate. *At least he still loves me*, she thought. She slipped on the chemise he always complimented her on, followed by a splash of perfume.



Roger knew something was wrong, but he didn’t know how to deal with it. He spotted Cameron as she approached the bed. He always loved it when she wore that chemise but knew tonight wasn’t the time to try to approach her. *Cameron is definitely not in the mood for sex*, he thought. So instead of starting another fight, he opted to keep silent and merely said, “Good night, love.”



Loved is exactly what Cameron did not feel. Not from Roger, not from God, and not even from herself. As she closed her eyes, she thought about cancelling her doctor's appointment for the following morning. *What's the use?* she thought. *Oh well, if nothing else maybe she can give me something to help make me feel better.*



“What exactly is it that’s causing you so much distress?” I interjected. “What area of your life do you feel is weighing you down?”

“That’s just it,” Cameron began. “I have no idea what my problem is, but life just does not seem to work out for me. It’s not just one area; it’s every aspect of my life. I had so many plans and dreams growing up. The older I get, the further away I get from making those dreams a reality. It seems that no matter how hard I try, I just can’t make my plans happen the way I envision them.”

Cameron was absentmindedly twirling a curly strand of hair around her finger as she stared at a landscape scene on the opposite wall. The tears had ceased, replaced by a solemn resolve that her fate was sealed. Life was not fair and she would always end up on the short side of the deal.

This young woman sitting across from me was in some ways a mirror reflection of my own personal life. We both were married with young kids. We were both in our late thirties. The main difference was our view about our lives. Cameron had incorporated a wrong set of personal beliefs into the tapestry of her life. This faulty belief system was choking the joy out of her, mentally keeping her from being open to experiencing and enjoying the unique elements of her life.

Like bacteria, these mental lies had gained access through an open wound in her life. Initially they may only have affected

one aspect of her life, but daily they grew stronger until ultimately they had begun to weave themselves around vital areas. Her health, joy, and self-confidence, as well as her ability to love and be loved, could now feel the tightening grip of these mental ties. Before she realized what was happening, they had started draining the life out of her life.

“Cameron, do you want to get better, or have you completely given up hope of being happy?” I asked as compassionately as I could for such an in-your-face question. I knew there was a fifty percent chance she’d grab her bag and leave the office, but there was an equal chance she would give me the opportunity to help her.

Cameron sat motionless for over a minute. When the emotions of the past weeks subsided, she honestly contemplated the question. “I do want to be better,” she said as her lips slanted up in the faintest of smiles. “I haven’t completely given up hope yet, but I don’t know how much more I can take.”

I beamed. “Good. I don’t have a magic pill that’s going to make everything better overnight. What I am offering you is an opportunity to heal an area of your mind that has been wounded and bound.”

Cameron’s face yielded to a look of confusion. “What are you talking about?”

“I’m talking about freeing your mind from the lies that have caused you to see life from a disadvantaged perspective. These lies have become a mental tie, limiting your ability to enjoy your life. You’re right, you are not crazy. Nor do I believe that at this time you need a medication, or at least not in the sense you were expecting. What I am prescribing for you are five stages of freedom. Navigating each stage brings you one step closer to being completely free in your spirit.”

“I don’t understand,” whispered Cameron as she shook her head in disbelief over my proposal.

“What I am proposing to you is a chance to actively work through the areas of your life that are causing you so much distress. Your only limitations are the ties you allow to bind you. If you don’t break this cycle, it will continue to control you.”

“Do you want to be free?” I probed for the final time.

“I do.”

“Then let’s begin . . .”