

EXTREME GRACE



Stained Blue Jeans

and Other Lessons about Love

by Dick Duerksen

My new pair of jeans is covered with stains. When I wear them, I look like I've been playing in a mud pile. There are dark brown stains on the knees and a big reddish-black Rorschach splotch on one of the rear pockets.

I've tried every stain remover known to Target, including "Shout It Out" and Amway's "last stain remover you'll ever need!" None helped. Whatever I wallowed in has muddied me forever. About the only options left are dyeing the jeans dark brown, bleaching them white, or giving them to the Salvation Army. I am certainly embarrassed to wear them in public as they are.

Unfortunately, my life is rather like my jeans. Stained!

I am dirtied by choices I've made and by choices I've neglected to make. I've tried everything I know to come clean. I've made New Year's resolutions, attended 12-step programs, had Crucial Conversations, read my Bible, and attended church—

all in the failed hope that I could do something to take the stains away and give me a life I could wear in public without embarrassment.

Nothing has worked. I look into the mirror of my life, and every stain still shouts my failures—little white lies, angry bursts of emotion, thoughtless words. I feel like the enemy is right beside me, eagerly reminding me of every fall, every dumb mistake, every failure to live up to God's ideal.



Some of the memories are so old that they come up in black and white. Others are matrix-like holograms that make yesterday's events more real than they ever were. All come accompanied with condemnation, designed to wipe away all smiles and break my resolve for living the good life.

But, *praise God!*, there is an effective antidote, one product that lives up to its cleansing claims. It's called F&R—Forgiveness and Restoration—and it's marketed directly by the producer, God Himself.

Apply F&R, and it's like Christmas, birthday, anniversary, baptism, communion, and last rites all rolled into one awesome truth. God takes away the stains—and then forgets them! Filthy becomes clean, sad becomes happy, angry becomes peaceful, and guilty becomes innocent. All because that's how He made us to be.

"Come," God invites, "let my love do a cleansing job in you. I will scrub away all your stains and give you a life as pure as fresh snow, as clean as lambs' wool. I'll give you a new start, a guilt-free life filled with energy, adequate to maintain its purity" (Isaiah 1:18).

A new year can celebrate far more than a change of calendar. For those who accept God's offer of cleansing, it can also be the shout of joy that comes when we look for our stains and see only His *purity*.

It is the applause that comes when our stains are exchanged for His gift of *love*.