Our Bad Choices

"A Wake-Up Call for Anyone Who Thinks They're the Only One Paying the Price" Keith Thorn © 2025

Chapter 1: The Lie of Isolation

For years, I convinced myself that my mistakes were mine alone. My bad decisions, my consequences, my problem. I didn't think they touched anyone else in a meaningful way—not really. If someone was disappointed or hurt along the way, I told myself it would pass. I told myself they were strong enough, or distant enough, or simply uninvolved. And I moved on.

But I was wrong. Deeply wrong.

The first lie we often believe is that our choices live in a vacuum. That because we made them, we alone must carry their weight. But the truth is, every decision ripples outward. Even the quiet ones. Even the private ones. Especially those.

I used to think skipping my son's school play because of "a meeting that ran long" was just poor time management. That not returning a call from a friend going through a divorce was just forgetfulness. That disappearing into silence after an argument was me "cooling off." I didn't understand until much later that those choices, small as they seemed, whispered messages to the people who needed me: "You don't matter right now. I'm not here."

I think about a time when I lost my temper in a way I justified as righteous anger. I slammed a door, raised my voice, and stormed out. I thought it was over once I calmed down. But my daughter, barely twelve at the time, had been sitting in the next room. She didn't say anything that night. In fact, she didn't say much for the rest of the week. It wasn't until months later that I noticed she had started flinching whenever voices escalated, even if it wasn't directed at her. I hadn't meant to scare her. But I had.

I can still picture the look in her eyes the next time someone else yelled on TV and she quietly got up and left the room. That was when it hit me. My outburst hadn't disappeared into the ether. It had etched itself into her sense of safety. She was learning—through me—that loud meant dangerous. That love could suddenly become unpredictable.

And that's the thing about isolation: it doesn't just cut us off from others. It cuts others off from the safety they once felt around us.

There's a seductive comfort in thinking it's only our life we're messing up. We believe it gives us freedom, control. But what it really gives us is blindness. Because when we deny the impact of our choices on others, we deny them the truth of their experience. We dismiss their pain because we don't want to feel our own.

Blindness feels easier than accountability. Especially when shame starts whispering in our ear. Society tells us to "man up," to keep moving, to not dwell. So we bury the fallout. We convince ourselves they're fine, that it's not our business how someone else reacts. We hide behind busyness and bravado and the lie that strong people don't look back. But they do. And they make it right.

I know now that my worst moments didn't stay contained. They leaked. Into the lives of people I loved. Into the trust I once held sacred. Into the space between me and the ones who used to feel close.

It wasn't the single explosion that did the damage—it was the repeated pattern of isolation disguised as control. It was pretending not to notice how uncomfortable the room got when I walked in. It was chalking up silence to coincidence instead of consequence. It was pride wearing the mask of self-reliance.

Isolation is a lie we tell ourselves to avoid accountability. But it's also a lie we tell because we're ashamed. It's easier to say, "This is my burden," than to admit, "I caused someone else's pain."

Some people suffer in silence because they don't want to make it harder for the one already unraveling. Some walk away because they no longer know how to stay. And some stay, but begin to disappear. If you've ever looked around and wondered why your circle feels smaller, quieter, or more distant, consider this: maybe they didn't leave. Maybe you closed the door and called it solitude.

I know a man who once told me, "My biggest lie was that I was only hurting myself." He'd spent years drinking alone in his garage, thinking he was sparing his family from his mess. His wife worked overtime. His kids learned to put themselves to bed. And still, he believed he was containing the damage. It wasn't until his teenage son stood in front of him with tears in his eyes and said, "Dad, you haven't seen me in three years," that the truth cracked him open.

He described that moment like being shattered from the inside. His son's voice didn't just break his heart—it broke the illusion. The lie

that his pain was private. The myth that numbing out in solitude protected others.

That night, he didn't just put down the bottle. He picked up a pen and started writing letters to his wife and kids. Not to excuse, not to explain—but to begin the long road of repair. It took time. They didn't hug it out and move on. But piece by piece, through presence and humility, he began to stitch together what his silence had frayed.

That's when I began to understand: we are never truly isolated. We are woven into a tapestry of relationships. Even if frayed or broken, those threads still tug. Still pull. Still matter.

When we begin to name our choices and take ownership of their reach, we begin to restore the fabric. We begin to mend what has torn.

This chapter is not about guilt. It's about awareness. It's about seeing clearly. When you finally see how wide your decisions reach, you're not paralyzed by shame—you're awakened by purpose.

Because now, you can begin to live differently.

I invite you to look back at a few of your "private" choices. Were they really private? Or did someone else feel the consequences?

Maybe it was the words you didn't say that left someone insecure. Maybe it was the time you ghosted a friend who just needed clarity. Maybe it was the shortcut you took at work that made someone else clean up the mess. Maybe it was your silence when someone needed you to speak.

We all have these moments. They're not the end of the story. They're the beginning of something new—if we let them be.

What changed me wasn't a dramatic breakdown or public reckoning. It was the slow dawning realization that I wasn't living in a vacuum. That I wasn't an island. That my

presence, or lack of it, was shaping the world around me in ways I hadn't dared to see.

And once I saw it, I couldn't unsee it.

We are responsible not just for our intentions, but for our impact. We are accountable not just for what we say, but what our absence communicates. We are powerful—not in a controlling way, but in a connected way. Our choices carry weight because our lives carry meaning.

So if you're reading this and realizing you've told yourself the same lie I did—that your damage was your own, that your decisions were yours alone—you're not alone in that either. But you don't have to keep living under that illusion.

There is something better than isolation.

There is connection, repair, and redemption. But it starts with truth.

Truth that looks like an apology. Truth that sounds like, "I didn't realize the effect I had on you." Truth that walks into a room and listens instead of defends.

Let this chapter be your mirror. Let this chapter be your invitation.

To stop hiding behind "it's only my problem." And to start healing the world your life has touched.

Even if you didn't mean to hurt them. Even if you thought it was just about you.

It never was.

Reflection Prompts

1. What's a decision I once thought only affected me?

 Describe it in detail. Now consider: Who else was in the blast zone—directly or indirectly?

2. Where have I minimized the effects of my behavior?

 List moments where you said or believed things like, "They'll get over it," or "That's their issue." What might others have truly felt?

3. Who stayed silent while I unraveled?

o Think of someone who didn't speak up or tried, and you didn't listen. What might their silence have cost them?

4. Have I confused independence with selfishness?

 Reflect on a time you said, "It's my life," and explore who may have paid for that decision too.

5. What emotions did I avoid by pretending it was only about me?

Shame, fear, guilt—what feelings were you trying not to face?

6. Is there someone I still need to acknowledge?

 Not necessarily for an apology—just an honest accounting of who was affected.

7. Have I ever been on the other side—hurt by someone else's denial?

 Reflect on a time you were the one left wounded in silence.

8. What did my isolation cost me?

- Think about lost relationships, missed opportunities, or unspoken love.
- 9. If I could go back, what would I do differently—not for myself, but for someone I love?
- 10. What one step can I take this week to reverse the ripple?
- A text. A note. A confession. A pause. Begin somewhere.

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Dear			,

I've been thinking a lot about things I didn't see clearly before—especially the ways my choices may have affected you. For a long time, I told myself it was only my problem. But I'm starting to understand that you were part of the story too, and not always in ways you signed up for.

I want you to know this isn't about blame or trying to reopen old wounds. It's about honoring what may have been left unspoken. Whether it was silence, distance, anger, or avoidance, I see now how it might have impacted you—and I'm sorry.

You didn't deserve to carry the consequences of what I wasn't ready to face. Thank you for whatever grace, patience, or space you gave me. I don't take it for

granted. And I hope, in time, you'll see me living differently.

With humility, [Your Name]

Letter Template: To My Younger Self

Dear Younger Me,

You thought you were doing the best you could—and in some ways, you were. You didn't know the weight of your choices. You didn't understand how silence could speak louder than words, or how distance could wound more than anger.

I forgive you for what you didn't know. I honor the pain you carried alone, thinking it was noble to bear it quietly. But I'm here now to tell you: you were never meant to do this alone. You were not weak for needing connection. And your actions, even when unintentional, had impact.

From now on, I will live in a way that makes peace with our past. I will speak the truth we once avoided. I will show up in the relationships we once hid from. You are not forgotten. You are not broken. You were simply learning.

We still are.

With love and grace, [Your Name]