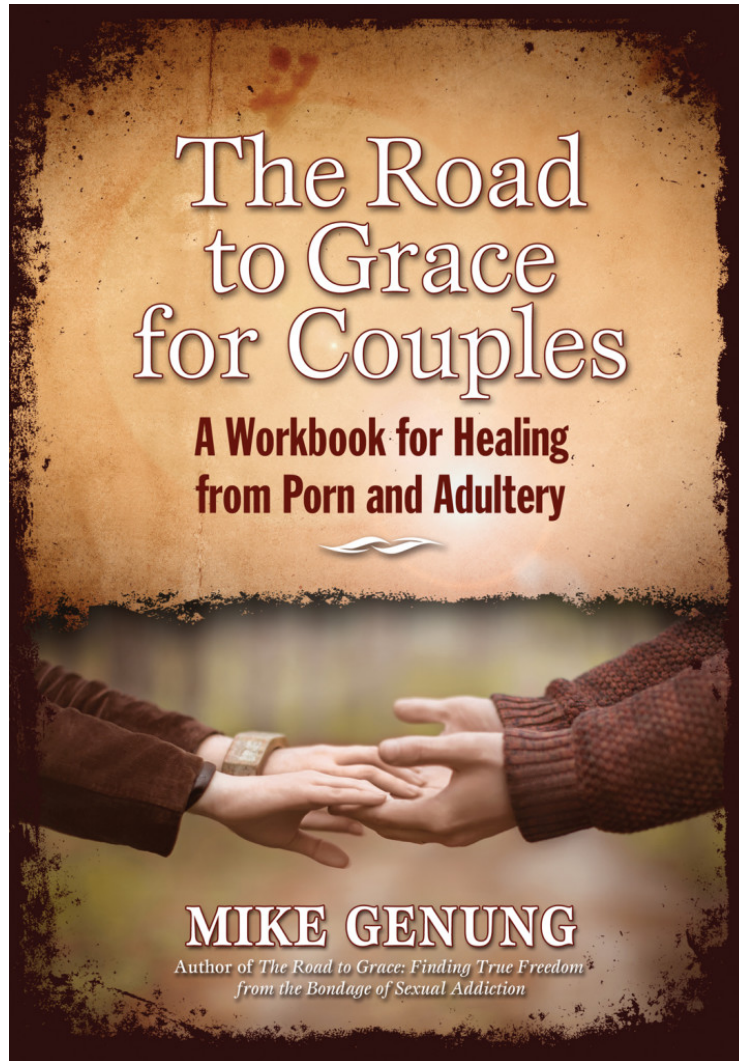


(This is an excerpt for subscribers to the BlazingGrace.org newsletter.

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The Road to Grace for Couples

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The Road to Grace for Couples: A Workbook for Healing from Porn and Adultery

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Cover Design ©2016 TLC Graphics, www.TLCGraphics.com.

ISBN–13: 978-0-9787756-8-1

ISBN–10: 0-9787756-8-6

Printed in USA

More copies of this book can be ordered at www.roadtoGrace.net.

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Intro

It breaks my heart when I hear that a couple is divorcing because of porn or adultery.

It grieves me because I know the pain and trauma porn and adultery inflict on a marriage, especially for the wife, as I wounded my wife Michelle with my sexual sin. I also know what divorce does to the kids, having watched my parents end their marriage years ago.

It makes me angry, because I know many marriages could be saved but won't be, because churches won't talk about sex or porn, and some well-meaning counselors are doing more harm than good. I've heard of wives that were told "you're not giving your husband enough sex so he's masturbating to porn." Insanity. A woman could have the perfect body (there is no such thing) and have sex with her husband three times a day (as if he could) but it would never resolve his lust-craving.

Sharing with friends and family is risky. One wife whose marriage recovered told me she had to distance herself from most of her friends because they kept pouring gasoline on the fire of her anger rather than helping her find ways to reconcile with her husband.

Recovering from porn, adultery, or other forms of sexual sin is one of the most painful, difficult, and challenging paths to walk for a couple. The husband must break free from the bondage of sexual sin; a confusing and intimidating path that requires him to press through shame and fear, confront his pride, sex, and self-absorption, and resolve the distorted core beliefs that triggered lust, while his wife processes all of her pain, anger, shock, and sorrow, learns to trust again, and gropes her way to forgiveness.

Add in the everyday stress of work and family, the normal disagreements that arise in marriage, and an invisible enemy, Satan, who is attacking them with everything he has, and you'll find yourself facing the Mount Everest of marital challenges.

The journey is often confusing and frustrating.

A husband feels a sense of victory after having received a coin from his support group commemorating three months of sexual purity. He rushes home, eager to tell his wife: "Surely

she will be happy.” When he shows his coin to her, she breaks down crying. His victory celebration salted her wound; the pain is overwhelming her again. She didn’t sign up for marriage to a sex and porn addict, and explodes: “Three months? You shouldn’t have used porn once while we’ve been married! Is this supposed to make me feel better?!”

Her husband is hurt, confused, and frustrated. “Here I am, doing all this work, and she’s upset with me.” He chases after her, trying to get her to see his side; an argument ensues. Hot words are followed by silence and withdrawal; he doesn’t feel appreciated, she doesn’t feel heard. How do they work through this?

If this pattern repeats for months, the rift in their marriage expands. Bridging the gap seems impossible.

I grew up in the church, then walked away from God during my teens to my early twenties. During my years as a single man, I threw myself into drugs, alcohol, pornography, promiscuity, adultery, and sex with prostitutes. When I hit twenty-three, God started calling me away from my life of sin. I quit the drugs, alcohol, and promiscuity, but couldn’t break away from porn and masturbation.

I met Michelle in 1987; we were married February of 1989. I knew all the right churchy words; she thought I was a great Christian guy. She had no idea she was marrying a porn and sex addict. I abstained from porn and masturbation the first six months of our marriage, but the inevitable stress from putting together two broken people of the opposite sex from two different families with messed-up communication methods started pushing my “medicate with porn” button. Soon I was bingeing daily.

Lust always leaves a man hungry for more; by the summer of 1991 porn wasn’t enough. I had sex with a prostitute during a business trip to Ohio. I was horrified. How could I, the “great Christian guy,” have committed adultery two and one-half years after our wedding day? How did I fall so far so fast? The shame and guilt were more than I could take, so I decided to call Michelle and come clean.

I'll never forget that phone call; it still brings tears to my eyes. Michelle was shocked, then started crying, with deep, heavy sobs, the kind that come from a broken heart. She kept repeating, "*Mike, Mike, Mike... oh Mike...*" It was then that the reality I'd hurt Michelle deeply broke through the fog; this was no "Honey I messed up please forgive me and let's move on" deal. I'd shattered our marriage vows, and had no idea if we would make it.

Thus began the long, fumbling, painful process of healing and restoration. Anger, fighting, misfired communication, confusion, crying, and cold silence laced our marriage for months. I'm amazed Michelle didn't leave me; biblically, she had every right to. Instead, she showed me grace and kindness that can only be described as amazing by working through the healing process with me.

God did an incredible work in our relationship. Today our bond is strong, as is our commitment to each other. More of our story is provided in my first book, *The Road to Grace: Finding True Freedom from the Bondage of Sexual Addiction*.

Every marriage is of profound importance and value to God. No matter how deep the wounds or what you've been through, the Lord can make something new and wonderful from the wreckage. I've seen him work a miracle in my life and in the lives of others I've been privileged to help. One couple I know who were days away from finalizing their divorce stopped the proceedings at the last minute. Months later they visited me; it was amazing to see the change in their relationship.

Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge.

Hebrews 13:4

By design, God put the two of you two together; He has a purpose for your marriage. Wives, in spite of the pain and trauma you're experiencing, the Lord didn't make a mistake when he paired you with your lust-ensnared husband. He has a plan for both of you, and He can walk you through the storm if you're both willing to cooperate with the process.

It will not be easy. In the chapters ahead we'll work our way through what may feel like a minefield at times; some issues will be emotionally charged. Several days after I exposed my adultery to Michelle, she found a book I had been reading on sexual addiction that had a list of twenty questions to determine if someone was a sex addict. She asked me every one. I was squirming in shame and embarrassment and wanted to crawl into a hole, but answered each question truthfully. In the end it turned out to be a good move on her part because it opened the door of communication and helped us understand each other.

Open, honest communication on the tough issues is critical. When a wounded couple is in the recovery process, emotions are raw and exposed. Some topics provoke pain, while others can stoke the fire of anger. These places need to be visited, worked through, and resolved to bring resolution and healing. Ostrich holes don't provide healing. If we don't bring these issues to light, the underlying resentment, shame, hurt, and anger will continue to torment your marriage.

So let's move forward. Healing and restoration are possible and there is hope; we serve a God who's in the business of mending broken hearts.

1: Setting the Stage

I suggest you read through this entire workbook together, especially this chapter. It's important that you're both in agreement with the process as we move forward. At the end of each topic there is a section for you to work the assignments, journal your emotions, and/or record decisions that were made. You can use this copy together, or, if you want to keep your notes private you may consider using two copies, one for each spouse.

Let's set the stage.

Assumptions.

This book is written with the following assumptions:

1. You are both Christians, believe the Bible is the inspired word of God, and have a desire to honor Him with your lives. This is important because the word of God is the standard for this workbook.

2. You're *both* committed to doing whatever it takes to heal your marriage. Some assume that once the husband ceases to sin sexually everything will be okay. The wife has as much work to do to heal as her husband does to break free; you both have a critical role to play. The will to persevere will play a key role in your recovery as you work through the assignments, examine the issues of the heart, and make adjustments in your relationship.

3. You're in agreement that the only God-ordained context for sex is in marriage between a husband and his wife. Solo acts of masturbation, pornography, sex with anyone outside of marriage, or other forms of sexual sin such as visiting stripper bars, phone sex, or watching R-rated movies with sex scenes are sin. Some may balk at the idea of solo masturbation being a problem; for an in-depth examination of this topic from a Biblical perspective see chapter 6 of my first book, *The Road to Grace: Finding True Freedom from the Bondage of Sexual Addiction*, and chapter 26 of my second book, *100 Days on The Road to Grace*. You can also view the masturbation article on the Blazing Grace website at <http://www.blazinggrace.org/masturbation/>. It's important that you're both on the same page with this issue; sex is a gift from God and should be reserved for the marriage bed.

4. All disclosures of porn use, adultery, affairs, or other forms of sexual sin have been made. If not, please wait until this is done so you can proceed without getting sidetracked by painful detours.

Commitment to Honesty

Lying, hiding, and deceit *always* accompany sexual sin. When the truth comes out, most wives are shocked to discover that the man they married has been lying to them for most, if not all, of their marriage. Trust, the cornerstone of every relationship, is shattered.

If trust is not rebuilt the marriage cannot be restored. Men, *I can't emphasize enough how critically important this is: from this day forward if your wife asks you a question, you must answer her truthfully.* "Truthfully" includes no lies by omission. If she asks you when you last masturbated to porn, tell her. If she wants to know every device you've acted out with (your home PC, smartphone, office computer, etc.), list them.

One of the worst things you can do to sabotage the rebuilding process is keep lying. Don't be fooled into thinking she won't find out; if you're Christian, you're God's son, and He will expose the truth in His time.

Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.

Galatians 6:7-8

As I described in the last chapter, I know how uncomfortable those questions from a wife can be. Even so, rigorous honesty is the only way to rebuild trust.

Before proceeding to the next chapter, please make a firm commitment to God and your wife that you will stop all lying and deceit from today forward.

Time

When Michelle and I began the healing process, I wanted to hurry up and get through it so we could "be normal again." What I didn't understand was that our marriage had been razed to the ground. The cornerstone of trust needed to be reset, new communication patterns learned, and faulty ones discarded. Our bond and love needed restoration and invigoration.

This will take time; focus on the journey, not the end result. Don't rush through the topics. Take the course at a pace that works for you without forcing it. Some assignments will be easy, with little time or emotional investment needed. Others might require several days or even weeks to work through. That's okay. It took years to get to where you are today. Now take the

time to carefully rebuild your marriage, brick by brick. Think of it as building a house; the investment of time and quality of resources the builder puts into it determines how long the finished product will last. Putting the same effort into your relationship will increase the chances that one day you'll have a new marriage that's so rock-solid that nothing can shake it.

The two of you are not alone. God will be helping, strengthening, encouraging, teaching, and healing you as you walk with Him. This workbook is about receiving His help as much it is providing you with the process.

Some people beat themselves or their spouses up because they can't heal, move forward, or "fix their marriage" as quickly as they'd like. Statements like "Why can't you just stop acting out" or "Why can't you get over this?" should be set aside. Give yourself and your spouse the time you need to heal and recover.

Communication

One of the biggest reasons couples go to marital counseling is they need a safe place to share where they won't get attacked by their spouse. Following is a communication structure you can use that will make it easier to talk freely.

Decide who will start.

The person who shares first begins by expressing their thoughts and feelings about the issue (staying on topic helps—avoid rabbit trails). While they're sharing, the listening spouse is not to speak. All impulses to defend, rebut, or, especially, attack their spouse is to be set aside.

The only goal for the listening spouse is to make their mate feel heard and understood.

No insults, sarcasm, antagonizing, belittling, attacking, or name-calling are allowed. Your goal is to work *with* your spouse, not against them. You're not in a contest to prove who's right. As hard as it will be, work to keep your emotions in check. Expressing them is good and necessary, but an angry explosion that turns abusive will shut your spouse down. Regardless of your spouse's failures or whether you feel they deserve it, treat them with respect.

Avoiding the word “you” as much as possible will help keep your spouse from going on the defensive. “You’ve destroyed our marriage and there’s no hope because you’re a pervert and a liar!” will send your husband into a foxhole. Instead, try to communicate with “I” statements such as “I’m hurting so much that I don’t know if I can forgive you; I’ve got a lot of anger and resentment for the way I’ve been treated and lied to.” Responses like this provide insight to your heart and will hopefully spark compassion from your spouse. It states what they did to you and how it affected you without attacking them.

Once the sharing spouse has finished, the listening spouse is to reflect, or mirror, what the sharing spouse expressed so the sharing spouse knows they were heard and understood. Again, the listening spouse is not to defend, dispute, or take over the conversation. Here’s an example: “You’re feeling wounded because of how I hurt you with my sexual sin. And it’s hard for you to forgive me because there’s so much pain and anger. Is this how you feel?”

If the sharing spouse agrees, then the listening spouse can do one of two things:

1. Ask the sharing spouse to expand on their original statement, put forward a question, or comment on what was shared, such as “I feel horrible for what I’ve done to you and would like to know more about what you’re going through,” or “Thanks for sharing that with me. Can you tell me what I could do to help you?”

If the sharing spouse doesn’t want to talk more, don’t force it. Just opening up and sharing feelings can be a challenge for some topics. A statement from the sharing spouse such as this works: “I’m not ready to go there just yet. I need a little time.”

2. The listening spouse can proceed to take the floor while the sharing spouse assumes the listening role. Continue the process until both sides feel heard, that they have worked through the issue, and are ready to move on.

Many marriages are made up of one introvert and one extrovert. The extrovert may need to work hard at listening and holding their tongue, while the introvert may need to force him/herself to open up and reveal their inner world. Extroverts tend to talk about themselves, while introverts think about themselves. Both sides need to work at focusing on the other so the

marriage can heal. When two people care more about the other than themselves or their agenda, healing can occur. We want the husband genuinely concerned for his wife's healing, just as we want the wife invested in her husband's journey to freedom from sexual sin.

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.

Philippians 2:3-4

Strive to work together. If you're not both in agreement on an issue, wait until you can find a way to come together on it. Don't force your will on the other. Let God have room to work so He can help you put together the pieces.

Part of being a safe spouse involves honoring your mate's desire for confidentiality. If the wife, for example, wants to tell her mom, who crosses boundaries at will and doesn't know when to back off, but her husband doesn't, honor the husband's request. If the husband wants to tell one of his buddies but his wife isn't ready, don't. Honor your spouse by putting them first; don't make a move unless you're in agreement.

If either side makes a mistake and says something hurtful, apologize immediately, and move on. If the offended party needs time to recover, take a break. Don't demand that the other side bounces back quickly if you hurt them. If you're the offended side, it's to your advantage to forgive as quickly as you're able. Work to keep bitterness away from your marriage as much as possible.

Setting a goal of creating a safe environment will open the doors to heart-level communication and healing.

If You Get Stuck

Every couple has moments when they hit a wall and can't agree on an issue. When this happens, follow these steps:

1. Look at what God's word says about the matter.
2. Remember that the spirit of the law (love) is often more important than the letter (Romans 8, 1 Corinthians 13). It's possible to be technically right but spiritually wrong; this usually happens when one side is trying to dominate their spouse instead of working with them.
3. Discern the essential from nonessential issues. An essential issue would be no porn or adultery; there shouldn't be any negotiation on whether these are permitted. Which day of the week your spouse goes to a support group is a nonessential and not worth taking a hard line on; what's critical is that the person goes.
4. When you know you need to, let your spouse win. Sometimes winning means letting the other side have their way on a nonessential. Don't be a control freak and insist on what you want all the time.
5. Examine your motives. Take a hard look at what's going on inside of you. Are you being selfish, proud, or fearful? Are you so hurt, angry, or wrapped up in yourself that you're not listening to what your spouse is saying? If they're pointing out a flaw of yours (or if this book has exposed it), are you putting up a smokescreen to avoid admitting that you have work to do?
6. Pray. Ask God what He wants you to do, then wait for His answer. Remember that you and your spouse are not alone; divine help is near.
7. Step back. Sometimes giving an issue time to breathe can clear the way for an answer to present itself.
8. If, after doing the above, you're still at an impasse and would like outside input, feel free to send me an email. My contact info is at the back of this book.

Prayer

We need to soak your marriage in prayer.

Pray together once a day, every day, no matter how you feel. There may be instances when one spouse is so upset they can't say a word and the other has to do all the praying. That's

okay; whatever it takes. One survey showed that of couples who pray together daily, only one couple in 1,000 will divorce, while of couples who don't pray together one in two will divorce. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken (Ecclesiastes 4:12). Prayer is one of the most important tools of the healing process.

Before you begin a chapter, pray together. Request God's help to diffuse any potentially explosive situations. Pride can pop up at a moment's notice, sparking both sides to take up defensive positions. Ask the Lord for the grace and humility to surrender your rights and the discernment to understand what you're going through. You're in a spiritual battle with an enemy who wants to destroy your marriage; Satan will poke and prod you with all the resentment, discouragement, and confusion he can. He doesn't want your marriage to heal because he knows you'll be a glowing testimony of God's grace.

Read all of the instructions for each action step before you proceed so you have a complete understanding of what you need to do. This is especially important when the topic is emotionally charged.

After completing an assignment, pray again. Ask God to seal what's been resolved and provide the will to take action. If your spouse needs healing in an area, pray for them.

Let's pray now. Pray together, and ask God to rebuild your marriage. Surrender the process and your spouse into His hands. Pray for each other. Ask for the help to focus on listening and caring for your spouse, and for the Lord to shut down all attempts of the enemy to thwart His work of restoring your relationship.

Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world. After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you. To Him be dominion forever and ever. Amen.

1 Peter 5:8-11

2: Taking Ownership

Pray

For the purposes of this course, I'll refer to the husband as the one who has committed sexual sin. I'm aware there are marriages where the wife committed adultery. If this is the case merely reverse the roles as described in this book.

Some men blame their wives for their sexual sin; not enough sex, nagging, and fighting are a few of the excuses they fire off. Every attempt by a husband to blame his wife for his sin is a smoke screen to keep him from taking a hard look in the mirror.

My hope is that you're not one of those men. Either way, it's important that we begin with the husband taking complete responsibility for his choices to engage in sexual sin. This is important for two reasons:

1. For the marriage to heal and the man to break free from lust, all justification, blaming, and denial, which have corrupted his character, must stop. These are attempts to hold on to sexual sin; your wife can't trust you while you're playing games with lust. Since God's word says all sex outside of marriage is sin, the husband has no ground to stand on to claim that his wife is responsible for his choices.

Some men might say, "But my wife has been closing me off sexually for a while now. How else am I supposed to find sexual release?" Many wives sensed when their husbands were engaging in sexual sin long before it hit the fan. Even if they didn't know the truth, a wife can read her husband like a book. If I'm messed up or had a hard day, Michelle can take one look at me and know something's wrong. Men who are in bondage to lust are sex and self-absorbed, critical, bitter, and miserable, so after years of being treated poorly it wouldn't be unreasonable for her to shut down sexually. Porn, adultery, and treating your wife harshly are sex-killers for a marriage; get the relationship right and the sex will come later.

2. Your wife needs to hear you take responsibility. Many women report that their husband's sexual sin gutted their self-esteem. Michelle told me I destroyed hers. Some women internalize the lie that they weren't good enough for her husband as a wife, lover, or mother to their children. If they just did (fill in the blank) better, maybe their husband wouldn't have turned to porn or an affair. Unfortunately, there are counselors in and out of the church who stir more confusion and chaos into the pot by saying foolish things like "If you just gave him more sex he wouldn't have this problem." No, it wouldn't. Lust always leaves a man wanting more; it never satisfies. In the early years of our marriage, Michelle and I had a great sex life, even when I was using porn. The truth is that a wife can't fix her husband's lust problem no matter what she does.

The wife of the husband who's using porn may see herself fighting an unwinnable war against "the perfect woman." If this is her perception, she'll be trapped in an unending cycle of trying to be "the perfect wife," which only leads to more despair, frustration, and anger. Until her husband takes complete ownership for his sin, the healing process will stay grounded.

On the positive side, a man who takes full responsibility shows his wife he's serious about rebuilding their relationship. By choosing the path of humility, he plants seeds of hope in their marriage garden. Moreover, God *promises* to honor humility with grace (James 4:6); for Christians this is an awesome promise that can yield unexpected blessings.

When a husband takes ownership of his sin, he creates a safe environment his wife can heal in. Instead of shutting her heart down and putting her on the defensive by blaming her, now he gives her a reason to hope. She can stop competing with the "perfect woman" or seeing herself as a failure. She is God's gift to her husband, not the cause of his sin. She has hope because he's not going to play games with lust or hide in denial or justification as many men do. He's saying, "I'm broken; I need help. I want to break free from sexual sin and heal our marriage. I'm sorry I hurt you."

For today's action step, the husband is to take complete ownership for all of his sexual sin. He is to release his wife from all responsibility for all of his choices, no matter what was going on in their marriage.

Husbands, you can write this out in a letter, or verbalize it. Wives, allow him the freedom to express his feelings in the way that is least intimidating to him. He may need a little time to put his thoughts together and work through his emotions.

When the husband has completed his part, the wife is to reflect, or mirror, what her husband said. If he truly took ownership he'll want to know that you heard him.

Then the husband is to invite his wife to share her feelings about his confession. Wives, remember that shame is a debilitating part of sexual sin. Some men are terrified of letting their guard down; your husband may feel like he took a risk today when he exposed his feelings. You want to encourage him to keep taking the steps of humility. If your emotions are raw at the moment and you're feeling overwhelmed, (i.e., if you're afraid that anger might overtake you) you might want to consider saying something like "I appreciate what you've said; I'm in a bad place right now. Please give me a little time to absorb this so I can provide a response that might be better for both of us."

After she shares, the husband is to mirror his wife's comments. Husbands, remember that this is painful for your wife; even something as positive as taking responsibility can rub salt in her wound. No matter what she says, do not defend yourself. *Focus on listening to her and making sure she feels heard.* Allowing her to express her feelings without interruption will help her feel safe with you. You want her to feel free to open up with you with everything she's going through.

In spite of how emotionally charged this action step may be for both of you, remember that your goal is to work *with* each other. Striving to understand your spouse will help open the doors of communication, which is an important part of this process.

Close with prayer.

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