

## Forward

My desire to write *Dear Gavin* was solely intended to share my experience with those who may have made similar choices to mine, and possibly to keep others from leaping off that cliff of sexual purity into those crashing tide waters of guilt and a lifetime of ultimate responsibility. I pray that our loving Heavenly Father will continue reaching out to those who may feel that they can't be helped or forgiven. The Word of God says in Romans 3:23 that "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God."

No matter what regrettable decisions you have made in the past please know there are many more wonderful chapters to be written in your life if you will just allow God to be the author. He has done that for me, and I know His infinite grace and mercy is real. I'm no longer interested in what the judgmental people of this world, or the religious community think of me. I am more concerned with what God's thoughts are toward me and continue to grow and mature into that man of God that He always intended me to be. Don't give up! Remember that every sinner has a future and every saint has a past.

*Dear Gavin,*

Although the following words, thoughts, and feelings flow from the deepest parts of my soul and heart, they still cannot express how much I love and care for you.

Gavin, I am so honored and blessed that God chose you to be my son and that He chose me to be your daddy. The joy that He has brought to me through you since your birth has been extraordinary. From the moment I found out that I would become your father, I prayed that God would allow you to be born healthy, strong, full of laughter, joy, and peace. You possess each of these traits along with numerous others. Each time I look at you I not only see a childhood reflection of myself, but of a little boy who radiates with happiness.

Son, I will never forget the first time I held you in the delivery room right after your birth. As I cradled you, you reached out and grabbed one of my fingers with your tiny hand as if to say, “This is my daddy!”

When I gave you your first bottle, we sat downstairs in the brown leather recliner that you now enjoy sitting in as you watch television. Your little blue eyes never wandered away from my beaming face.

I felt so bad for you when your first baby teeth starting coming in. You would cry, not knowing why your mouth was hurting, so I would sing to you as I rocked you in my arms, rubbing your gums until you fell fast asleep.

I was so proud of you the day you took your first steps at eleven months of age. At first, the awkwardness of upward mobility must have been frustrating, but I had already noticed a conquering attitude and spirit emerging from within you. After hitting the ground several times you showed me, the world, and more important, yourself, that Gavin Pierce Lord would never crawl again!

When you were fourteen months of age, I brought home a toddler’s basketball goal-set since you enjoyed watching me shoot baskets at the local playground. After setting the goal up in

our kitchen, I handed you the small orange basketball that came with it. You briefly looked at the undersized sphere and tossed it aside. Disappearing into the other room you returned with my leather pro-basketball and proceeded to slam it with both hands through the shaking rim...looking up at me with such pride. Not believing my eyes I handed you the ball once more, and again you power slammed the ball with the force of a professional All-star. At that moment I decided that I would also become your agent once you entered the NBA draft.

Son, you have always caught on so quickly when trying to learn things. I started working with you on learning your ABC's and numbers when you were eighteen months of age. When you were two years old, you could not only say your entire alphabet, but also count to ten. Even when you were younger, if we drove through an area of town or past a recognizable landmark you would say, "Daddy look, see I remember," even if the previous trip had occurred a month or two earlier.

The list of your accomplishments and experiences is innumerable. I am thrilled and honored to have shared and witnessed so many of them with you.

Gavin, we are so close that I can almost anticipate at any given moment what you might say or think about doing. That is why I almost always catch you being mischievous or getting into something that you should not be getting into. Although you have your occasional moments of naughty behavior, you are a wonderful boy and I would not trade you for any other child on this earth. You make my job as your dad easy to perform.

I am so sorry that things did not work out between your mother and me, but please know that you are loved by both of us. I will always strive to provide you with an abundance of love, care, and support as you grow. I promise that I will prayerfully ask God on a continuing basis to help me become a father that you can always look up to, respect, depend on, and trust—no matter what. Son, I still have my moments of impatience and frustration, but please know that they are temporary, and that my unconditional love for you is permanent!

The words of wisdom and advice that I leave with you are these: always, and I mean always, place God first in your life no matter what. This world is unforgiving, manipulative, and vengeful. Christ offers eternal forgiveness, freedom, and peace. Secondly, stay true to your beliefs and values. Thirdly, *dream!* All your dreams may not come true in the end, but the

journey to reach for them is unbelievable. And last, don't follow the crowd and the expectations they might have for you. Be unique and let others follow you.

Gavin I could not have asked for a better child than you. You have wildly exceeded any expectations that I might have had prior to your birth. Each day that I see you grow, learn, and experience life, I am so proud, honored, and humbled that you are my son.

I love you,

*Daddy*

This book is the story of my life with Gavin,  
and how it all came to be.

## Unexpected News

Though I knew that having a child out of wedlock was not God's perfect will for a professing Christian, I somehow knew that He would forgive me of my willful disobedience toward premarital sex and help me bring one of His most precious gifts into this world.

## Chapter One

*Tonight will be a quiet and relaxing evening.*

Travel Specialists, the travel agency where I have worked for the past several years, was especially busy today, the work tedious. I wanted to forget about all the delayed flights, stranded clients, and canceled vacations that were a result of icy conditions originating somewhere up East. I just wanted to lock myself away in my cozy one bedroom loft apartment with nothing but a book, a cup of hot cider, and a chosen menu of silence.

One of the advantages of being a confirmed bachelor was the freedom to come and go as I pleased and to decide how much or how little social interaction I would involve myself in at any given time. Tonight, I decided there would be zero interaction as I pulled the shades and turned the ringing volume on my cordless phone to off.

As I lazily stretched out upon my futon/couch, a calm and therapeutic newness slowly took over my frazzled mind and tired body.

“Ah...this is exactly what is need,” I whisper and drift into a pretentious state of relaxation on a deserted white sandy beach; then, the silence of an otherwise, perfect evening was suddenly broken by a familiar, but unexpected knock at my front door.

Rachel was my best friend and the love of my life. I had met her a couple of years earlier while having lunch around the corner from Travel Specialists at Doll’s Grocery and Deli, a small neighborhood market that prided itself on not being mentioned in the same breath as Metro Louisville’s national supermarket chains. Shapely-petite with long auburn hair and hazel green eyes, Rachel’s energetic personality and perceived innocence was what first attracted me to her. Overflowing with a seemingly endless amount of energy, Rachel was always in motion. Though our age difference was pretty significant, we shared several things in common and enjoyed each other’s company.

Generally, I would wait to come into the deli for lunch between one and two o'clock. That way, most of the noonday crowd was already heading back to work, and Rachel and I could chat about music and exercise, along with our unashamed belief in God.

Rachel's parents were missionaries who traveled throughout the world until she was about sixteen years of age. I, on the other hand, had been raised in church as a child but never took my faith seriously until I was a freshman in college. I loved to hear Rachel talk of her childhood experiences in Thailand, Australia, and some of the other places where she and her family had lived. It all sounded so exotic to me, but according to her, it was pretty difficult when you are one of nine children and sleeping in the same bed with three other sisters for months on end.

I also loved to travel. That was the reason I became a travel agent right out of college. The pay was low and the advancement opportunities were limited, but since I was the only mouth to feed, I figured I would have fun and explore this great big world as long as I could. One parallel between Rachel and me was that she had pretty much traveled to most of the areas in the Orient and South Pacific, while I had concentrated on the Caribbean and Europe. Thus, our travel adventures had covered almost the entire earth.

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As Rachel sat down next to me, I asked her whether she was all right. She nodded in a casual but unconvincing manner, probably hoping that she would momentarily deflect any straight to the point questions she knew I might ask. Because we spent so much time together, I knew that something of importance was churning up within her that she did not want to talk about just yet.

Finally, I asked, "How was your day?"

"Okay," she replied as her eyes drifted and focused on everything else in my dimly lit apartment except me.

"I didn't think I would see you tonight. I thought you were going to spend some time with your sister."



Rachel still seemed distant but started to return to normal as she replied, “Rhonda didn’t feel like going out so I thought I would see what you were up to.”

“I’m glad you did, but I know something is on your mind.”

I knew enough from past experience to let her answer me on her own terms. It may take a couple of minutes, but I knew that Rachel would come around. “So much for my solo evening on the beach,” I muttered.

Without a word, Rachel cautiously pulled a small, white box from her purse, which looked more like an unwrapped gift to me.

What’s the special occasion?

As she looked up at me her demeanor suddenly took on an air of seriousness as she removed a long, pen shaped object from the box and carefully laid it down in front of me upon the futon. Still clueless as to what Rachel was doing or thinking, I looked at her and bluntly asked, “What is this?”

With a bewildered look of utter amazement, she just stared at me trying to fathom why I had not yet figured out the obvious. Okay, maybe I didn’t catch on as quickly as most guys would have in a similar circumstance, but I had never been in a situation like this before.

About thirty seconds later, let’s just say, the anvil of stark reality pummeled my head. As I held the pregnancy indicator in my right hand, I looked up at Rachel and chanted, “I’m going to be a daddy...I’m going to be a daddy.” Pulling her to me I shouted, “We are going to have a baby!”

On one hand, I am sure that Rachel was now somewhat relieved by my excitement, and that I would not disappear or take no responsibility for our unborn child. Another part of her must have been almost frozen with fear as she contemplated the prospect of having a child, especially out of wedlock with the expected backlash of judgmental feelings from certain family members and friends. I, on the other hand, could have cared less about what others would think about me. I was going to be a daddy with the woman I loved.

God was the only one I had to answer to.

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My excitement transcended all those years I had spent alone, never married, with very few serious relationships, and childless. I had made a vow to God as a college freshman to remain a virgin until I was one day married. For the past two decades I had fulfilled that promise and was serious about staying sexually pure. Don't get me wrong, I had just as many sexual and carnal desires in me as the next person, but only through God's grace did I manage to remain abstinent this long. My relationship with Rachel was different from other women I had dated in the past. At age forty-one, I knew she was the girl that I would marry, and as a result I totally allowed my heart and body to become unusually vulnerable to any fantasies or wishes that she and I shared or wanted to indulge in.

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Rachel left my apartment that night around ten. Although my planned evening of solitude was unexpected, as well as justified in being disrupted, I was happier now than I had been in years. Just the thought of me being a father was totally awe-inspiring. Though I knew that having a child out of wedlock was not God's perfect will for a professing Christian, I somehow knew that He would forgive me of my willful disobedience toward premarital sex and help Rachel and me bring one of His most precious gifts into this world.

## On Second Thought

Although I had fathered a child outside the confines of marriage, I knew that God in all His unbounded grace, mercy, and forgiveness was not punishing me, nor would he turn His ear away from my prayers.

## Chapter Two

The next couple of weeks were a total blur. All my mind could focus on was our impending new arrival and all the plans that needed to be made along the way. The excitement that permeated my head, heart, and body was tortuous to contain, though I had promised Rachel I would not tell anyone about our bouncing baby news this soon. Although the same day-to-day travel-related problems escalated at my work, they seemed minor, now that I had more important things to think about. With it being early March, Rachel would need to start slowing down in the upcoming months as our projected birth month of October approached. I am not chauvinistic by any means, but I did feel that I should be the one to provide a stable home and financial environment to help Rachel raise our forthcoming son or daughter.

Since I had never been a parent before, I was amazed how certain fatherly instincts were starting to kick in. I found myself browsing the local newspaper for yard sales, clearance buys, and anything else that might be associated with providing for a newborn. I also continued searching the Internet for any information on raising a child. I was really getting into this arena called fatherhood—not because I had to, but because it felt so natural. On a scale of one to ten my child-raising aptitude probably topped out at a dismal four, but my motivation to be a father who was willing to learn about effective child-rearing peaked out at ten. I knew there was a great deal for me to grasp and implement, but the challenge, and reward in being able to help mold my son or daughter into a healthy, happy, and successful member of the human race far outweighed the time, sacrifice, and labor that all responsible parents face or experience. Up to this point in my life, I had never had anyone who would love me as unconditionally and be totally dependent upon me for even the most basic needs like my little boy or little girl would. With eager anticipation, I was seriously looking forward to that responsibility.

Rachel's excitement paled in comparison with mine. Every night, immediately after I got home from work, I signed onto the Internet, and went to a couple of sites that gave important

information concerning our child's weekly growth rate, ways in which the mother should take care of her body, and how fathers can be helpful and supportive. Though I was not the one having our baby, I wanted to feel as much a part of the birth process as possible. As the only boy growing up with four sisters, I understood that the opposite sex sometimes undergo mood transformations on a monthly basis. I also found out that when a woman is pregnant, other physiological patterns may develop that can sometimes be challenging to deal with. I knew that Rachel was not only battling the physical changes taking place inside her body, but also the emotional ones that are sometimes even more painful, lonely, and frightening to contend with.

Rachel's biggest fear thus far seemed to be her family's attitude toward the pregnancy and our plans. I tried to encourage and convince her that anyone, including family who truly cared and loved her, would understand and help in any way they could.

I wasn't too sure Rachel was actually buying into my philosophy.

My love for Rachel grew stronger daily, and so did my respect for her as a mother. From the time that she found out she was pregnant, she took great care of her body, watched carefully what she ate or drank, and constantly read various literature pertaining to motherhood and what to expect. I was so proud of her initial mothering instincts and the seriousness that she showed toward bringing our child into this world in a healthy manner.

Rachel and I seemed to be clicking as a team. We exercised together daily, took walks in the local parks, and fantasized about what our child would look like.

"Who do you think our baby will favor," Rachel would periodically ask.

"As long as he or she doesn't have my nose, it doesn't really matter," I would reply.

Rachel and I were also undecided whether to wait until the birth to see if we were going to be the proud parents of a baby boy or baby girl. Because of Rachel's concentrated and consistent efforts in developing good prenatal habits, early indications really reinforced my belief that our chances of having a beautiful, healthy baby were excellent.

Of course, the beauty part would mainly have to come from Rachel's DNA.

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One typical early morning, I stopped by Rachel's work to say hello before I went into Travel Specialists. She seemed very distant, but I just reasoned that it was because of possible morning sickness. When I casually asked if something was on her mind, she abruptly advised me that she could not see me anymore until she figured out what she would do about our baby.

"Rachel, what are you talking about?"

Shrouded in temporary silence, she ignored my presence and continued arranging and slicing the assorted fruits and vegetables for the deli's lunchtime salad bar.

Pausing for a moment, Rachel looked up and flippantly remarked, "I'm not sure if I'm going to stay in Kentucky...or what I want to do about the baby. I even thought about moving to Florida where my mother and sisters live."

Dazed and bruised from Rachel's onslaught of incalculable reasoning, I pulled myself up from the canvas and steadied myself against the ropes of utter confusion.

"Move away? Not sure about...? What about me, our plans as a family, and my input as the father?"

"I don't have time for this. Please, just leave me alone and don't call me!"

My initial shock gave way to an immediate sense of helplessness as I was introduced to a side of Rachel I hadn't seen before. My fear was that I really didn't know what she was capable of doing despite the absurdity of her threats.

Rachel wanted to hear none of it. She already had her mind made up. Her comments came as a complete and unexpected shock. Just the previous night we were making plans and getting excited about our upcoming roles as parents. What happened?

Heartbroken, I left her that morning in total silence and extremely concerned about what she was now capable of doing. Rachel, all of a sudden, was not the same person that I had come to know, trust, and love.

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I arrived at Travel Specialists that morning about an hour before we opened and went downstairs into a small basement area, crying and pouring my heart out to God. Although I had fathered a child outside the confines of marriage, I knew that God in all His unbounded grace,

mercy, and forgiveness was not punishing me, nor would he turn His ear away from my prayers. The next sixty minutes consisted of tears, pleading, and prayerful requests for God to help Rachel with any confusion or fear that she was facing. Though I could not imagine what she was feeling or thinking, I loved her and knew that my Heavenly Father was somehow going to help us both through this crisis situation. One of my recurring prayers was, “Please God, speak to Rachel in a way that she can hear and understand!”

Over the next month, I went faithfully into work two hours early each morning to pray for Rachel and our unborn baby. Despite the tremendous emotional strain and pressure that I continued to deal with, I still managed to hide the truth from everyone else around me, including friends, family, and coworkers.

Were both Rachel and I committed in having this baby together, or was this already-unfolding drama going to yield results that would negatively affect all involved? I guess you could say that I was a *faith-abiding realist*. I learned a long time ago that although God has a perfect plan already outlined for each of us, we are still free to choose our own path and the subsequent consequences associated with that choice. Was Rachel going to disappear or would God miraculously intervene and bring the three of us back together?

Never before had my faith and belief system been tested to this degree. I never shied away from a challenge, but this situation was totally different. At stake were lives, relationships, futures—and a child that deserved the chance to be born, nurtured, and allowed to succeed. This was not a fight to be won using fists or man-made weapons. No, victory and ultimate forgiveness could only happen by allowing God to move in His way, and for me to be understanding and supportive of Rachel’s unconfessed fears and self-induced confusion.

## Adolescence

My parents' divorce reaffirmed my desire to one day find that special girl and hopefully have a long-term marriage that would yield fruits of love, kindness, respect, and devotion instead of disharmony, anger, and hurt.



## Chapter Three

My childhood growing up would be considered average by most accounts. Our family consisted of my mother, Lettie, my step-dad Jim, and four younger sisters, Caren, Kathy, Mary Anne, and Jamie.

Mom was an outspoken woman who was slender, had reddish-brown hair, and a laugh that could make a hyena envious. She was a very methodical person whose daily ritual included drinking a couple of pots of her favorite black coffee, smoking two to three packs of non-filtered cigarettes, and feverishly working on her never-ending assortment of thousand piece jigsaw puzzles. Because of her lack of shyness and point blank candor, neither her children nor anyone else within her immediate life circle ever had to wonder what my mother might be thinking or feeling. Mom never straddled the fence on any issue and certainly showed no favoritism for the sake of gaining or keeping friends. She was fair, strong, and well meaning.

My step-dad, on the other hand, was in many ways the direct polar opposite of my mother. Jim was average in stature, blue-collar, and passive to the point that it drove my mother crazy. She married Jim when I was about four years of age, so I always considered him to be my real dad since I hardly knew my biological father. Jim would often take me with him fishing, taught me how to hunt, and even showed me the finer points of automotive mechanics. He always went out of his way to make sure that I felt included in whatever he might be doing at the time. Whether it was working on the family car or trying to fix something inside our house, I was gladly and officially deemed his *appointed apprentice*.

Despite not having any brothers to roughhouse with or play tricks on, I felt that my fellow siblings would be more than willing and able to fulfill that mandatory role. I soon found out that performing various wrestling moves, changing channels in the middle of a favorite show, or scaring the heebie-jeebies out of one of my unsuspecting sisters after they went to bed was not acceptable within our household bylaws. I was not purposefully hateful or vengeful as a child,

but instead exhibited a consistent streak of mischievousness that at times I still carry with me today. The results of my antics fell right into line with a scientific principal that I learned about in school called *The Law of Relativity*. It says, “That for every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction.” How true, how true. Every one of my premeditated actions toward my sisters resulted in the forceful reaction of a wooden paddle or leather belt hitting my butt numerous times. The administrator, usually my mother, brought tears to my eyes and forced an attitude of true repentance until the next time I chose to disobey.

For several generations, my mother’s side of the family raised oranges and grapefruit in Central Florida, which was then considered the citrus capital of the world. Miles upon miles of green-rowed trees covered the landscape as far as the eye could see in every direction. My favorite part of the growing season was during the springtime when the countless white-budded orange blossoms sprang forth from millions of citrus trees and produced an aroma so intoxicating that motorists would sometimes stop their vehicles along side the road just to inhale their sweetness. Another perk of raising citrus was that every morning for breakfast mom would squeeze the ripe juicy nectar from a freshly picked orange right into our glasses before sending my sisters and me out the door for school.

Taking proper care of a top-producing orange grove was a laborious task that involved countless man-hours and a little luck from Mother Nature. I began working in our citrus groves at the age of twelve during my summer break and sometimes after school. It was not pleasant work, especially in the hot and extremely humid, hundred degree plus temperatures. My hands blistered from pulling a wooden-handled hoe beneath the vine infested citrus trees, arms scratched and bleeding from thorns that guarded each piece of fruit, and my muscles cried out from lifting the heavy orange crates onto the back of a transporter that would take our crop, once picked, to the nearest processing station.

Sure, I would have rather been playing basketball, swimming, or fishing with my other buddies in our neighborhood, but my mother insisted I learn the value of a good work ethic at an early age. Despite the fact that I thought she was being so unfair, it did instill in me as an adult how important hard work was in achieving a goal.

My sisters and I knew that our mother loved us, but she had a hard time showing any real affection on a consistent basis. I knew that as a little girl, my mother was raised in an atmosphere

where one should never show emotion, but it still would have been nice to feel a reassuring embrace every now and then. I could probably count on one hand the number of times my mom ever told me that she loved me as I was growing up. Despite this, I loved and respected her very much for the morals and high standards she instilled in me at an impressionable young age. I knew that every time my mother spanked me, scolded me, or disapproved of even an average report card, that she was really telling me she cared, and knew I could do better.

About the time I reached ten years of age, my mother and Jim were having disagreements more often than usual. Their arguments, at times, became so heated that my step-dad would disappear for days on end. This would upset me greatly. Many nights during his self-imposed, sabbatical jaunts, I would sit prayerfully, staring out my small bedroom window, hoping, waiting for Jim to miraculously drive up so that our family could all be together and happy again. Unfortunately, God never answered my prayers as quickly as I would have liked. Usually after several days Jim would suddenly reappear as if nothing ever happened.

My parents' problems escalated throughout my junior high, high school, and early college years. Finally, as a college senior, I got the phone call that I knew would inevitably come. My mother informed me that she and my father were finally calling it quits and getting a divorce. When she told me this I thought, *why did it take you so long?* Saddened, but relieved, I told her that I was sorry and hoped that she and Jim could remain friends since I planned on including them both in my life. Again, this all reaffirmed my desire to one day find that special girl and hopefully have a long-term marriage that would yield fruits of love, kindness, respect, and devotion instead of disharmony, anger, and hurt.