

FROM THE
GOD WE'VE MADE...

REFRAME

TO GOD WITH US

BRIAN HARDIN

VISION & VOICE OF THE *DAILY AUDIO BIBLE*

“Few of us are totally blind or living in the dark. Our problems are much more a result of worldly distortions that lead us down destructive paths to ungodly destinations. *Reframe* is a very insightful and powerful book that clarifies the ‘true’ truth and how we can change our lives by changing the way we view God and our circumstances.”

STEVE ARTERBURN

Bestselling author and host of New Life Radio

“This beautiful, honest, and vulnerable book has a way of stripping away your weary dogmas and legalistic lies, your fear-filled ‘oughts’ and ‘shoulds,’ and reminding you of God’s amazing love and why you surrendered your life to Him. It was liberating, all over again. Read it. Weep if you must, want to, or need to. But read it.”

JO SAXTON

Speaker and author, chair of 3DMovements, and co-pastor of Mission Point Church

“*Reframe* lays it out there for Christians to reconsider the assumptions they may be making about God, faith, the Bible, and themselves. It’s very clear and insightful, and tailor-made for anyone who senses they are missing something significant in life . . . but can’t quite place what it is. *Reframe* reveals the spaces between Christian culture and the relationship with God that we have always been promised but rarely experience.”

PASTOR BRAD MATHIAS

President of Bema Media—iShine, pastor of Four Winds Anglican Mission, and author of *Road Trip to Redemption*

“*Reframe* is Brian Hardin’s compelling challenge to rethink what we know about God and how we relate to Him. Too many people live with a limited, small-minded view of God—and end up living a limited life. Brian wants to change that. God has dreamed for you a bigger life, a more significant life. Hardin insists that you not settle for less and invites you to *restart* your story—and live the exhilarating, bold life God has waiting for you. If your relationship with God has turned stale and anemic, then you must read *Reframe*. Hardin says it’s time to start over! Because right now, today, you can restart a completely new relationship with God.”

PALMER CHINCHEN, PHD

Speaker, cultural artist, and author of *Barefoot Tribe: Take Off Your Shoes and Dare to Live the Exhilarating Life* and *True Religion: Taking Pieces of Heaven to Places of Hell on Earth*

“Brian Hardin has a way of asking the hard questions that you just can’t shake. Like a modern-day mystic, his writing hits you diagonally and haunts you. In *Reframe*, Brian seeks to bring the reader to a place of spiritual awakening. I highly recommend this read to anyone who feels dead . . . as most of us do, most of the time. I wept throughout reading it, and as I did, I sensed a strange warmth arising from within.”

FR. CHRIS SORENSEN

Abbot of Mission Chattanooga



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PROLOGUE



When I began to flesh out this book, I planned to write of things I thought had seasoned in my life and become a part of who I am. I wanted to transfer a few hard-won truths onto paper and offer them. Little did I know . . .

After a few months of writing, in between long stretches of a strenuous speaking schedule, I felt as if I was writing words that weren't going to connect the dots to anything. I was discouraged. Three and a half chapters into *Reframe* I threw most of it out and started over. For a writer, throwing away thousands of words and dozens of hours of work leaves a bit of a sigh and a deflated, almost nauseous feeling. But I also knew that there was more to this story. Something profound was taking shape inside me.

What I didn't know when I began to write again was that it was going to challenge my own faith to the core

and force me to reframe everything I thought I knew about God.

For many, including myself for so many years, having a “relationship with God” has become synonymous with believing in God. But is this really all there is to it? I believe in a lot of people that I’m not in a relationship with and, for that matter, have never even met. I’m sure the same is true for you. It would seem that a relationship is more than just belief; unpacking what it’s actually shaped like can be a bit of a mystery. It’s not talked about that much—it’s more assumed. But maybe it shouldn’t be.

After years of poring over Scripture, I find nothing less than a God who is desperate to be with people and has done everything conceivable to enter into a collaborative and life-giving relationship with us. And so I’ve written this book to share my own journey, observations, and hope for a collaborative and holistic relationship with this God.

This book humbles me. It humbles me because I want it to be my life as much as I want it to be yours, and I believe everything I’ve written is true and available. It just requires the vigilance and commitment to accept nothing less than an all-out, all-in relationship with God. The same passion God has for us, we need to have for Him, and that has ignited a fire inside me. A revolutionary fire.

But fire burns things. It consumes things.

Much of what is being consumed are things I don't need anymore. I don't need those wounds. I don't need those idols. I don't need those ambitions. The fire is burning away things and making more room for God to occupy. But how I desperately want to hold on to some of the things that have been poison to me.

When I was nearing the end of the book, it had all but taken over my life. I couldn't sleep. The words wouldn't stop even in my dreams. I was consumed with it. I needed to know how it would end. I needed to get it out of me and release it. But the fire burns on, and I expect this is the new normal—that if I want this kind of relationship with God, it really will ruin me for anything less than all of Him. But I can tell you from a little further down the path that it's going to be worth it. This is how we were meant to live. Understanding what a relationship with God isn't, and what it could be, might just be the missing puzzle piece that completes our lives.

I'm praying for you.

— — —

One more thought. I've watched with amusement as many theological battles have been waged during the last few years—some of them pretty nasty. It's not as if this is a new thing, but I suppose the interconnected world we live

in makes it more pervasive and disruptive. The truth is that anyone who steps into the public arena of faith is setting themselves up to be shot at. We've been fighting one another over the nuances of the Bible for centuries.

Via media is a Latin phrase that dates back to the ancient Greek philosophers. It means “the middle road” or “by the middle way.” It found its way into church history during the Protestant Reformation, when the Church of England attempted to find its place as a bridge builder between papalist Catholics and radical reformers. I like this phrase and I've tried to write from this place—by the middle way. I didn't write anything in this book to be intentionally controversial. Maybe controversy sometimes sells books and raises profiles, but honestly, I just want to love God with all my heart and be known by Him while being true to the Scriptures. And that's what I want for you, too.

PART ONE
RETHINK



At any time, you can rethink your life and reinvent yourself.

DENISE PITRE

When we least expect it, life sets us a challenge to test our courage and willingness to change; at such a moment, there is no point in pretending that nothing has happened or in saying that we are not yet ready. The challenge will not wait. Life does not look back. A week is more than enough time for us to decide whether or not to accept our destiny.

PAULO COELHO,
THE DEVIL AND MISS PRYM

Chapter 1



RETHINKING YOU

Wherever you go, you take yourself with you.

NEIL GAIMAN,
THE GRAVEYARD BOOK

*I have seen the best of you, and the worst of you,
and I choose both.*

SARAH KAY,
“AN ORIGIN STORY”

YOU

It’s all about you. And it’s all about what you do next. It always has been. I know you’ve been told otherwise your whole life—but it is. It has to be. Your life can be no other way.

Does that sound somehow . . . wrong? Stay with me.

Where you’ve been and where you’re going can only happen with you involved. What you do with yourself only you can decide, but make no mistake—this air in your lungs, this next beat of your heart, the stirring in your chest when he or she walks in the room, this life—

it's yours. Yours to unfold, unpack, screw up, crash, revive, stumble through, master, flourish, thrive in, discover. It begins with you, and if it ever ends, you'll be there. It's yours to steward and yours to give away, and no matter where you go, you are there.

Maybe God is everywhere, but being created in His *likeness* makes you *like* Him in fascinating ways. You are omnipresent to yourself.

Let that one bake in for a minute.

You are everywhere you are. God's image is embedded in you. It is as inseparable from you as you are from it. You are a constant, living reminder of who He is. You can look away but you can't get away. You can purify yourself or you can destroy yourself but you can't escape yourself. Nor can you escape God.¹ You're made this way. You're made for God.²

Perhaps you had no control over your creation, but you have momentous control over what you create. There's unbelievable power inside that. You matter. Really, you do. You are a creator. You fashion what becomes of the world you live in. You are finely crafted in the image of the Almighty,³ and He is beautiful beyond description.⁴ He has unquestionably created beauty within you.⁵ You are His absolute masterpiece.⁶

That you are here is a gift. A beautiful, extravagant,

decadent, overgenerous, excessive gift. Something precious given by One who is hopelessly in love with you. Desperately enamored of you. Fascinated beyond words with you and longing to collaborate in what comes next for you. God is so invested in you that He put His own breath in you, molded you in His image, and stood back and said that you are “good.”⁷

God was dreaming about you before you ever showed up.⁸ When the attraction and rhythm and motion of your parents’ union was complete, God was there providing the spark of life that has become you.⁹ You’re supposed to be here. It’s a good thing that you are, because there’s a lot riding on it.

God didn’t just stop with the gift of life, though. How could He? When you’ve fallen in love with someone, everything, everywhere reminds you of that person. You can hardly walk down the vegetable aisle in the grocery store without wanting to buy them a ripe red tomato or a head of broccoli just to show them you can’t get them off your mind. God has heaped gifts on you that are beyond extravagant.

You’ve been given the gift of the Holy Spirit to tell you the truth.¹⁰ You have the gift of the Holy Scriptures to guide your every step and decision.¹¹ You have the gift of a gorgeous, lavish, exquisite planet to live on.¹² You’ve been given the gift of companionship.¹³ You may have the

gift of precious children.¹⁴ You've been given the gift of an existence that will never, ever end.¹⁵ You have the gift of God's own Son.¹⁶ And that's barely scratching the surface of the generosity that God has bestowed on you.

Think about ears. What a gift! Without them you hear no music. No soft lullabies, no tender word from a friend's lips, no ecstasy of a lover. And what about the mountains? Oh, their beauty as the sun dips toward the horizon and engulfs the snow-capped peaks with fire, dancing and crying out worship beyond words! And think of eternity. A span of time that cannot be described by time at all. A never ending. A forever that insists and persists, promising discoveries that cannot even be imagined. A bottomless, topless, naked expanse waiting to be filled with the radiance of every experience we will ever have. And this has been placed in your heart.

Then there's love and water and green and coffee and toes and paint and sex and water lilies and chocolate and skin and dogs and motor oil and vitamin B and the smell of a newborn baby and rain and London and almonds and silk and bread and wine and the endless, endless cup of salvation. Gifts that are so extravagant and so endless that they can't possibly all be named. And they are all for you. You are beyond precious. You are beyond cared for. God has loved you well.

Maybe hearing this is like a cool sip of water when all you've been doing lately is swallowing sand. Maybe it's the other way around because you can't find any sign in your life that this could possibly be true no matter what the Bible or anyone else might say. That's okay too. No matter where you're going, you arrive by putting one foot in front of the other.

And right now, maybe one page after the other is just as important.

THE ACHE

So if all of this is true, why do you feel so empty inside? Why the struggle with anger? With depression? Why does every day feel the same? Or why does what is true feel as if it's not true at all?

There's a hunger that never quite goes away, right? An itch that doesn't quite get scratched. Life isn't working quite as it's supposed to, especially if we're supposed to be loved by God.

We think we know a lot about many things, including God. And we've created a box or a frame for this knowledge because it gives us some sort of context to explain what is unexplainable. But what if all that knowledge won't fit in the box? What if we get a bigger box and it still won't

fit? What if all that we think we know has been forced into the wrong frame? We can keep looking at the picture, knowing there is something off about it, or we can take it down from the wall and reframe it.

We need to *rethink* what we know about God and how we relate to Him. Then perhaps we can *reframe* the relationship. Maybe we can give it something a little roomier. Possibly a bigger frame for our understanding of God will mean a bigger life for us. Probably if we get just a glimpse, just a taste of what's really going on, we're going to be fed up with the narrative that's been passing for our life. It won't be enough. You probably already know this. It's been the problem all along, hasn't it? You'll want to *restart* your story. A new story that feels like you. One that fits you.

And that's where we start.

GOD'S RELATIONSHIP WITH YOU

So if life is such an extravagant gift, what are you supposed to do with it? As believers, we filter this question through the lens of a relationship with God.

If I were to ask you how you know you're in a relationship with God, what would your answer be? Is it because of a prayer you spoke or portions of Scripture that you've

read? Is it because you're around a lot of people who seem to be in such a relationship, or a feeling that you have inside or a theological formula you're following? Does God want to be in a relationship with you? How do you know this? Does God know who you are?

As you begin to consider these questions, slow down a bit. Ponder your answers. Be deliberate. This is very important. These questions will begin to uncover what you think you know about God and your heart's posture toward that knowledge.

“A relationship with God” or “a personal relationship with Jesus” are phrases that have become almost cliché over the years. It's shorthand for saying we are “believers.” But can we be believers and not have a relationship with God? In his letter to Hebrew believers scattered throughout the Roman Empire, James said, “You say you have faith, for you believe that there is one God. Good for you! Even the demons believe this, and they tremble in terror” (James 2:19, NLT).

Most of us would say that we want a “growing relationship with God,” but has this become just another of the clichés? What do we mean when we say this? Growing or deepening any other relationship involves both people. So what does that look like with God? What is it He wants from us? And how do we know for certain that we're in

such a relationship? These are the things we're going to explore together. But I have to tell you, our conclusions may be different than you think. And it's going to take the fearlessness to really look at yourself.

BE HONEST

At the beginning of this story where it's all about you and the God who loves you, we have to agree to be honest. A frank conversation can bring some of the most valuable and treasured guidance for life—and we never forget it. So I'd like to have an honest discussion. No more of these conversations where we dance around what we're really trying to say.

I had a discussion recently with a man who is greatly concerned for a friend who is obese, diabetic, and consumed by and with food. The reality is that if change doesn't happen, the friend will likely die young, leaving behind people who love him and an incomplete story filled with what could have been. The man was considering how to broach the subject with his friend. It's a tough call, isn't it?

Most of the time, what we're willing to say is very subtle. We don't want to step into someone's space and create confrontation. We don't like to question individuality or freedoms. And in most cases this is healthy. At a minimum,

a person who lives his or her life giving endless advice lacks the understanding of nuance. People have their own stories and reasons for the things they do. It's wise to be cautious about touching the tender parts of another person's life.

I thought a lot about my conversation with the concerned man. In that situation, it would be easy enough for him to soothe his conscience by saying, "Boy, white flour and processed sugar are really bad. They are actually the leading cause of a lot of disease." It's much harder to look someone in the eyes and say, "You're going to die if you don't change."

Don't worry. I'm not going to tell you that. But you might end up telling yourself. It's your life. It's all about you. How you live your life, how you flesh it out, is your story to tell. All the twists and turns, all the drama and intrigue and the thousands of tiny and bulky choices of each day are yours to make. You decide whether to eat the moist, creamy chocolate cake or stay focused on your fitness goals. You decide whether to drink too much and go to bed with a stranger. And when you wake up and step on the scale, you get the result of your choice one way or the other. If you yawn and roll over to find someone you don't know, well, you get the shock of your own choice.

All these little decisions become your life. You get to write the chapters with your days. You get to interact with

the drama and tension that comes your way. And eventually you may come to a point where you realize you don't even like your story anymore. But what happens if you decide that with the remainder of your time, you're going to live a brand-new story? One that is not a solitary endeavor but rather a collaborative one with a God who is desperate for the opportunity to be a part of it. This new story can be a gift back to God. A page-turner that He can't put down. He gave you life, and you can give life back to Him. This is love. The give-and-take. The-send-and-receive. The back-and-forth of an alive and breathing relationship.

So this is what we need to agree on before we go any further: No one can make a change for you. It's all about you and it's all about what you do next.

Let's go on an adventure together.

Notes

1. Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. (Psalm 139:7-10)
2. You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being. (Revelation 4:11)
3. Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." (Genesis 1:26)

BRIAN HARDIN

4. One thing I ask from the LORD, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple. (Psalm 27:4)
5. He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end. (Ecclesiastes 3:11)
6. For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago. (Ephesians 2:10, NLT)
7. God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. (Genesis 1:31)
8. Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart. (Jeremiah 1:5)
9. For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. (Psalm 139:13)
10. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. (John 16:13)
11. Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path. (Psalm 119:105)
12. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground." (Genesis 1:28)
13. Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up. Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken. (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12)
14. Children are a heritage from the LORD, offspring a reward from him. (Psalm 127:3)
15. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:23)
16. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16)