

The Truth Will Set You Free Sample Chapter

Hidden in the bathroom, Shane held his shaking hands in front of his eyes. These hands had protected and loved, and now, out of that same love and protection, they'd claimed freedom. The soil had dried, keeping the crimson evil safely contained until he plunged his hands into the clear stream running from the faucet. Varying shades of pink and red danced in the muddy water that pooled in the slow draining sink.

Turning his eyes upward, Shane caught his image in the mirror. He didn't recognize himself. He squinted as his gaze left the reflection of his vacant eyes and toured his pale and unkempt features. His hair was stringy and longer than he used to keep it. He'd let himself go. Turning his cheek to the right, he closely observed a smudge of dirt on his temple.

"My God," he whispered.

Wiping absentmindedly at the dirt with his wet hand, he stepped back and looked down. Blood covered the front of his light blue T-shirt, and dirt was ground into the knees of his high-water jeans. He took a deep shuddered breath. Clarity was taking hold, a clarity that he didn't care to acknowledge.

"What have I done?"

His voice was quiet and timid with a hint of tremor to it, reflective of the struggle just starting to take root within his heart. His eyes grew wide as fear threatened to surpass the surreal feeling he'd been wrapped in.

His senses were heightening, and the strong smell of earth, combined with the coolness of his blood-soaked shirt, was making him nauseous. He clawed at his shirt to get it off and hurriedly shoved it deep into the hamper. His mind raced, and panic set in.

"I'll go to the Laundromat in the morning," he whispered to himself.

He stepped back from the hamper, anxiously wringing his hands, but his eyes couldn't leave it.

"No, that'll look odd. I just did laundry last night."

His voice was squeaky now as he thought aloud. Ever since he began doing it for the family at the age of eight, Wednesdays had been laundry day. Doing it again, especially so soon, would look suspicious.

He pulled the shirt back out of the hamper and looked around for another idea. His attention was drawn to the mess he'd made around him. Tucking the bloody shirt into the waistline of his pants, his scattered mind changed its focus once more.

Shane grabbed the ratty hand towel off the nail to clean the sink. Tears ran down his cheeks as he scrubbed, blindly at first, then frantically. The dirty water sloshed about, spilling to the floor. He just wanted it clean. *He* wanted to be clean. Stopping his efforts, he gripped the sides of the sink. His shoulders rose and fell with shuddered sobs, which he tried desperately to stifle.

"Why? Why?" He sobbed as the tears continued, and his breathing became stuttered with fits of deep gasps. "Why did you allow this?"

He tossed his head upward and looked through blurry tears toward the stark lightbulb.

"Why would you? Give me back my life!"

Through gritted teeth, Shane rasped out his anger at a God he had a hard time believing in. He lowered his eyes back to his reflection.

"Isn't that simple enough for you?"

His shuddered breathing subsided, and the tears reduced as he stared at himself.
“I just want my life back.”

The moment of self-pity, however, was making way for a fury that rose to take its place. Shane became angry at his own lack of self-control. He wiped his hand harshly across his face, smearing the tears he'd foolishly allowed to flow.

“Oh, get a grip,” he uttered low through clenched teeth.

He had to clean up this mess and pull it together before someone heard him. Dropping to his knees, he began to wipe up the mud the spilled water had made of the dirt from his sneakers. On all fours he wiped and wiped, accomplishing little more than smearing the dirt about the grungy bathroom floor.

“What have I done?” he uttered under his breath again, sitting back on his heels.

The little boy in Shane seemed briefly bewildered before his voice turned harsh and mocking.

“What have I done? Idiot, I got my freedom. That's what I've done.”

His statement demanded at least a piece of justification for his actions. Nodding his head and furrowing his brows in determination, he made the choice to own it.

The hand towel was not getting the job done. Placing it on the edge of the sink, he grabbed his bath towel off its hook. Rubbing that around the floor accomplished much more. Once the floor's appearance was somewhat acceptable to him, he rolled up the dirty, threadbare towel, tossed it into the hamper, and looked around at the dismal bathroom he'd shared with his family for all of his fifteen years.

The floral wallpaper was loosely hanging in one corner, revealing a few feet of black mold-spotted plaster. The back of the toilet was missing its cover, the shower curtain surrounding the claw-foot tub needed replacing, and the cover for the light had broken long ago.

“Those were on my list,” he said in quiet determination. “I was going to help make this house nicer. Now I can. I swear I will.”

Having freed himself from burden, he felt certain he could be the person he wanted to be, which included being an involved and helpful member of his family again.

“It's been a long time, Bud.” Shane hissed, choosing the words that would drive his secret deep within his soul.

Stretching his legs out, he sat on the floor, emotionally exhausted. Feeling the cold of the broken tile beneath his hands, he tried to shake the sinister feeling that was held in the smile that crossed his lips. *He* wasn't the evil one. *He* had been good. He could not, would not, allow that sickness to take root in him.

“Shane.”

Sarah's voice startled him as he fumbled his way quickly to his feet. He thought everyone would be sound asleep. It was late.

“Shane, I need to go,” she called again, beckoning from the other side of the bathroom door.

“Okay,” he answered nervously.

The grungy hand towel lying on the edge of the sink was stained with the proof of his actions. He balled it up in his hand. Grabbing a clean towel, he hung it on the nail and then reached for the doorknob.

“Shane, hurry,” she pled.

He looked back around for a final perusal. All was clear. Opening the door, he reached out and touched his little sister's head. He'd intended to tousle her hair but found himself stuck in the moment, looking at her.

“Sarah, how's it going?” he asked.

“Shane, please move. I gotta go, bad!”

She pushed past him, closing the door quickly, leaving him standing alone with his thoughts. What he'd just done was done for her. She was barely eleven now. He'd spent his life helping to raise and protect her. He wasn't about to let wickedness ruin the purity of that love.

Looking in her bedroom, Shane remembered the fort he'd made for her when she was four. They must've slept in that fort for two weeks, at least. They'd had a lot of fun together when they were young.

He leaned against the doorframe, smiling and lost in thoughts of a more innocent time of life. Something was pressing into his hip, and he reached to feel what it was. The bathroom door opened just as he realized it was his bloody shirt. Where was his mind?

He saw Sarah through the opened bathroom door reaching for the string to shut the light off. His heart began to race, and he hurriedly ducked down the hall and into his own room.

Shane shut the door and leaned against it, listening to the light tread of Sarah's feet and the creak of the floorboards as she went back to bed. He walked to his and peered around the dark room. It was dreary and smelled stale. He grabbed the dirty shirt laced with conviction and held it up before him. A dirty feeling overwhelmed him, and he shuddered.

“What have I done?” he questioned as he shook his fist in the air.

Looking above to the darkness that enveloped him, he tried to make sense of what became of his young life. Feeling defeated, he dropped to his bed.

“Lord, what have I done?” he asked more directly.

In his heart, he realized that trading one sin for another had not been the answer. But it was too late. He buried the shirt in the overflowing trash can at his bedside and sobbed. There was no turning back now.

Methodically, he removed his shoes, socks, and dirty pants and lay back on his sweat-stained mattress, folding his hands behind his head. He recalled the many nights of the past year that he'd sought solitude and peace in this same spot. It was just as fruitless now. There was nothing he could do to redeem himself.

A deep feeling of loss and devastation consumed him, and he rolled to his side, pulling his knees up to his chest.