

Think Again

*Resilience That Produces a
Return on God's Investment*

Second Edition

Don Allsman

Think Again: Resilience That Produces a Return on God's Investment

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Dedication

To the next generations of Allsmans: Ryan, Mark, Chris, Jonathan, Janée, Lindsey and their future family members. I pray you each live a fruitful life in the fulness of Christ, being resilient in all trials, and until He returns, passing that heritage to the next generation.

Acknowledgements

To Cathy Allsman, thank you for the hundreds of hours you invested in this project, talking together about how God shapes us during trials, urging me to write this second edition when I didn't have the confidence to do so, tirelessly editing several drafts of the same material, and challenging me to craft each phrase for clarity. This book would never have happened without your inspiration, industriousness, and comradery. Thanks to Dave Johnstone for your insights and encouragement to keep writing. To Mark and Lindsey, thank you for your insight from a mental health perspective. Thanks to Elder Michael Dinkins, Harold Roesler, and Bob Drummond for input on content, and to Lisa Hoffman for proofreading. To Charles Anderson, Mary Flin, and Edith Davis, thank you for using *Think Again* as a companion with other training programs like *Fight the Good Fight of Faith* and *Climbing Up*.

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Introduction

God has a plan for the ages, and He invites us to join Him in that work! From Genesis to Revelation, the Father has been building His Kingdom. This progressive action glorifies the Son by the power of the Spirit, but is manifested through His Body, the Church. Because He wants to bless the nations through us, He lavishly provides all we need to carry that work forward. In other words, He blesses us so that He can see a good return on His investment until the Great Commission is completed.

But there is a problem. We have an enemy who is constantly at work to steal, kill, and destroy, seeking to discourage and distract us from our purpose. Satan wants us to give up, to abandon what God offers. This world is full of difficulty and confusion, and we experience tragedies and disappointments that knock us off our feet. We get pushed down in life, whether it is rejection by a friend, death of a loved one, loss of a job, a serious illness, or suffering abuse from a family member.

Resilience is Key

But we are not helpless victims in this spiritual warfare. Even though being knocked down is inevitable, the true measure of our character is not the number of times we fall, but *how quickly we get back up*. This ability to bounce back from adversity is called “resilience” and it is an important quality for anyone who produces fruit for the Kingdom of God. It is not that the resilient never get discouraged or disappointed, but with the strength that God provides, they can quickly recover from a tumble.

In fact, true greatness in the Kingdom comes only from resilience. Jesus was the most resilient of all, giving us an example to follow. He got tired, frustrated, and sad, but He did not stay that way. His trust

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in the Father allowed Him to get back up and keep moving. It's in the resilience (getting back up again) that fruit is borne in our lives.

Francis de Sales compared resilience to the agility displayed by birds.¹ Some people trudge through life, never learning how to overcome challenges. They are like ostriches or chickens who never learn to fly. However, eagles and doves fly swiftly and to great heights. In the same way, we can learn how to soar to great heights by showing resilience in the face of trials.

De Sales also compared resilience to the activity of bees, who can extract bitter juice from plants and then convert it to sweet honey. In the same way, God has equipped us to take in adversity and produce fruit for His Kingdom. Like an investment banker who gives seed capital to entrepreneurs, God invests in us so He can see a return on His investment. *Think Again* can help us learn how to produce a return that is 10, 50, 100 times more than what He supplies (Mk. 4:20).

The Identity Problem

In the world, people attempt to *find their identity*, but in the Kingdom, God *gives us a new identity* as members in His family (Gal. 3:28). He wants to conform us into the image of Jesus (Rom. 8:29). Identity is not so much about discovering ourselves, but realizing *who we belong to*. Consequently, we are free from worldly pressure to find our identity that mostly produces frustration.

For example, as affluent countries have become richer, enjoyed more leisure time, and experienced a higher standard of living, unhappiness and depression rates have sharply increased, including the number of people suffering from anxiety.² In part, this is based on the lie: find your identity and you will be happy. After 50 years

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of chasing after personal identity, the result has been increased emptiness, worry, boredom, and addiction.

But it is difficult to “find myself” when there are so many choices and not enough objective bases to make decisions. The more people pursue answers, the more confused they become. This makes it overwhelmingly complex to find personal identity. And once someone has successfully defined their identity, there is no rest, because they must work equally hard to *maintain* that identity.³

Moreover, for those who come from years of oppression, identity can be strongly associated with their struggle to be recognized as fully human. Prisoners, drug users, the abused, immigrants, or minorities live every day with the effects of their pain and can start to believe they are nothing more than victims of their oppression. This adds another level of complexity in making sense of their identity.

The Enemy's Role

Another challenge to seeking personal identity is that there is an enemy who lies to us about who we are, an adversary who attempts to confuse us and take us off track. He frames the debate so we will ignore our identity *as God sees us*. He does not care what identity we choose, as long as it is not based on our identity in Christ.

Therefore, if our identity is based solely on being a social-justice advocate, Satan wins; a powerful crime lord, Satan wins; a successful businessperson, Satan wins; a devoted grandmother, Satan wins. Identities don't have to be overtly evil to be satanic, they simply need to distract us from our true identity in Christ. Neil Anderson said, “We have been deceived into believing that what we do determines who we are. The only identity that works in God's Kingdom is you

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plus Christ equals wholeness and meaning.”²⁴ If we do not know who we are in Christ, we will be defeated throughout our lives.⁵

A Different Way

Jesus said we find life when we give it up for His sake (Mt. 16:25). But when we permit God to shape us, it doesn’t mean we lose our personality or distinctiveness. We are not *cloned*. God reshapes and transforms us to be like Jesus while we also retain our uniqueness. He reveals who we are over time, so we can be His ambassador wherever we are placed on the map of life.

Like the superheroes of comic book fame, in Christ we find our “true identity.” As one leader in the prison church said, “In Christ, I met myself for the first time. I was existing, but now I’m living.” When God forges our identity, we realize we are much more than we appear to be.

But unlike comic book heroes, the contribution we make is not likely to make us famous. Our ambition may be to make a name for ourselves, have a big social media following, or become well known in our field, a “big fish in a little pond.” But if we want to leave a legacy of eternal significance, we need to use our energy to quietly serve in anonymity, knowing that our labor in the Kingdom is not in vain (1 Cor. 15:58). When we labor inconspicuously, we can find the joy of being a “little fish in God’s grand ocean.”

Free at Last!

This realization provides confidence and joy! “Finding ourselves” is not our responsibility. By allowing God to shape our identity in Christ, we can enjoy everything He supplies without it *defining us*. When we no longer have to find ourselves, we are released from a

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yoke of slavery. We are free to stand on another soil, breathe another air, and look up at another sky. Our life motives change, making our inward drives brand new.⁶

But securing this freedom is not easy, and it doesn't come in one fell swoop. Forging us into the character of Christ is a long and arduous process, superintended by the Spirit. For many, the process of deep, inward change is not desirable. We want instant change, and when we can't find it, we prefer to escape life's problems through wealth, relationships, prestige, drugs, pornography, or shopping.

In essence, we can exert enormous energy to *find our identity*, or we can allow God to *forge our identity*. Finding or forging, that is the question. For those who are ready to say "yes" to the Spirit's forging work, this book will be helpful.

The Return-on-Investment Process

Part I: God Supplies is a celebration of the warm and generous nature of the Triune God who gives us abundant life through the Father's philanthropy, the Son's provision, and the Spirit's power. This section also explores the metaphor of God as *venture capitalist*, seeking a return on His investment (ROI) in us.

Part II: Satan Impairs is a description of the devil's strategies to oppose God's work. This section explains some of his many schemes to steal, kill, and destroy that result in strongholds of destruction and distraction.

Part III: We Produce provides a road map to build resilience that increases capacity for the Kingdom. Although Satan impairs and

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God supplies, we produce a return on investment for God when we practice skills that transform us to become like Christ.

To sum up, the normal Christian life is spiritual warfare. This is not the exotic encounters seen in Hollywood productions, but the daily grind of standing against the schemes of the devil. But we can't stand against what we don't see. Therefore, the primary skill to become more like Christ is to sort lies from truth. In other words, gaining discernment regarding Satan's lies is the key to producing a return on investment.

Why a Second Edition?

Since writing the first edition (2018), I have been through trials where God has equipped me to learn resilience in new ways. I am grateful to pass these lessons on. I have also become aware of new and additional resources that will be helpful in building resilience.

Trauma Healing

One of those resources is trauma healing. If you have experienced trauma, I urge you to get help from professional practitioners or through the many fine trauma healing programs available, such as Reboot Recovery, the American Bible Society, and World Impact.⁷

But even for those who have been through therapy or trauma healing, the reality is there are more trials yet to come. We all need to develop resilience to face the inevitable adversity before us. In fact, the desired outcome of trauma healing is to acquire resilience to face what is ahead. In this way, *Think Again* can help you in trauma prevention: the daily fight to dust yourself off, get up, and keep walking.

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To be clear, I am not a trained counselor or therapist. I am a fellow sojourner attempting to let the Spirit strengthen my resilience to produce a return on God's investment. Therefore, this book is not meant to be a replacement for professional mental health treatment.

Companion to Fight the Good Fight of Faith

In 2014, I co-authored *Fight the Good Fight of Faith* with Dr. Don Davis. This nine-part Bible study introduces people to their role in God's cosmic drama, using the themes outlined in the book of Ephesians. Since 2018, *Fight the Good Fight of Faith* has been translated in over 30 languages and has widespread use in U.S. prisons. It is an excellent foundation for Christian faith. This second edition of *Think Again* has been modified to serve as a natural sequel to *Fight the Good Fight of Faith*, providing an effective next step to become increasingly fruitful for His Kingdom.

New Subtitle

The first edition's subtitle was "Transformation That Yields a Return on God's Investment." Since 2018, I have experienced new kinds of adversity that tested me to the limits of endurance. As God helped me use the principles of *Think Again* to survive and thrive in the middle of these tribulations, it became clear that we need more than just *transformation*. We needed *resilience*, the ability to get back up when we get knocked flat on our backs. Therefore, I replaced "transformation" with the word "resilience" in the sub-title and changed some of the material to reflect that insight.

Personalized Schemes

Another reason for a new edition came from the discovery of a personal scheme the enemy had been using throughout my life. Out of that experience I gained practical insight from other believers,

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especially from Ignatius of Loyola who wrote about consolation, desolation, and agency. From that experience I added a chapter on developing a personal defense strategy in Part III.

Other Books

In the first edition, I mentioned *Think Again* as a sequel to my 2010 book *Jesus Cropped from the Picture*. This second edition is still a natural follow-up for those looking for personal application to that book. Also, in 2020, my wife Cathy and I wrote *Climbing Up: Preparing on the Inside for Service on the Outside*, to equip prisoners preparing themselves for release, and to orient their loved ones to the challenges of re-integration into the free world. This book used much of the material in the first edition of *Think Again* and suggested it as a supplemental study. I have made some changes to this second edition to make an even stronger connection to *Climbing Up*.

Feedback

I received some feedback from readers of the first edition that the book would flow better if the order of Parts I and II were reversed. In other words, put the description of God's work to provide abundant life first, and place the devil's work to steal, kill, and destroy after that. Therefore, that adjustment is reflected in this second edition, while much of the content has remained the same.

Finally, it could be argued that the importance of spiritual disciplines is under-represented in *Think Again*. These historical practices of the Church to receive the grace to follow Jesus effectively are vitally important, especially when they are bundled into a personal plan (called a "Rule of Life"). The principles of *Think Again* will work best when a person faithfully practices spiritual disciplines. But the introduction of this topic is beyond the scope of this book and

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deserves further exploration. There are already many excellent resources on this subject and Appendix 4 offers some ideas to get started.

A Prayer of Blessing

Life is full of disappointments, and if we are going to produce fruit for the Kingdom of God, we must be ready to get knocked down, but also learn how to get up. Here is the crux of the matter: we can try to find inner calm, power, and poise by controlling the circumstances of life, or we can let God shape us on the inside so that no matter what happens, nothing can sink us.⁸ Imagine a future where God is at work in such a way that no matter what happens in life, we can be secure. We can become *unsinkable!*

Amazingly, God wants to change the world through us! He has richly provided for us to represent His interests in the world, and we are free to do so with anticipation and delight. He invests in us to enjoy a return on His investment, seeing us bear fruit that glorifies Jesus.

Therefore, I pray you will start a new journey of allowing God to do His work that produces abundant fruit for His Kingdom and brings glory to His name. Just think what refreshment awaits the people in your world! This book is not just for you, but for untold people waiting to be blessed by you.

Part I: God Supplies

I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

John 10:10b

Chapter 1

The Problem Defined

I REMEMBER THE INSECURITY and anxiety of my teenage years, but as a new believer in Christ, I also started experiencing the transformation that God offers His people. Over the decades, bit by bit, I witnessed the fruit of His work in my life, finding the abundant life He offers.

My story begins in the North Bakersfield high school gym, running lines. This dreadful conditioning drill seemed to be a source of my coach's delight as he berated us until we were ready to keel over. While some of us tried hard, others made a half-hearted effort, and any time he observed even one person slacking off, he would punish all of us by making us run more. It was a dreadful experience.

During these days I started experiencing a recurring nightmare, where my coach was in my bedroom shouting, "Allsman, what are you doing sleeping when you should be out there running!?" I would jump up, stand at my bedside (for who knows how long), and then eventually realize that it was not real. Then I would go back to sleep only to wake up a few minutes later, haunted by the same dream.

A Comical Turn

Years later, these stressful dreams took a comical turn when I married Cathy. It wasn't too many weeks before Cathy was awakened by something bumping her shoulder. She looked over and saw me raising and lowering my arms in unison, and said, "What are you doing?!" Without waking up, I responded, in between deep breaths, "Pumping . . . iron." As soon as I uttered those words, with arms fully extended to the ceiling, I realized I had been doing bench presses in my sleep. I had no idea how long this had been going on. It was only when I replied that I became aware of the fictional world in which I was living.

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A few months later, we moved to Wichita, Kansas for graduate school. It was a cold winter night, and to save money, we turned the heater down at night, relying on several layers of blankets for warmth. Feeling a cold draft, Cathy woke up to see me standing by the bedside, slowly pulling the covers back. She said, “What are you doing?!” I abruptly put my finger to my lips and whispered, “Shhhhhh. There’s a snake in the bed.” She said, “You are dreaming again, give me the blankets back and go to sleep.” Cathy made several earnest attempts to wrestle the blankets from me, while assuring me of our safety before I finally became aware of my dream. It seemed so real!

After we graduated and moved back to California, it was another winter night when Cathy woke to the feeling that someone was in our bedroom. She switched on her bedside light and found me standing in the corner wearing swim trunks, with my hands on my hips. She asked her now oft-repeated question, “What are you doing?!” As she spoke, I woke up, looked around for a moment and replied, “I have no idea.”

The funny part of this story is the amount of effort this required. Since my swim trunks were packed away for the winter, I had to get out of bed, quietly rifle through the cabinet in the dark, change out of my warm pajamas, and stand in the corner of the chilly bedroom for an unknown amount of time. I may have stood there for hours had Cathy not rescued me from my misadventure.

On another occasion one early morning, I dreamt that Cathy asked me to bring her a cold washcloth for her forehead. Being a loving husband, I walked to the bathroom sink, soaked a washcloth with cold water, and returned to lovingly care for my dear wife. As I quietly whispered, “Here’s the washcloth you wanted,” she was

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shocked by the ice-cold stream of water descending on her face and exclaimed, “What is that?!” Although puzzled by her question, I said, “I brought you the cold washcloth you asked for.” Wiping water from her face, she said, “You’re dreaming again. Please wring that out and go back to sleep.”

However, my favorite anecdote originates during the days of confirmation hearings for Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, a big news story that captured my attention. One night, I bolted up in bed and said, “Oh no!!!!” Concerned it was some kind of emergency, Cathy also sat up to ask, “What’s wrong?” In a clear but concerned voice I said, “If they confirm Clarence Thomas to the Supreme Court, I’ll have to put him on the payroll!” After several years of these annoying dreams, Cathy had learned how to handle the situation and calmly said, “You don’t need to do that Don, the US government will handle that for you.” Relieved by her words, I said, “Oh good,” and went back to sleep.

Feelings Unconnected to Reality

These amusing stories illustrate a fundamental element of the human condition: *we are subjected to thoughts and feelings that have no connection to reality.* Our enemy the devil constantly bombards us with confusing messages that are disconnected from God’s truth. He lies, deceives, and distorts so that we might live in confusion and distraction.

Like my stress dreams, the enemy’s lies can seem real and based on sound experience. I really thought there was a snake in the bed. I really thought it was my job to put Clarence Thomas on the payroll. I really thought Cathy wanted a cold, dripping washcloth. And the troubling part is that my body reacted to my dreams as though the delusions were true. My adrenaline was pumping at the same rate as if a snake were really in the bed. The anxiety about Clarence Thomas

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was the same as though I really did forget an important task at my job. And when Cathy told me the federal government would take care of Clarence Thomas, my body reacted as though it was true. I calmed down and went back to sleep.

Indeed, our bodies cannot tell the difference between truth and lies. If we believe there is a snake in the bed, our bodies will react with a burst of adrenaline. If we don't believe there is a snake in the bed, our bodies will relax, and we can sleep peacefully. When it comes to our nervous system, there is no such thing as truth or lies, only what we believe.

The danger of this comes when we repeat a lie enough times that we start to believe it, whether it is true or not. Saying "I am dumb, and I can't do anything right" can start off as a joke but can turn into a belief after several repetitions. Those who say, "I have no interests" can soon find themselves having no interests.⁹ Over time, who we *think* we are actually becomes who we *are*.

As a result, our spiritual and physical health is dependent upon what we *believe*. If we believe Satan's accusations, our bodies will respond to those accusations as though they were true. If the adversary suggests, "God has abandoned you and you are alone," and we *believe* that lie, our bodies will suffer anxiety leading to bitterness, worthlessness, disappointment, and fear. On the other hand, if Satan says, "God has abandoned you," we can *believe* what God says in His Word, affirming that we are cherished and forgiven. By believing God's truth, our bodies can respond in joy and thanksgiving.

Expose Lies and Affirm Truth

Because our bodies react so strongly to what we believe, the accuser can trick us into believing the same lies over and over until they form

The Problem Defined

toxic habits and attitudes. At first, he presents lies that can produce a rush of anxiety. When this happens, we may sense an alarm that something isn't right, that the thought may need to be challenged.

But if we repeatedly ignore these alarms, the warnings we once noticed have less and less effect. Then our response to that lie becomes a habit, which ends in an unconscious state of anxiety that starts to feel normal. Without realizing it, we can live in a constant state of stress. Therefore, each time we agree with the devil's deceptions, we allow grooves to be etched in our brains that, over time, form strongholds. By so doing, we not only harm ourselves, but our bad attitudes and behavior starts impacting the people around us in a negative way.

On the other hand, if we believe what God's Word says, the Spirit will change our habits and attitudes to be like the Lord Jesus. This enables us to glorify God and bless others for His sake. He can forge our identity, being conformed to His likeness (Rom. 8:29). As Neil Anderson said, "As believers, we are not trying to become saints; we are saints who are becoming like Christ."¹⁰ When we agree with the truth of God's Word, we demolish old strongholds and create new habits that bring life and peace.

This means we don't simply have to "try harder to avoid sin," but by the work of the Spirit, we can be transformed into a different person on the inside. Because our bodies react only to *belief*, our job is to expose lies and affirm the truth. Lies and truth have no power in themselves; they are neutral. We activate lies or truth by what we *believe* and the best way to do this is by affirming the truth from God's Word.

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This transformation has been true in my life, evidenced by the fact that I no longer have the stress dreams Cathy and I suffered years ago. And while I still have a long way to go, I have learned how to cooperate with God in building the kind of resilience that produces a return on God's investment.

Chapter 2

The Battlefield Location

OUR SONS RYAN AND Mark were a source of delight to us as they grew up, providing us with many funny stories. At a young age Mark often caught us by surprise with vocabulary that seemed beyond the understanding of someone his age. For example, when he was six years old, I announced the convening of a family meeting. Right away, Ryan (age 11) inferred by the tone of my voice that this was going to be unpleasant. Oblivious to these non-verbal cues, Mark excitedly said, “Are we going to a movie or out for dinner?”

Before I could respond, Ryan whispered to Mark that this event was going to be serious. Mark’s countenance immediately dropped, and he said, “I don’t think I want to be a part of this confrontation.” Cathy and I burst out laughing, wondering if Mark even knew what a “confrontation” was.

The Epic Battle

When it comes to the epic battle we find ourselves in, we can feel the same way Mark did. We wish we hadn’t landed in the middle of a confrontation but prefer to avoid it or negotiate a truce.

But it can be comforting to realize that there is larger, historical context that is bigger than our situation. Our day-to-day existence is part of something far beyond just our personal problems. Dallas Willard said, “Instead of being the main show, we are of significance only as a – very important – part of an immense struggle between immense forces of good and evil.”¹¹ This gives us the right perspective to cope with the harsh realities of life.

This is a battle that preceded us and goes on after we die. Before Creation, the devil rebelled against God and then recruited Adam

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and Eve to join in that insurrection. Ever since that day, God has been intent to win back everything that was lost at the Fall. Through Jesus our Lord, the devil has been defeated, not only through His death and resurrection, but also through His incarnation, healings, exorcisms, and ascension. Then He sent the Holy Spirit at Pentecost to launch the Church to continue His victories over Satan, expanding His Kingdom influence around the world.

Therefore, the Gospel is the good news that God will prevail in this broader historical conflict, and we are the spoils of that victory (Mt. 12:29). But before we understood this Gospel, our eyes were blind to much of what was happening in the invisible world all around us. We needed the Holy Spirit to reveal this, but when we believed, our eyes were opened to the truth of His Word. We could understand a Creator and His creation that includes an adversary who attempts to keep everyone from understanding the truth. We find ourselves as a part of the Father's plan, carried out by a Champion to make all things new, with an invitation for people to receive forgiveness and join Him in this work.

The Thief

In Jn. 10:10, Jesus said about the adversary, “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy.” He is a plunderer, a robber, and a murderer. He wants to do more than just impair God's work; he also delights in ruining our lives. Sometimes we miss the violent nature of the devil's agenda. He did not come to “tickle, bump, and annoy” but to “steal, kill and destroy.” He is a vicious and powerful adversary prowling around for someone to devour (1 Pet. 5:8). His desire is chaos and devastation.

He also employs a strategy of *subtraction*, taking valuables away from people. He is like a bully who steals lunch money from a child or

The Battlefield Location

brute who enjoys stepping on a flower. He constantly pillages, which is manifested in sickness, rejection, interpersonal conflicts, financial problems, and even geopolitical conflicts. The Bible frequently refers to these as coming from “the world, the flesh, and the devil” (e.g. Eph. 2:1-3, Js. 4:1-7), but all evil originates from a single source: Satan. Paul said the evil one is an enemy of all righteousness, full of deceit and villainy, perverting the ways of the Lord (Acts 13:10).

Part B

Despite the accuser’s devastating efforts to steal, kill, and destroy, God offers an entirely different approach. There is a “Part B” to John 10:10. Jesus contrasts the enemy’s plundering work by declaring that we can have *abundant life*. While the devil’s math is based on *subtraction* (taking good away), God’s math is rooted in *multiplication* (making good things double and triple). Where the evil one tries to steal our lunch money, God wants to give us enough money for our own lunch, plus a little extra something so we can treat our friends to lunch too (Eph. 4:25).

In general, God wants to forge our identity so He can multiply the blessings of His Kingdom. He wants a return on His investment (ROI), and an examination of Jesus’ parables shows this to be true. God provides but expects to receive more than He put in (Parable of the Talents, Mt. 25:14-30). God provides the seed and expects 30, 60, 100 times the investment (Parable of the Soils, Mt. 13:3-9). A small seed results in a large plant that produces refuge for others (Parable of the Mustard Seed, Mt. 13:31-32), and a small amount of leaven spreads to the whole loaf (Parable of the Leaven, Mt. 13:33).

In all these parables, God supplies the seed and expects a harvest well beyond what He put in. He makes the initial investment but asks us to produce a windfall. Because Jesus appointed us to bear fruit

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that will last (Jn. 15:16), there is work for us to do. By shaping our identity, He enhances our ability to yield an ROI for Him.

The apostle John said it this way: “The reason Jesus appeared was to destroy the devil’s work” (1 Jn. 3:8). In the context of this cosmic battle, we become Jesus’ agent to carry on the destruction of Satan’s works. While the enemy impairs and God supplies, we participate in God’s work to frustrate the enemy. We didn’t ask to land in the middle of this confrontation, but like it or not, we are God’s chosen agent to advance His Kingdom. But a greater understanding of this begins with a deeper understanding of the philanthropic nature of God the Father.

Chapter 3

The Father's Philanthropy

WHEN JESUS SAID, "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly," this notion was rooted in the unbounded goodness and generosity of the Father who sent Him (Jn. 7:28-29). He is a loving Father who encourages, exhorts, and charges His children (2 Thess. 1:11). He is a philanthropic parent who provides for us. Too often, our concept of the Father is out of sync with this reality. When we fail to recognize the Father as lovable, radiant, happy, friendly, accessible, and totally competent, then we have the wrong image of the Father.¹² His overflowing mercy and kindness flows from His character.

We can start to understand the Father's goodness when we consider all the ways that life can bring us joy. These include laughter, good food, interesting conversation, time with family, or hours of interesting hobbies that energize us and give us life. We experience God in nature, watching a beautiful sunset, taking a walk in the woods, or enjoying the companionship of a pet. The list of blessings God has created seems without end, extending to music, athletics, science, art, and literature.

Source and Sustainer

The Father Almighty is sovereign over everything, the source of all living things, the sustainer of all. His marvelous goodness is demonstrated in His attributes, His perfect moral purity, His absolute integrity, and His unbounded love.¹³ The Father shows concern for all creation, providing for every creature in a wondrously complex ecosystem where birds, fish, animals, and microorganisms flourish. The Father is gracious, offering His bounty to all people, whether they deserve it or not. He shows a special compassion toward the needy

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and broken. He is slow to anger, patient in exercising judgment, and His kindness leads people to repentance and salvation (Rom. 2:4).

However, when we fail to trust the goodness and philanthropy of the Father, our lives can be ruined. Upon the examination of the many moral failures of well-known people, what they have in common is the false assumption that “God has required me to take care of my own needs.” When a person stops believing that God richly supplies, resentment toward God is the inevitable outcome.¹⁴ Therefore, the downfall of respected ministry leaders is not rooted so much in a desire for sex or power, but a lack of trust in the Father’s provision.

But we can trust in the Father’s care! Despite the circumstances we face, Rom. 8:35 reminds us that He is with us. Whether we face tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger, or sword, no circumstances are beyond God’s redemptive purposes. Despite the attacks of Satan, we can be certain that the Father’s unmerited favor is sufficient for all that we face (2 Cor. 12:9).

One of the most important aspects of the Father’s philanthropy is demonstrated in his protections from the enemy. Job 1:1-2:6 reveals Satan’s methods of accusations and threats, but it is the Father who authorizes permission before trials are released. This insight into the spiritual realm assures us that nothing happens outside of God’s sovereignty. The book of Job informs us that while we may not be given insight into the greater cosmic purposes of our trials, we can trust the Father to protect, provide, and redeem in every situation.

Adaptability

The Father demonstrates His philanthropy through the adaptability found in His creation. God designed the amazing ability of life to

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adapt in changing environments. This is especially true in the highest of His creation: humankind, the *imago dei*.

For example, scientific discoveries in epigenetics have demonstrated how flexible God has made the human brain. Our brain is “neuroplastic,” meaning it can change and grow.¹⁵ The scientific community used to believe that once our brains were damaged, they could not be restored. But now, neuroscience has verified what Christians have known for years: we can be “transformed by the renewing of our minds” (Rom. 12:2).¹⁶

In fact, the human brain is made up of real, physical, electromagnetic, quantum, and chemical flow that switches genes on and off in a positive or negative direction based on our choices and subsequent reactions. When our bad reactions get wired into our brains, they can also be rewired as we respond to God's truth.

Therefore, even our neural pathways can change according to our beliefs. Thinking destructively wires in toxic patterns that damage the body and the mind. On the other hand, this can be reversed by thoughts of love, joy, appreciation, and gratitude (e.g. Phil. 4:8).¹⁷ Because we are made in the image of God, we can stand outside our feelings and exercise control over our response to stimuli. We can decide how to interpret the meaning of events and avoid being a victim of circumstances.

Like a person looking in through a window, we can observe a traumatic event and cause its harmful effects to wither and die, replacing it with a healthy perspective based on God's truth. The substance of toxic memories in our brains can be weakened, replacing damaging mental events with the Word of God. Neurons that don't get enough attention start falling apart, destroying the emotion attached to the

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pain. In their place, dopamine (which increases focus and attention) and serotonin (which increases feelings of peace and happiness) start flowing, leading to the formation of new brain connections.¹⁸

Transformation in Weeks

The Father's design of our human bodies also allows for transformation that can happen rather quickly. The book *Switch On Your Brain*¹⁹ suggests that it takes only 21 days for certain protein changes to occur in the brain, so strongholds can begin degrading after just three weeks of work, practicing only 7-10 minutes per day. In other words, we don't have to wait for years before the strengthening of resilience begins.

She goes on to state that after three successive rounds of 21 days (63 days), our nonconscious thinking begins controlling our conscious thinking, and we begin to automatically respond in a healthy new way. This gives us mastery to the extent that mentoring others can occur. In other words, after only 21 days of sustained practice we can form new Christlike habits, and after 63 days we can begin discipling others.

Despite what people say, we are not controlled by our heredity! Because of the Father's philanthropic design, we are not stuck being the person we are today. While the genes we inherited do give us a predisposition to certain behaviors, they are not our destiny! Our thoughts can change the structure of our brain at every level: molecular, genetic, cellular, electromagnetic, and even subatomic. The power of habits can be broken, because the Father has designed us to transform. We can become a new person day by day!

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Imagination

The Father is also the God of imagination. He has created a universe of mysterious unknowns yet to be revealed, a cosmos of complexity and wonder. Through the diversity of His creation, the Father's *imagination* is manifested everywhere we look.

Throughout history, the Father has demonstrated freedom to act in creative, surprising ways. He provides rams stuck in thickets, makes axe heads float, and releases plagues that discredit the gods of Egypt. He sends His Son as a zygote in a Nazarene peasant girl, dispatching angels to visit shepherds, while saying nothing to experts in the Law parsing out texts in Jerusalem. He sends the Spirit to appear in tongues of fire at Pentecost and baffles religious leaders through uneducated apostles.

Moreover, the Father is full of generosity, providing every good and perfect gift that humans have imagined. He delights in His creation and rejoices in us (Zeph. 3:17). His sovereign rule can be felt like a warm ray of sunshine cracking through darkened clouds.

Dallas Willard said,

“We should think that God leads a very interesting life, and that He is full of joy. Undoubtedly, He is the most joyous being in the universe. The abundance of His love and generosity is inseparable from His infinite joy. All the good and beautiful things from which we occasionally drink tiny droplets of soul-exhilarating joy, God continuously experiences in all their breadth and depth and richness.”²⁰

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His Image in Us

The Father's imagination can be seen in our own ability to show imagination. Because we are meant to be perpetually creative beings, He devised a world that is conducive to our inventive nature. His earth is fully equipped to handle humanity's innovative impulse. Because we are cut from the cloth of the Father's imaginative nature, we can stand on the plateau of an open plain and see an infinite set of possibilities, eternal vistas that might emerge before us.

In other words, we are free to move within *boundless situations*. The Father's goodness stretches on without limits.²¹ By contrast, the devil tempts us to view the world in terms of frustrating limitations, boring boundaries, and legalistic rule-following. But because God is free to move without limits, there is no limit to what creativity and beauty can look like.

However, we can be deceived into thinking we live in a small space, not knowing there is a larger world of freedom outside our bubble. We can choose a life of quiet isolation in a bunker, believing it is unsafe to go outside. The enemy can fool us into retreating into a provincial existence, thinking it is dangerous to explore all the adventure the Father offers. But the Father's philanthropy, seen in His creation, our ability to adapt, and the use of our imagination, provides what we need to press ahead.

Willard put it this way: "The intention of God is that we should each become the kind of person whom he can set free in His universe, empowered to do what we want to do. Just as we desire and intend this, so far as possible, for our children and others we love, so God desires and intends it for His children."²² Because His imagination is designed into the fabric of our being, we are equipped to walk by

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faith, not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7) and can follow in the footsteps of others who lived by faith (Heb. 11).

Emotions

Another aspect of the Father's philanthropy is our ability to feel emotions, which includes not only happiness and joy, but also sadness, fear, and confusion. Sometimes people downplay their feelings because they know emotions can deceive them, leading them away from truth. But feelings are particularly important because they show us where our *beliefs* are hidden. Emotions are like a Geiger counter, revealing toxic beliefs that need to be replaced with truth. Uncovering our beliefs is important in the process of developing resilience.

For example, I took my car to Bob, our mechanic, when my "check engine" light came on. Bob looked at the dashboard and said, "I know how to fix that at no cost to you." Intrigued, I asked him to explain. He went to his office, pulled out a roll of black electrical tape, tore off a small piece, and covered the dashboard light so it was no longer visible. Bob's method of car repair is how many of us deal with our feelings.

In fact, we cause ourselves harm by ignoring our feelings. When people say, "You shouldn't feel the way you do," it is a form of rejection.²³ God does not ignore our feelings and He requires us to respect the feelings of others by saying to "weep with those who weep" (Rom. 12:15). It is far better to give full inventory of our feelings than to ignore or suppress them. It is foolish to ignore a dashboard light indicator by covering it up with tape.

Neil Anderson framed it this way:

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“Your emotions are to your soul what your physical feelings are to your body. Nobody in his or her right mind enjoys pain. If you didn’t feel pain, you would be in danger of serious injury and infection. If you didn’t feel anger, sorrow or joy, your soul would be in trouble. Emotions are God’s indicators to let you know what is going on inside. They are neither good nor bad; they are amoral, just part of your humanity. Just as you respond to the warnings of physical pain, so you need to learn to respond to your emotional indicators.”²⁴

Throughout the Bible God encourages us to pour out our feelings to Him. He is not shocked to hear our complaints, challenges, joys, and fears. The prophets and psalm writers express the rawest of emotions. As the Author of Scripture, the Spirit’s inclusion of these examples demonstrates that He is not only tolerant of our emotions but encourages us to express our deepest feelings, not just to vent our emotions, but to build resilience.

Lament in Scripture

I once did a quick study of the prophets and Psalms to find out how many passages began with expressions of grief or complaint but concluded with praise to God. I found over thirty examples that started off emotionally scattered but finished with a mind fixed on God’s truth. One clear example is from Habakkuk that begins:

“O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not hear? Or cry to you ‘Violence!’ and you will not save? Why do you make me see iniquity, and why do you idly look at wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise. So the law is paralyzed, and justice never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous; so justice goes forth perverted” (Hab. 1:1-4).

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By the end of the book, God has taken Habakkuk through a process that took him beyond his initial feelings: “Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will take joy in the God of my salvation. God, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the deer’s; he makes me tread on my high places” (Hab. 3:17-19). What begins with shattered emotion, ends with affirmation of truth. God clearly uses our feelings to lead us into truth, to build resilience in us.

Unfortunately, some people teach that we should only say positive things, that verbalizing our fears will somehow cause them to happen. This is not the pattern of Scripture. Emotions are a blessing from the Lord because they uncover where the healing of God’s word can be applied. He encourages us in our weakness, to freely express our feelings without guilt, so we can be healed and have a correct perspective.

In summary, the Father provides every good and perfect gift for us. He created an adaptable world where we can use our imaginations, and where we can express our emotions as a pathway to healing. Because of His philanthropy, we have what we need to produce a return on His investment in us.

Chapter 4

The Son's Provision

THE FATHER LAVISHES HIS philanthropic generosity to all people. But without the work of Jesus Christ to defeat the devil and redeem creation, much of the Father's good gifts could not be realized in this fallen world. Therefore, the Father intends to restore the brokenness of creation through the Son. In Christ, the Kingdom of God has come!

In Him!

Paul's letter to the Ephesians is a marvelous explanation of the Father's plan to restore His creation through the Lord Jesus Christ. He has revealed "to us the mystery of His will, according to His purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth" (Eph. 1. 9-10). Several other foundational themes of God's Kingdom purposes are laced throughout chapters 1-3, like an inventory of all the marvelous riches we have in Christ!

Because of Jesus, we have adoption, holiness, forgiveness, insight, intimacy, assurance, belonging, hope, power, meaning, creativity, individuality, community, and an inheritance. Through frequent references to "in Him," we are reminded that it is only by Christ's work that we possess such potential for fullness of life, ending in the crescendo: "To him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen" (Eph. 3:21).

Reservoir of Potential

Jesus is like a vast reservoir of living water for a thirsty world. He said, "The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (Jn. 4:14). But without Christ's work

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of victory over the devil, there would be no reservoir for us to access. Jesus was tempted by the devil in the desert but emerged victorious. He also triumphed over Satan through His healings, exorcisms, and teachings. And righteous life was not only an example for humanity to follow, but a source of defeat for the enemy.

But most spectacularly, Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection sealed the adversary's doom forever. But Jesus was not done after rising from the dead. His ascension to the throne placed everything under His feet, where He now rules over the work of His Body, the church.

From the fruit of these victories, He provided a way for us to carry out His work that could not be done before (Eph. 4:7-12). He rules and reigns to provide a constant source of living water for us to access. We create, bless, protect, and serve as nozzles delivering water that extinguishes fires of despair. We are the instruments that Christ chooses to use to dispense His grace in the world.

The Continuation of His Work

Jesus won the prize of victory over the devil, and now empowers us to continue that conquest. He transferred us from the domain of darkness into His Kingdom of light (Col. 1:13-14). And now through our baptism into Christ, we have confidence, because our efforts have eternal value in Him. He not only paved the way for us to follow, but His Great Commission (Mt. 28:18-20) is an expression of His authority, allowing us to teach others to obey His commands.

Therefore, we are the continuation of His work: "Be strong in the Lord and the strength of His might" (Eph. 6:10). Satan offers a yoke of slavery (Gal. 5:1), but Jesus offers a yoke that is easy and light (Mt. 11:30). Jesus outfits us to resist the enemy's theft, murder, and destruction by giving life in its fullness. But that fullness comes only

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through obedience and submission to Jesus' lordship, a willingness to be forged into His identity.

This abundant potential is not meant to be stored up for ourselves but multiplied for the benefit of others. Prosperity teachers talk about blessing for personal consumption, but Jesus wants to bless the world through us. We are God's workmanship, His creative expression, created for good works in Christ Jesus (Eph. 2:10), appointed to bear fruit on His behalf (Jn. 15:1-8).

Paraphrasing C. S. Lewis, God wants creatures whose life will be qualitatively like Christ on a miniature scale, where we exercise our will in conformance to Jesus' identity. He wants a world full of beings united to Him but still distinct. Jesus longs to reproduce His life all over the entire world, through people who would do even greater works than He did (Jn. 14:12). In short, God wants to form us into little replicas of Jesus.²⁵

Because of Jesus' provision, we offer hope, comfort, and encouragement to people confused by the accuser's lies and schemes. Because Jesus is our source, we come with living water of deliverance and joy, not condemnation and fear.

No Limitations in Jesus

In the world, people are limited by our competencies: money, education, experience, power, and influence. But in the Kingdom of Christ, we have unlimited potential. In this world's system, people need access to those in power, but in His Kingdom, Jesus can operate in anyone: the poor, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, and the persecuted. In fact, these are the kind of

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people God used in the Bible, and the kind of people He uses today, to produce a return on His investment.

But sometimes we feel pushed around and battered by the circumstances of life, desperately looking to escape, and living in constant fear that more bad things might happen. We may fear that there are proverbial icebergs waiting to sink us.

But because of Jesus' provision, we can become people who are unfazed by the difficulties of life. Our joy can come from an unchanging relationship with God and His faithfulness. We don't need perfect circumstances to be happy, and we don't need to be appreciated by others to be content. Instead, we can be fortified in such a way that we develop a hull that no iceberg can penetrate.

In this, Jesus is our perfect example. He appears to have walked unstressed and unhurried. His peaceful pace implies that He lived by a different set of criteria. It was not where He was going or how fast to get there, but whom He was following (the Father) and how closely they walked together.²⁶

The Picture of Resilience

Jesus also modeled resilience for us in a most dramatic fashion. In Gethsemane (Mt. 26:39), Jesus was greatly troubled about what He was about to face. He was so distraught that some translations say he "threw himself on the ground." Most of us have not yet known that level of anguish, where we would throw ourselves to the ground, but we can probably relate to at least falling on our beds in tears over some great disappointment.

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In that agonizing event, Jesus pleaded with the Father for the cup of suffering to pass from Him. When His sorrow reached even to the point of death, He went to find His friends to pray with Him. His sorrow deepened when he found them asleep. Not only was he agitated by the anticipation of His upcoming torture, but his support system let him down. They were not there in His moment of great need.

Jesus went back three times to repeat His request, and each time, He was stretched to the limit. At one point, His anguish was so extreme that He sweat drops of blood (Lk. 22:44). Each time, He found his friends sleeping, and so He went back alone, without any support, to ask for a reprieve. But remarkably, Jesus emerged from this distress with a settled mind. By the time Judas and the crowd came to arrest Him, Jesus calmly responded, "Friend, do what you came to do" (Mt. 26:50).

Gethsemane is a splendid example of Jesus demonstrating resilience. It took several iterations for Him to move from the anguish of throwing Himself on the ground until He was ready to move resolutely to the cross. It was a process. He knew from experience that He could pour out His grief, then receive a little encouragement from the Father; pour out His grief again and receive a bit more strength; and repeat this process until He was ready to face what was ahead.

Just because He was the Son of God, he was not exempt from the distress we all experience (Heb. 2:17). Out of his grief, he had learned obedience (Heb. 5:8) that built resilience. This prepared him for the intensity of His passion, giving Him strength to go to the cross on our behalf.

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We Can Too

Like Jesus, we can follow the same step-by-step process to bounce back from crisis. His resilience is not only an example for us, but a source of real strength. Paul reminds us of this by saying “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27). His resilience becomes available to us when we tap into His strength.

This means we can become effective vessels of living water, forged, crafted, shaped, conformed, and molded to be like Him. In the flesh, we are like a scrapheap of metal. But we can be transformed into nozzles that deliver refreshment to thirsty people by our connection to the Christ-reservoir in us. As we *Think Again*, His life-giving provision can flow through us to benefit the world.

Chapter 5

The Spirit's Power

THE DEVIL USES SCHEMES to rob us of our treasures through stealing, killing, and destroying. But God does just the opposite by providing with extravagance; the Father's love overflows through philanthropy. Meanwhile, the Son has provided victory over the devil, creating abundant potential for us to do good things.

But God doesn't stop at philanthropy and provision. He also gives us power by the Holy Spirit! The Nicene Creed declares that the Spirit proceeds from the Father and Son. When people in the Bible were filled with the Spirit, they ended up *doing something*. They spoke, they acted, they protected, they defended. The Spirit initiates action, giving us power to get busy!

For example, look at the frequent references to the word "power" in describing the Spirit's work:

"I pray that out of His glorious riches he may strengthen you with *power* through His Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have *power*, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His *power* that is at work within us" (Eph. 3:16-20).

This is good news because if we are to produce an ROI for God, we need supernatural power that is outside ourselves. We especially need insight to recognize truth from error, so we are not deceived. Notice how the Holy Spirit's work is characterized by power, action,

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and truth: He gives us power (Acts 1:8), love and self-control (2 Tim. 1:7), help in our weakness (Rom. 8:26), and strength in battle (Isa. 28:6). He teaches by reminding us of what Jesus said (Jn. 14:26), sets our minds on life and peace (Rom. 8:6), gives us wisdom (Isa. 11:2), and gives us insight (Eph. 1:18, 3:4-6).

He provides weapons for our warfare (Eph. 6:10-20) and provides gifts so we can serve (1 Cor. 13; Rom. 12; 1 Pet. 4). By the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus was raised from the dead (Rom. 8:11), and when we walk in Him, we are free from obedience to the flesh (Gal. 5:16). He refreshes us (Jn. 7:38-39) and fills us, which is manifested by joy, thanksgiving, and mutual submission (Eph. 5:18-21). He serves as the guarantee of our future inheritance (Eph. 1:13-14; 4:30) and provides access to the Father (Eph. 2:18). He builds the body into a dwelling place for God (Eph. 2:22) and gives us capacity to take in knowledge (Eph. 3:16-19) by speaking to us through the Word (2 Pet. 1:21). He gives us wisdom leading to a harvest of righteousness (Js. 3:13-18)

In all these attributes, we are the beneficiary of His power, capsulized in three important ways: Making Us One, Bridging the Gap, and Making a New Creation.

Making Us One

The Holy Spirit is the “Great Integrator,” bringing various scattered people and factions into a single body of Christ. He builds the Temple of the Spirit, constantly adding members, disciplining, strengthening, gifting, comforting, and encouraging. The Spirit integrates the body to the Head (Eph. 2:10-22; 4:11-16; Col. 1:28).²⁷

In essence, the Holy Spirit is constructing a Christ-centered, fully functioning body, with a diversity of operating members,

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characterized by Paul's imagery in Ephesians. We are a household (2:19) and a workmanship (poem) created for good works (2:10). We are a Body growing toward unity of the faith and knowledge of the Son of God, to the maturity of Jesus, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (4:13), growing up in every way into Him who is the Head (4:15). As we do, we become coordinated so when each part is working properly, the Body builds itself up in love (4:16).

Like a great music conductor, He orchestrates the body of Christ to function in harmony, according to the creative vision of the Composer. He takes our various gifts and coordinates them together for functionality. Every counter action of the enemy is to disrupt this integration, to destroy the harmony of the orchestra.

Moreover, the Spirit superintends a fourfold description of the Church found in the Nicene Creed: We believe in *one holy, catholic (universal), apostolic* church.²⁸ The Church is *one* because He integrates the one Body to the one Head. The Church is *holy* because it is the temple indwelt by the Spirit. The Church is *catholic* (universal) in that it includes people from every tongue, nation, tribe, and people, all invited by the Spirit to join. The Church is *apostolic* because He guides her into truth, preserving her from error through the apostles' writings in the Bible. In all these actions, His intent is to make us one.

This is important because producing an ROI is never meant to start and end with you individually. You play your part, but it is always for the benefit of the community. Any blessing you experience is meant primarily for the Body's well-being. In fact, the Spirit's help will often show up through the church, through other believers. One of the most important resources we have for resiliency is the support and challenge of other believers. It is difficult to be resilient in isolation.

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Bridging the Gap

The Spirit makes us One, but He also bridges the gap between the first and second coming of Christ. We tend to think about the Gospel story as though it ended at Jesus' resurrection and ascension. But we need to remember that God's work continues with the Spirit's work at Pentecost. Between Jesus' departure (ascension) and His return (Parousia), the Spirit superintends the work of Christ on earth.

In this way, the Spirit bridges the gap as the "Ascension-Parousia Differential."²⁹ This new role was publicly introduced to the world at Pentecost. On that special day the Holy Spirit became the Bridge linking Christ's work on earth and the Parousia. We now live in the age of the Spirit, which is sometimes called "the last days."

The Spirit's dramatic appearance at Pentecost also began an intimate relationship between the Spirit and the Church. He is our constant companion to help us navigate the tension of the "Already/Not-Yet" Kingdom. We enjoy the foretaste of eternity in the *Already*, and we endure the sufferings of the present age in the *Not-Yet*.³⁰ He gives us power to be a radically eschatological (end times) people, directing every thought and action in anticipation of Jesus' return and glorification, which gives us courage to persevere.³¹

In this way, the Spirit's presence is tangible evidence that the treasures of eternity are given to us not only in the future, but right now. He serves as a guarantee that He will see us through to the completion of our task. By animating, encouraging, and empowering us, He reminds us that the responsibilities of life don't fall on us alone. We cooperate with the Spirit because it is our destiny to be triumphant and valiant until Christ returns. We get busy because He motivates us to do God's work.

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In short, the Spirit helps us *do stuff*.

The New Creation

Another way the Holy Spirit helps us is by forming new creation.³² As the Creed says, “We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and *life-giver*.” He gives life. Jesus was conceived by a work of the Spirit, with the willing cooperation of Mary. In the same way, the Spirit works with the Church to do the works of God. He motivates, inspires, and directs, but only with our cooperation.

In fact, the Holy Spirit Himself is the “evidence” that we are the people of God.³³ After the Exodus, Israel was officially set apart from other nations through the Law of Moses. The Law was a visible emblem showing they belonged to Yahweh. Because the Law was given *after* their deliverance from Egypt, God demonstrated His salvation by grace from day one. The Law was a gift to help them function as the people of God, a visible proof of His presence with them.

But now the Law has been replaced by the Spirit. He is the new evidence of our adoption as the people belonging to God. The Spirit replaced the Law as a better and more permanent gift. The Law was a useful source of temporary guidance for the people of God (Ps. 19), but the Spirit is superior in that we are given *power* to act, not just instruction on how to live.

Spiritual Warfare

The Spirit makes us one, bridges the gap, and forms new creation. He integrates us with the Head, making the whole Body function together. He wants a mature body connected to Jesus, as agents of mercy in this fallen, not-yet world. This is an important part

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of spiritual warfare: resisting the devil's attempts to disrupt the integration of the body to the Head.

Therefore, spiritual warfare is not the high drama found in the movies. It is the day-to-day grind of each believer cooperating with the Spirit who gives us power to be changed personally, while being integrated into the Body collectively. This power is not just an occasional burst of energy, but a supernatural ability for us to be transformed by the renewing of our minds at a molecular level. The Spirit is the One who leads us into the truth that makes us free, so we become more like Jesus (Jn. 8:32, 14:16-17).

We are equipped to fight the enemy with power as the Spirit leads us into truth (Jn. 16:13; 2 Thess. 2:13).

We are well-supplied for resilience because of the Father's generosity and Jesus' provision. But the Spirit also offers high-octane power that can help us yield a healthy return on God's investment.

Chapter 6

The Expected ROI

A VENTURE CAPITALIST is an investor who provides money for those who lack the capital to start a new enterprise. To help an entrepreneur start a business, the venture capitalist gives out of their abundance, with the promise of sharing the future profits of that venture. The television show *Shark Tank* illustrates how venture capital activities work, although it is sometimes a far-fetched caricature of serious venture capital activities.

Blessing the World

People with wealth have a choice: They can spend their money on things they enjoy now, or they can invest it, hoping there will be even more money in the future. They delay their immediate gratification to experience greater wealth in the years to come. This is risky, because there is no guarantee that their original investment will pay off in the future. They give up the benefits of money today, with no certainty of any money in the future. Therefore, venture capitalists look for talented people who are good at putting assets to effective use.

They look for a steward who will use seed capital to hire employees, apply entrepreneurial skills, and put in long hours of hard work. Venture capitalists show patience and trust, sacrificing in the short term to secure more blessings in the future. If the investment goes bust, the wealthy person loses everything, so investors must have considerable confidence in the steward's potential.

By releasing venture capital to an entrepreneur, the benefits proliferate throughout the community. People are hired, goods are purchased, and new businesses get started (who then hire even more employees). Investors' sacrifices bring multiplication of benefit to a

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society. In the same way, God invests in us to multiply blessings for the world.

Fruitful Abundance

The teachings of the Bible reveal God's venture capitalist nature, making frequent reference to God's Kingdom in terms of multiplication of outcomes:

- Healthy trees bear good fruit (Matt. 7:17).
- A tree is known by its fruit (Matt. 12:33).
- Good soil produces 30, 60, 100 times the seed that started it (Matt. 13:23).
- An investment in a winepress carried the expectation of a profit (Matt. 21:33-41).
- A farmer planted a fig tree looking for a return (Luke 13:6-8).
- A grain of wheat falls and dies to multiply into more fruit (John 12:24).
- God prunes like a vinedresser to produce more fruit (John 15:2).
- He appointed us to bear fruit (John 15:16).
- Through Christ we should bear fruit for God (Rom. 7:4; Col. 1:10).
- The Spirit produces fruit (Gal. 5:22-23).
- We are to be filled with the fruit of righteousness (Phil. 1:11).
- He looks for a harvest of righteousness (James 3:17-18; Heb. 12:11).

God desires to make an investment that pays off far beyond what He puts in. In the Kingdom, the process of wealth creation is

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achieved through spiritual entrepreneurs, stewards who cleverly take what God supplies to innovate, experiment, adjust, toil, assess, and innovate again.

This means a steward must constantly initiate creative ideas in complex situations, exploit opportunities quickly, adjust to discouraging setbacks, and all without any certainty of a successful outcome. What works one time may not work the next time. It is not a linear process and is not for the faint of heart, the risk-averse, or the cowardly. Those who wait for a sure thing will act too late. Stewardship requires courage, hard work, and optimism. It requires love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22-23).

Parable of Venture Capital

Perhaps the clearest insight into God's role as venture capitalist can be found in the Parable of the Talents (Mt. 25:14-30). In this story, a wealthy man prepares to depart on a long journey and calls three of his stewards together to make sure his wealth grows during his absence. To the first one he gives five talents (about 100 years of a laborer's wages). To the second, two talents were given (40 years of wages), and to the third one talent (20 years of wages). The first two immediately set out to provide a return on the investor's money, but the third fearfully buried the money in the ground.

After a long time, the wealthy man returned to find that the first two had doubled his money, much to the delight of the venture capitalist. Commending each one, he promised to reward their work with even more responsibility, along with a share in the master's wealth. Investors are thrilled when their risk is turned to reward.

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But the third steward said, “I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, so I was afraid and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here, you have what is yours.” Jesus reveals God’s venture capitalist nature through the master’s response: “You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest.” The master took the wasted talent and gave it to the one who had ten, casting the lazy servant into the outer darkness.

In other words, the venture capitalist is especially frustrated by the cowardly steward who does nothing with the investment. The investor made the sacrifice of giving up money, when it could have been enjoyed. Then upon the discovery that there was no return on investment, not even a little from a bank account, it was seen for what it was: as a monumental waste. The disappointment is twofold: “I could have enjoyed that money I gave you, and now there is nothing to show for it.”

Jesus’ teaching makes it clear that God is generous in His provision, but there is also an expectation for us to multiply that initial investment. The Father’s philanthropy, the Son’s provision, and the Spirit’s power are given by grace but with anticipation that we will *do something* with His endowment. He wants us to *use* the spiritual gifts we’ve been given and *multiply* good works, described as the “fruit of the Spirit.” He wants us to replicate His love so that the Body of Christ can be built up, integrated with the Head. He is not happy when He risks His capital, and we do nothing but fearfully bury it in the ground.

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What Does it Mean to Produce Fruit?

When I was a young Christian, I used to think that when the Bible mentions fruit (e.g. Jn. 15:8), it referred only to those who come to Christ through our Gospel proclamation. Now I understand that producing fruit has a much broader meaning. It includes any good thing that God uses to bless creation (1 Pet. 4:10). Every good and perfect gift comes from Him (Js. 1:17), but He delights in delivering it through us, His people.

This means that everyone, regardless of their gifts, can be useful in the Kingdom. This means that fruit is borne by setting up chairs at a church meeting, giving a word of encouragement to a coworker, preparing elements for communion, praying for a neighbor, or saying a kind word to someone at the store. Therefore, a return on God's investment can be produced by a social worker, a landscaper, or a stay-at-home mom. Our occupation puts no limits on the fruit we can produce for the Kingdom.

Another way we produce an ROI is by showing gentleness toward others. We can forget that every single person on earth is victimized daily by the enemy's schemes. We can catch ourselves being unfairly critical, looking down on someone else, thinking how easy it would be to avoid their temptations. But we need to remember that we have struggles that are not difficult for them. Knowing that Satan's individualized schemes are designed to destabilize each person helps us to be less harsh towards the failings of others.

Three Unhelpful Responses

We are designed to offer hope, comfort, and encouragement to those confused by the accuser's lies and schemes. But rather than show compassion for people in the middle of their trials, we often

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feel ill-equipped, and don't exercise the perseverance people need when they are in chronic pain, whether it is a disease, a bad marriage, or a wayward child. As a result, we often respond poorly one of three unhelpful ways:³⁴

1. Retreat (avoiding them, not knowing what to say)
2. Refer (quickly sending them to a professional, feeling inadequate to know how to help)
3. Reprove (criticizing them or providing simplistic answers)

For example, we knew a person in our church who went through a six-year bout of skin problems that doctors were unable to treat or diagnose. We observed how she was treated by other believers when this problem persisted for a long time. Some people visibly avoided her because they didn't know what to say, while others recommended various websites or practitioners to solve the problem. And a third group mildly chastised her, offering simplistic answers that were not encouraging.

There is a better way than *retreat, refer, or reprove*. Because we are ambassadors of Christ, and priests of the Most High, we can start by remembering there is good buried deep in every person, just waiting to be released. We can deliver Jesus' grace and healing. Instead of descending into their pit of despair with a scalpel and a scowl, we can shout out to the wounded person, "I am on my way down with a flashlight! Hold on, we can go through this together!"

Instead of "retreat, refer, or reprove" we can *embrace, enlist, and release*. By delivering Jesus' living water, we can calmly *embrace* their pain, *enlist* ourselves to go through pain with them, and *release* them to their potential. Instead of wagging a finger saying, "Let me give you some advice" we can open our arms saying, "I'll walk with you, I

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believe in you.” Even when we don’t have helpful answers, we can calmly enter people’s pain instead of recoiling in fear. We can help other believers find their way to the other side of their grief, even when a disease never heals, a marriage ends in divorce, or a wayward child dies from a drug overdose.

What our friend at church needed was a listening friend to sit with her in the pain for the long-term. Remember, resilience is not measured by the number of times we fall, but by the ability to rise to our feet again, the speed of getting back up. As a result, we should be patient when people get tripped up, cheering them to get back into the fight.

Conclusion to Part I: God Supplies

God is the great venture capitalist. He has great expectations to double or triple His capital, realizing even 100 times His initial investment. He reaps where He doesn’t sow and gathers where He scattered no seed. He endows people to do important things for Him: “The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to give strong support to those whose heart is blameless toward him” (2 Chron.16:9).

But there is also an enemy who works to quench the supply of God’s provision by tempting us to squander those resources. But we are not left powerless against those schemes. In fact, the Bible teaches that “the weapons of our warfare have divine power” (2 Cor. 10:4) so that we can stand against the schemes of the devil (Eph. 6:10-20, Appendix 2).

Therefore, spiritual warfare is stewarding those resources, skillfully putting spiritual assets to work that produces something bigger and better than His initial outlay. Through the Father’s philanthropy, the Son’s provision, and the Spirit’s power, we are well-equipped

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to engage the enemy, yielding a return on God's venture capital investment.

The next chapter starts Part II: Satan Impairs. It describes the devil's strategies to oppose God's work, his many schemes to steal, kill, and destroy that result in strongholds of destruction and distraction.

Part II: Satan Impairs

The thief comes to steal, kill, and destroy.

John 10:10a

Chapter 7

Subversive Construction

THROUGH THE FATHER'S PHILANTHROPY, the Son's provision, and the Spirit's power, we have what we need to be resilient and fruitful amid two kingdoms in conflict. We have weapons to face the enemy in this larger context. The battlefield location of this war, the nexus of cosmic struggle, and the bull's-eye of Satan's target is *our minds*. Looking through the crosshairs of his rifle scope, he seeks to influence our minds, reducing our effectiveness for Christ.

New Strategies

Once we were blinded to this cosmic conflict. But when God opened our eyes and we repented, the adversary lost us forever to the Kingdom of Light and we became a dangerous threat. He turns all his energy to tricking us into squandering the treasures God provides. He pivots from keeping us *blinded* to keeping us *inactive*, using new weapons of impairment, such as distraction, disruption, discouragement, and dismay. He wants to confuse our minds, so we don't live as fruitful ambassadors of God.

The accuser uses us like pawns in this effort to frustrate God's work. He pillages with ruthlessness and cunning. In *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*, Luther said, "For still our ancient foe doth seek to work us woe, his craft and power are great, and armed with cruel hate, on earth is not his equal." Satan wants to destroy us and grieve God in the process. But we are only tools in his larger game. He cares nothing about us.

In fact, he not only tries to take what rightfully belongs to us, but if he can also incite us to destroy ourselves, all the better for him. He is a master of deception. Jesus called him "the father of lies" (Jn. 8:44).

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No one is exempt from his methods, and no one can live a single day without being in the middle of this spiritual confrontation.

But God has a different agenda. C. S. Lewis described Jesus as a King who landed in disguise and has invited us to join in a great work of sabotage.³⁵ As the people of His story, God gives us the privilege of participating in this counter-insurgency. Luther said, “And though this world, with devils filled, should threaten to undo us, we will not fear, for God hath willed His truth to triumph through us.” He triumphs *through us*.

On one side, God is constantly providing truth, encouragement, and comfort to make us increasingly fruitful to produce a return on His investment. On the other side, the adversary tempts us to be complicit in the construction of strongholds by utilizing a three-step strategy: devaluing, globalizing, and irrationality.

Devaluing

The accuser starts by speaking false statements and doubts into our minds. They are vicious and devastating, striking our deepest fears. Jennings said, “Every human being descended from Adam and Eve is born infected with fear and selfishness – fear of failure, fear of what others think, fear of not getting that job, fear of not getting that guy or girl, fear of not getting that grade, fear of not being loved, fear of being alone, fear, fear, fear!”³⁶

The enemy analyzes us, sizes us up, and designs a tactic that plays on our fears. You may recognize some of these:

- You don’t belong.
- No one loves you. You are lonely and miserable.

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- You have no talent or gifting. There's no hope for you.
- Look at her, why can't you be like her?
- God doesn't really love you or this bad thing wouldn't have happened.
- You're not really a Christian – look at what you just did.
- No one is going to talk to you at the party because you are a loser.
- They don't respect you because you don't deserve respect.
- Even when you try your best to find a spouse, no one is interested in you.
- You'll never change.

Boom, boom, boom; every day we are bombarded by the incessant, constant pounding of lies to devalue ourselves. In fact, he disguises his messages by making them seem like they are *our own ideas*, not his.³⁷ Designing a personalized attack strategy, he chips away at us. He knows what is effective on one person won't work on another, and vice versa. Every single human has enough fears for the evil one to formulate an effective, individualized devaluation strategy. But devaluing is just the first stage.

Globalizing

Once we agree with a devaluing lie, he has gained a foothold and will attempt to have us globalize our situation:

- Since you failed this time, you will *always* fail.
- Since you feel lonely now, you will *always* feel lonely.
- Since you are divorced, no one will *ever* love you again.

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- Since your spouse yelled at you, you'll *never* have a good marriage.
- Nothing goes right with you, *everything* you touch fails.
- Because no one talked to you at the party, *no one will ever* talk to you at a party again.

Irrationality

Then, if we succumb to his globalizing efforts, he can move to the next phase: arrive at irrational conclusions:

- I need to be perfect *all the time*, or I'll never get respect.
- *Everyone* is against me.
- If I don't meet *everyone's* expectations, I'll never have friends.
- If I don't make this ministry happen, my life will be *ruined*.
- Since I don't have a spouse, my life is *over*.
- I'll never make it in life; I'm *hopeless*.
- Life has to be fair and just *all the time*.
- If my kids don't turn out, it will show that *I was a bad parent*.
- *Why even try?*

Devaluing, globalizing, and irrationality: This is the pattern that erects strongholds. Here is a personal example.

Years ago, I received an email from my trusted colleague (Paul) about the possibility of relocating to another office in our building. Satan started twisting this by saying, "Paul doesn't respect you or he wouldn't ask you to change offices." I believed it (devaluing). Then the accuser said, "Other people don't respect you either." I

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believed that one too (globalizing). Then finally, “Everyone always disrespects you, all the time. You should resign from the ministry.” I believed that one as well (irrationality).

I ruminated about this all night, missing out on a good night’s sleep. When I finally talked to Paul about it, he said he had no intention of showing disrespect and was just “thinking out loud.” After it was over, I realized I had let the enemy work me over through devaluing, globalizing, and irrationality.

Constant Rampage

Every day, all day long, every single human being on earth is presented with thousands of thoughts and feelings that rampage through our minds if left unchecked. The deceiver never takes a day off. He never leaves anyone alone. If he would tempt the Lord Jesus with lies, we can be sure he won’t leave us alone either. Even the most secure and godly person will be thrown false messages every day.

The effect of believing these lies takes on many forms: anxiety, depression, mental illness, physical maladies, and broken relationships. The enemy’s pillaging extends even to suicide. In fact, every second there are two people in the world who try to kill themselves.³⁸ He steals, kills, and destroys in the most dramatic ways.

Although most people don’t go so far as considering suicide, people are consumed by keeping up appearances, terrified of what others think. The enemy whispers words of fear, “You are a fraud and people are going to find out.” This prompts us to waste time and energy trying to convince people to think well of us. We fear looking foolish, useless, or lonely. And because of those fears, we are constantly vulnerable to lies.

Think Again

Strongholds Are Built

All we really want in life is to be loved, accepted, and to do meaningful work. We just want our lives to count for something. God is ready to fulfill these godly desires, but the enemy provides a twisted alternative, a false solution that leaves God out of the equation and puts an unreasonable burden on us.

We wonder, “Maybe God can’t be trusted for my physical needs,” and like Adam and Eve we see that the fruit is *good for food* and we reach for it. Or we worry, “Maybe God can’t be trusted to give me a happy life,” and seeing that the fruit is a *delight to the eyes*, we reach for it. Or we fear “Maybe God is keeping me in the dark, making me look foolish,” so we see that the fruit would *make us wise* and we reach for it.

Dozens of times each day, we pick the fruit of these temptations and eat them. As we do, we cause damage to ourselves and others, doing nothing to reduce our insecurities. In fact, our fears often get worse.

When these lies are offered to us, and we consume them without cross-examination, they form an attitude. Over time these attitudes become a normal part of our thinking. Therefore, by our acceptance of those lies, a stronghold is constructed *one bite at a time*.

Signs of Strongholds

Here are a few signs that a stronghold is in place:

- We appear hard on the outside but fearful on the inside. As Dr. Don Davis says, “We act like The Incredible Hulk, but inside we feel like Winnie the Pooh.”

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- Our speech reveals chronic negativity, e.g., “Nothing ever goes right for me. Everything I touch fails.”
- We worry about things that haven’t happened yet and may never happen.
- Anxiety or bitterness floods our daily thoughts, and they pour out of our mouths (Mt. 15:18).
- We become busy earning God’s favor, living in regret, defeat, and condemnation rather than the loving encouragement that God provides. “For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation *without regret*” (2 Cor. 7:10).

To sum up, when we believe his devaluing lies, then globalize them, and allow them to fester to an irrational level, we construct a stronghold that becomes difficult to demolish (see examples, Appendix 1). After the constant barrage of the enemy, we can feel like a huge pile of scrap metal: scattered, broken, useless.

Unfortunately, no one can escape the accuser’s intrusion into our thoughts. But not every thought that pops in our head is true. We don’t have to be complicit in constructing strongholds, entertaining the ideas that invade our minds. God has a better way. He provides insight into the schemes of the devil (2 Cor. 2:11), so we can recognize deception and *Think Again* about truth. The next chapter illustrates characteristics of those schemes by comparing two conniving invaders: rodents and con artists.

Chapter 8

Conniving Invaders

EVIL SPIRITS ARE CONSTANTLY at work to disinherit us. They want us to relinquish our treasures of our own free will. Their activities can be understood by comparison with two conniving invaders: rodents and con artists.

Rodents

Demons are like rats, in that they need garbage to feed on.³⁹ When food is left out after a few days, critters will find it, and if this continues long enough it results in an infestation. When we leave garbage unattended in our lives, we give evil spirits an entry point that can become an infestation. When we let worry, greed, or bitterness pile up inside, we give the devil's minions opportunity to invade (Eph. 4:27). By letting them remain, they become like a growing pile of trash that invites even more attacks from the enemy.

In the same way, temptation starts small but grows into sin when we participate in it. Then sin builds up its own momentum and reproduces itself at an exponential rate. This is true, whether it is anger, shopping habits, or sexually impure thoughts. The more we give into it, the stronger the stronghold becomes.⁴⁰

To get rid of rats, the trash must be taken away. This requires a process of transformation over time and is typically not a one-shot deal. Removing the garbage is achieved through our cooperation with the work of the Spirit. As each bit of refuse is removed, we gain strength that discourages future infestations.

Whatever we meditate on will grow, for good or bad. If we interpret events in light of God's Word, we remove trashy thoughts, resulting in comfort and peace. But when we allow the enemy to narrate our

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circumstances, we permit the decaying pile of garbage to grow, resulting in even more damage.

It's also helpful to know that rats prefer to invade at night, where they can't be seen. In the same way, the adversary likes to keep us unaware of his activities, invading in stealth so he won't be exposed.⁴¹ Demons prefer to sneak up gradually without being noticed, then leave us in bad situations that are difficult to escape.⁴² A rodent infestation is not usually found until it is a huge mess to clean up, just as our bad habits can pile up without notice until they feel nearly impossible to overcome. But when we resist temptation early, bringing the truth into the light, demons will flee (Js. 4:7) before it becomes a stronghold.

Con Artists

Another metaphor that illustrates the pillaging deceiver is a con artist. One of my favorite movies is *The Sting*, the Academy Award winner for Best Picture when I was 13 years old. I found the plot twists amazing, the music spectacular, and the depression-era setting intriguing. Growing up, my grandmother told me stories about the hardships she faced during the Great Depression, so I was captivated by the images and themes of that period.

The main characters in the movie (played by Robert Redford and Paul Newman) are confidence artists, commonly known as “con men” or “grifters.” They made their living by designing elaborate schemes to draw people (“the mark”) into their confidence so the victim hands over their money voluntarily. Redford and Newman crafted a scheme to entice a mob boss (played by Robert Shaw) to place a bet on a fake horse race. Working patiently and methodically, they won Shaw's confidence before closing the trap.

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Con artists are still active today, using updated techniques. Most people have heard of the “Ponzi scheme,” where the con artist gets the mark to invest in a business that starts paying dividends. The con artist slowly siphons off the investment money, leaving the mark with no return and loss of the initial investment. Perhaps the most well-known scheme used today is where the con artist sends an email, portraying herself as a distraught family member, caught overseas without funds. The con artist asks a grandmother to send money to a foreign account that will presumably rescue the suffering family member. But the funds are routed to the con artist’s bank account, never to be seen again.

Like a grifter, the enemy likes to remain hidden and hates to be revealed. We can see evidence of this when people say, “Don’t tell anyone.” This is because they want to disguise their evil intent, so their schemes are not revealed. Therefore, we need to be vigilant and expose his con-artistry, because no one is exempt, whether a person is a CEO, a prostitute, a pastor, a drug addict, or a suburban soccer mom.

Thankfully, Christ has acquired priceless treasures for us. We have possessions! But Satan wants to separate us from those good gifts, leaving us damaged and regretful in the process. The devil will use doubt, intimidation, temptation, division, harassment, confusion, and the element of surprise – anything that will be useful in a personalized scheme for us to harm ourselves.⁴³

Personalized Cons

This idea of the devil as con artist can be found in Scripture. Paul says to “put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the *schemes* of the devil” and to “no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind

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of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful *schemes*.” (Eph. 6:11, 4:14). The word “schemes” refers to the craft of a con artist who fixes a dice game by shaping the dice to roll in a pattern that always turns against the gambler. At every roll, the gambler voluntarily relinquishes his money to the con artist with no hope of winning.

In the same way, we are instructed to be aware of the deceiver’s schemes, his confidence artistry. He sizes us up and designs a targeted scheme, a personal con to rob us of our possessions. While God invests in a slow, long-term return on investment, the devil tries to trick us through “get-rich-quick” schemes.

Since the deceiver cannot indwell us, rob us by force, harm us without God’s permission, or take away our salvation in Christ, the best he can do is trick us into voluntarily discarding our riches. He knows we have a rich inheritance through Jesus Christ that is untouchable by his hands. But he also knows that if he tricks us, we might voluntarily exchange our joy, confidence, or trust in God for short-term popularity, success, or pleasure.

Like a con artist he says,

“Give me what you have, and I’ll give you double the happiness. Give up your wife and kids through an affair; you’ll be happy. Give up your peace by worrying; life will be better. Give up your self-control through pornography; you’ll escape loneliness. Give up your time by researching conspiracy theories; you will feel vindicated.”

In all these examples, we don’t get what was promised, and often lose what little we already had. We often end up with nothing. He wants to steal, kill, and destroy, but at our own hand. He deceived

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Adam and Eve to give up their blessings of their own accord. In the same way, he wants to coerce us to abandon our own spiritual fortune.

Culture-based Cons

Just as the enemy sizes up individuals, it appears that there are also schemes that are designed for different cultural and historical settings. The reference to principalities and powers in Ephesians 6:12 indicates that there are different forces at work in different geographic locations, cultures, places, and times. Demonic efforts to steal, kill, and destroy are modified to fit a cultural setting to keep people bound.

Therefore, deceptions in Kenya might not be effective in Thailand, and clusters of lies that worked in 17th century France might not be as effective in France today. What was a common malady in the first half of 20th-century America is different from schemes utilized in America a century later.⁴⁴ In fact, there is evidence that since the 1950s, narcissism appears to have been the strategy of choice for evil spirits to do their pillaging work in the USA (see Appendix 6).

Plundering in the Brain

Regardless of culture, time, or place, the unseen plundering of the adversary manifests itself in the physical world via *our brains*. A chaotic mind, filled with rogue thoughts of anxiety, worry, or fear sends a signal that forms neural pathways in our brains. For example, those who suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or post-incarceration syndrome⁴⁵ have experienced crushing events that altered their brain structure. During the trauma, the person reacted to the event in such a way that wired in toxic thoughts at a biochemical level. As the person relives the event over and over, the

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wiring becomes increasingly permanent, producing flashbacks that reinforce destructive thoughts.⁴⁶

In summary, the father of lies uses many schemes to wire in damaging strongholds in our brains. Like a rodent, he hunts for an opening for infestation and like a con artist he designs a personal strategy to disinherit us. However, the Bible and the experience of saints through history provide insight into the most common schemes used by the enemy. We do not need to be caught unaware. Instead, we can hear a message, stop, and *Think Again* about its meaning before being deceived into the formation of a stronghold.

Chapter 9

Impulsive Destruction

THE DEVIL IS A grifter, ready to implement a personalized scheme. Unfortunately, there is no possible way to exhaustively catalog every falsehood used by the adversary, but since the time of Adam and Eve, the deceiver has employed a general pillaging formula found in Genesis 3:1-6: *“You will not surely die . . . for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”* Notice three deceptive ingredients in this formula:

1. God doesn’t tell the truth (God is holding out on you).
2. You don’t have everything you need (there are hidden things you need that you don’t even know about).
3. It’s up to you to obtain what you lack (God won’t help, so you are responsible for yourself).

In other words, Satan constantly uses this template: God can’t be trusted; something is lacking; it’s up to you to make up for what is lacking. All his schemes touch on some form of this basic strategy, fearfully driving us toward instant gratification, public adoration, and power through wealth (and all without God’s help). Within this generic formula, Satan uses particular schemes that lead us into causing damage to ourselves or others. One of these strategies is called “impulsiveness.”

Impulsiveness

Impulsiveness is a reaction to circumstances without exercising self-control. It is a response to pain, or the fear of missing out, believing the lie: “Whatever you want, you should have it, and you should have it *now*.” Rather than thinking through the wisdom of a situation, we foolishly rush ahead, believing we must force events to happen.

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Immediate satisfaction becomes the central impulse of daily life. For example, a person insults us, so we immediately insult them back; we have a difficult day and grab food to feel better; we see something we want to buy and purchase it on the spot even when we don't have the money to pay for it.

There are telltale signs when impulsiveness is driving us. Waiting for something we want seems intolerable and unfair. When we experience pain or discomfort, we believe something has gone awry in the universe. We are fixated by entitlement, and constantly evaluate situations in terms of our *rights*. We react out of self-protection, often speaking hurtful words before considering their impact on others. As impulsiveness increases, thankfulness fades from our conversation and complaining becomes the norm.

Several decades of permissiveness in American society have promoted impulsiveness. Children learn at an early age that parents are eager to spare their kids distress of any kind and believe the world should cater to them. When they grow up and discover that not everyone bends to their desires, they are confused and blame others saying things like, "Everybody hates me. Nobody understands me. The whole world is rotten."

Rather than exercising self-control by learning to deny themselves, people like this fall to temptation. They believe discipline and chastity are impossible. As angry motorists, they become violent when their space is violated. As parents, they lose control at children's sporting events, verbally abusing referees, and shouting at other parents.

Impulsiveness also comes in the form of seeking an exemption from the rules of life that everyone else must face. This desire for exemption is what Satan used to tempt Jesus, which is called "putting

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the Lord to the test” (Mt. 4:5-7). We put the Lord to the test when we desire something and expect God to meet our specifications, like the people of Israel who complained that God wasn’t meeting their expectations at Massah (Ex. 17:1-3). In the same way, it might sound like we are trusting God for our plans when we are really just doing what we want and expecting God to bail us out of danger.

Helplessness

Impulsiveness is particularly debilitating because our lack of self-control in one area can bleed into other areas. When we fail at one thing, we notice failure at everything. We say, “I can’t stop smoking,” then say, “I can’t read my Bible.” Before long, we can cascade into despair, believing we are a failure at *everything*. Feeling helpless, we desire control over our behavior, but we feel no power to change. In the extreme, such discouragement has led people to give up their faith in God altogether.

The deceiver has convinced millions of people that self-control is out of reach. Impulsive people bounce from one self-help activity to another. They make resolutions, try drugs, surgery, or hypnosis to gain control over their lives, but sink deeper into despair when nothing changes. Out of desperation, we may ask God to miraculously remove our impulsiveness, rather than do the work it takes to resist the devil and develop self-control. When we seek an instant solution like this, it reveals that we are more interested in using God as an instrument to avoid pain or have our desires fulfilled.

But at the same time, it is difficult to overcome impulsiveness by willpower alone. The good news is that we can be changed from the inside out, by cooperating with the Holy Spirit who leads us into truth by rejecting lies, which is the topic of the final chapters of this book (Part III: We Produce).

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But first, we can be helped by identifying seven triggers that lead to impulsiveness. These examples are not meant to be exhaustive or authoritative but allow us to recognize some of the enemy's schemes that lead to destructive behavior.

I Am Deficient

One way we are tempted to impulsiveness is fixating on our deficiencies. For example:

- I lack significance.
- I lack safety and security, especially for my loved ones.
- I am missing out on the pleasures of life.
- I am disappointed with my work.
- I lack friends.
- I lack recognition and admiration.
- I am too old, too young, under-qualified, or over-qualified.
- It's too late for me, it's too soon for me.

Notice how the enemy wants to focus our attention on what we *don't* have, while God wants us to consider what we *do* have. If the deceiver can get us to fixate on our lack, we take our eyes off God's good provision. This can result in what I call the "If-Only" life, where every blessing and breakthrough is quickly followed by "if-only I _____, then life would be good." If only I had a spouse; if only I had a child; if only I had a grandchild, then life would be good. For others, if only I had a better car; if only I didn't have this disease, if only I had a better job, then life would be good.

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The ungratefulness of the “If-Only life” not only sours relationship with God, but it can also be annoying to people around us. But instead of serial complaining, we can choose thankfulness to neutralize the devil’s temptation of deficiency. We can learn the secret of being content in all situations, whether facing plenty or want (Phil. 4:11-13). Therefore, thankfulness is a primary weapon in spiritual warfare (Eph. 5:20).

Fear of being left out can be another form of deficiency. Perhaps Eve feared being left out of some inner circle, believing that God had a secret knowledge He was holding back from her. The devil got her to believe that if she ate the fruit, she would be on the inside and not left out. The tragedy was, Adam and Eve were already on the inside and gained nothing through their rebellion.

Another symptom of deficiency is when we feel condemned and discouraged. Satan asks to sift God’s people like wheat (Lk. 22:31), but God is gentle with us. The Spirit is merciful and encouraging, telling us, “Don’t be afraid, it’s OK.” Sometimes the smallest doubt, even the size of a Post-it note, can squash the weight of what the Bible says. When we ignore the Word of God, feelings of deficiency can quickly overwhelm us. Counter this deficiency by saying, **“I have everything I need for life and godliness” (2 Pet. 1:3).**

I Deserve It

A trigger toward impulsiveness is believing we deserve only good things in life. The adversary will bait us into harmful actions by whispering, “You’ve had such a hard day, you deserve a break. Go ahead and (smoke, drink, overeat, steal, look at pornography).”

For example, in the movie *The Matrix*, the villains tempted the character named Cypher to leave his difficult existence and return

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to a life that would be easier. But to do so, he would have to betray his comrades. By slowly gaining Cypher's confidence, the enemies pointed out the hardship he was facing by staying loyal to his compatriots. They convinced him that he deserved something better. Finally, after Cypher gave into their temptation, they killed him, and Cypher ended up with nothing.

Cypher is a picture of a scheme that starts small and gradually grows, according to James 1:14-15: "Each one is tempted when by his own evil desire he is dragged away and enticed. Then after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin and sin when it is full-grown, gives birth to death." For Cypher, distraction started with a simple thought ("I deserve this"), then it was conceived into a thought pattern. After conception, it gave birth to a stronghold that took root so deeply that it led to death.

For us, this can be death of relationships, death of integrity, death of a testimony, even physical death. Whenever you hear the phrase "you deserve it," beware. What starts innocently can end in devastation. Counter this lie by saying: **"I can handle this without _____ (eating, shopping, stealing, looking at porn)."**

Temporary Amnesia

"Temporary amnesia" is another method Satan uses to prompt impulsiveness. He wants us to forget who we are, even if it is just for a split second. Simba forgot he was the future king. Pinocchio got sidetracked from his quest and wandered to Pleasure Island. The Prodigal Son lost track of his identity and found himself feeding at a pig trough (Lk. 15:11-31).

Paul admonished us to be like a soldier who doesn't get involved in civilian affairs (2 Tim. 2:4). When we forget that we are warriors,

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fully equipped to fight the good fight of faith, we can quickly find ourselves enmeshed in civilian affairs and all kinds of foolishness. In a heartbeat, we release every anchor that established stability, and every protection that keeps us secure. How many times have you done something and said, “That wasn’t me!” The enemy wants us to forget who we are, even just for a moment.

However, we fight temporary amnesia by putting on the armor of God. Like Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman, and Spider-Man, we put on our clothes that represent our true identity. Then we live according to it, becoming less prone to distraction. We are empowered to focus on our duty, our contribution to His Kingdom.

Someone may object, saying, “All that superhero stuff is fine, but my plumbing won’t work, my spouse hates me, and my kids are failing in school. None of my circumstances make me feel like a superhero of God.” While the ordinary events of life can squash the wonder of our true identity, what we *feel* has nothing to do with who we *are*. Nothing can change what the Bible says about us. To be a superhero of God means to start with what God says, not what we feel inside, so counter temporary amnesia by saying, **“I am the righteousness of God and I will act accordingly” (2 Cor. 5:21).**

Overreaction

Another temptation to impulsive behavior is overreaction. When I was a boy, I was an avid UCLA basketball fan during the John Wooden championship years. Every game was tape-delayed and shown at midnight, and I would get my parents’ permission to stay up late to watch the games. During UCLA’s record-breaking winning streak that had extended to 88 games, they faced Notre Dame on national television. With under four minutes to go, UCLA led 70-59, but I watched in agony as Notre Dame went on a 12-0 run to win

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the game by one point, ending the historic streak. I ran out of the house and cried in bitter resentment.

Certainly, my love for UCLA basketball produced real sadness. But my reaction was not proportionate to the weight of the event. It was an overreaction to the loss of a basketball winning streak. In the same way, we can overreact to situations that take us emotionally away from more important pursuits.

For example, we overreact when we “major on the minors” relative to theological differences, matters of conscience, or politics. We can be more interested in being “right” about everything, giving unimportant issues too much weight and intensity, causing division in the body. Counter overreaction by taking a breath, and saying, **“This is not a big deal in the scheme of eternity.”**

Shortcuts

We can act impulsively even when we do good things. This happens when we use worldly principles and methods to achieve God’s purposes. Abraham was promised offspring through his wife Sarah. But when it didn’t happen in his time frame, Abraham took it upon himself to bring the promise to fruition by having a child through Sarah’s servant, Hagar. This impulsive act caused widespread destruction throughout history.

Another case in point is seen in Peter and the apostles, who were looking for a Messiah to defeat Roman rule. But Jesus had something bigger in mind, a family comprised of people from every tribe, people, language and nation (Rev. 7:9). He refused a shortcut to His exaltation, taking the long way around, via the cross (Phil. 2:6-11).

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Also, in a world that idolizes business methods, the pursuit of measurable outcomes can tempt us to take shortcuts in ministry. Pragmatism calls out like the Sirens in Greek mythology. But in the Kingdom of God, we can work hard, do everything right, and still have unsatisfactory results. Sometimes the prophets were commanded to be faithful with no chance that the people would respond to their message, and regardless of our cleverness and good intentions, there is no guarantee for quantitative fruit. In fact, a fixation with measurable success can lead us to chase after the latest fads, which quickly run their course and leave us discouraged.

Because we cannot always see what is happening in the spiritual realm behind the scenes, we must stay faithful to God's direction regardless of the outcome. Counter shortcuts by saying, **"I will do what's right even if I don't see results."**

At Least I...

When we are tempted to sin impulsively, we often attempt to justify our behavior. Before we slander someone, we may think, "At least I won't be the one who started the rumor." We start to dwell on lustful thoughts but comfort ourselves by the excuse, "At least I am not actually committing fornication." Or we entertain hateful resentment toward someone but think, "At least I am not punching the person with my fists."

This trigger reveals the amazing capacity we have to discount our own sin and look down on others who seem more sinful by comparison. For example, in prison culture, the incarcerated recognize a hierarchy of crimes, where some are worse than others. We are vulnerable to impulsive behavior when we discount our sins as "normal because everyone does it" or by saying, "I'm only human."⁴⁷ This kind of spiritual pride blinds us and keeps us from the forgiveness we need.

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Whenever hearing the scheme that uses the excuse “at least,” let it be a reminder to **quickly confess the sin, receive His cleansing power, and avoid the slippery slope toward even greater transgression (1 Jn. 1:8-9).**

The Real Enemy

Paul reminds us that we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against Satan and his forces of evil (Eph. 6:12). Every wicked act comes from a diabolical source, and people are just the agents who carry out the devil’s destructive devices. But we can’t see demons. We only see the people who are making our lives difficult. This can prompt us to respond impulsively, but when we remember that every problem has a satanic source, we can step back and respond appropriately.

For example, sometimes we find ourselves in an imaginary world of unrealistic expectations, where the public always behaves as they should, family members always do what’s right, and those who claim Christ as Lord always act in accordance with His commands. In this fictitious world, we acknowledge that people make mistakes from time to time, but we expect life to generally flow as it should. But when someone violates those expectations, we are left without the ability to make sense of the situation and we respond in unhealthy ways. Bitterness, complaining, retaliation, and hopelessness come pouring out. We often lash out or clam up for a while, feeling like victims.

However, we are not rendered powerless by the incongruent actions of others. We can be liberated from our imaginary world by replacing it with a healthy and realistic one that is governed by truth, forgiveness, and love. We can have the presence of mind to see that the hurtful actions of others may be because they are simply

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unaware of our expectations. Or even when they do know what we expect, they may be unable to live up to the ideals we have for them. Therefore, when they violate the rules of our imaginary world, God can use this surprise to show us that we have created a prison of our own making, liberating us to reconstruct our outlook, becoming the author of our own freedom.⁴⁸

In this way, we learn how to walk by faith, not by sight, which means exchanging our idealistic world with the truth of God's Kingdom. When we do, we reduce the number of times we are surprised or angered by those blocking the goals of our fictional reality. This empowers us to respond to disappointment in a healthy way. Sometimes this means speaking the truth in love for their good. Other times we need to quietly move on, keeping in mind that they may also have an imaginary world of expectations that we inadvertently violate.

But in every case, it is our decision on how to respond. We are never victims without hope. We can take the initiative to live in a new reality, by identifying our real enemies: **“the rulers, the authorities, the powers of this dark world, the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Eph. 6:12).**

Overcoming Schemes of Impulsive Destruction

We overcome these various forms of impulsiveness through agreement with these three truths: 1) We make our own choices; 2) We are responsible for our own actions; 3) We accept the consequences of our actions. Instead of becoming a victim of circumstances, we can pay attention to those things we can influence.

For example, I once spoke with a ministry leader who complained about the shackles he felt under his leaders. I asked him to describe

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the aspects of ministry where he *did* have freedom to act. I then counseled him to innovate energetically in those areas where he possessed discretion and stop fuming about everything else. Sometimes, we have more freedom than we recognize.

Finally, perhaps the most important part of gaining victory over impulsiveness is to receive the grace of God and stop taking ourselves too seriously. If we spend more time in thanksgiving and praise, and less time in introspection, ruminating over our failure, we might relax enough to be released from the grip of impulsiveness. Like Paul, we can find peace in any situation (1 Cor. 7:24).

There is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:1)!

The next chapter will describe a different set of schemes that tempt us to be sidelined by distraction.

Chapter 10

Passive Distraction

THE LAST CHAPTER EXPLORED ways Satan tempts us to destructive action, the notion based on the lie: “Whatever I want, I should have it, and I should have it now.”

But not all diabolical schemes tempt us to impulsiveness. There is another set of tactics Satan employs so we give up when we should push ahead, to be passive when we should be active. The following eight examples are designed to immobilize us so we lose faith, give up hope, or waste time on the sidelines.

Awfulizing

The first scheme is called “awfulizing,” which is overreacting in fear to something bad that might not happen. This occurs when we tell ourselves, “If that thing actually happened, it would wipe me out. It would be horrible, awful, terrible; the end of the world.” Awfulizing takes a potentially undesirable situation and blows it out of proportion.⁴⁹

For example, consider a young person so burdened with fears that she can’t find the courage to look for a job. She wants employment but says, “I’ve tried but I can’t. I hate interviews. They scare me.” When asked what scares her, she says, “They might look down on me and make me feel foolish. That would be terrible. It would be horrible.”

The truth is, it would not really be the end of the world if someone viewed her as foolish. It would be unpleasant, but not the end of the world. She is *awfulizing*. There are two problems with awfulizing. First, the dreaded circumstances may never occur, so there is useless

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anxiety over something that might not happen. Second, even if it does happen, it is rarely as bad as it was imagined to be.

Unfortunately, awfulizing is a self-inflicted source of anxiety. We fear things that probably won't happen, and even if the imagined fears do come true, we inflate the impact on us. Although what we dread is unlikely to become reality, we may go so far as to believe that our fears are more than probable, they are *inevitable*. So we become a victim of our own illusions. The enemy has a field day suggesting troubling scenario after troubling scenario, watching us add fuel to the fire of his lies.

The following lies of Satan are common temptations toward awfulizing. Some of them may be familiar:

- If I go out with my friends, they may laugh at me. That would be awful.
- I might not meet people's expectations and they would be disappointed. That would be awful.
- I might be rejected. That would be awful.
- I might make a mistake. That would be awful.
- I might say something dumb. That would be awful.
- I might get hurt. That would be awful.
- I might be asked to do something I don't know how to do. That would be awful.
- I might lose what little I've gained. That would be awful.
- I could die. That would be awful.
- Once I've gained happiness, I might lose it. That would be awful.

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- I might not look as good as other people. That would be awful.
- They may not approve of me. That would be awful.
- She might discover who I really am. That would be awful.

Notice how many of these lies are connected to *what other people think*. Imagine if we could be free of the expectations of others. What freedom could we experience if we reduced the importance of others' opinions? We do not need to collude with the devil through awfulizing. Instead, we can replace "That would be awful" with **"What I fear may never happen; but even if it does, I won't like it but I will be ok."**

Your Past Dictates Your Future

A second method Satan uses to immobilize us is by defining our identity, allowing him to connect our past to our future. In the movie *The Matrix*, the enemy agent interrogates Neo by slowly leafing through Neo's file. With mocking tones, he refers to Neo by his old name, "Mr. Anderson," reminding him of his past. This is what the accuser does to us. He opens a big dossier, and slowly turns the pages, pointing out past failures and shortcomings, in a calm, cool, rational, and objective manner. There is a reason he is called the Accuser (Rev. 12:10).

However, our identity is NOT defined by this portfolio of past folly. In fact, nothing in our past defines our future: not our jobs, not our reputations, not our sins, not our mistakes, not the actions of others, not our sex, not our age, not our race, not our health. God can use us despite our past. He used Moses, despite the fact that he was a murdering fugitive in the desert. He used Paul, even though he persecuted the Church. God is not troubled by lengthy delays

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and detours in our lives. *Our identity is not defined by the accuser reading our files!*

The movie character Neo exemplified this by seeing the Matrix for what it was: a world of deception where people walked around oblivious to the real world. Therefore, he was not affected by the interrogator reading from his dossier. In the same way, our past does not dictate our future. We don't have to be a victim of every thought that travels across our brain cells. Counter this lie by saying, **“I am a joint heir with Jesus” (Rom. 8:17).**

Relax, Take a Break

Another tactic he uses to distract us is suggesting we take time off from spiritual warfare, convincing us the battle is temporary, that it can go away. But the moment we said “yes” to Christ, the fight began. It never ceases and we can't stop it. In other areas of life, we can take a break to rest, but the devil never takes time off. C.S. Lewis said, “The problem of the Christian life comes the very moment you wake up. All your wishes and hopes rush at you like wild animals. The first job consists in shoving them back, in listening to that other voice, letting that larger, stronger, quieter life come flowing in.”⁵⁰

But the devil lures us into seemingly benign activities, which afterward we think, “Why did I spend all that time doing that?!” Michael Dinkins said,

“Satan would like you to waste 2-4 hours each day on things like swiping social media, studying conspiracy theories, shopping for things we don't need, seeking attention online, cyber-shaming, flirting, reading about pseudoscience, disputing theological controversies, chasing fantasy worlds, or playing pointless games found on the phone. Satan cannot take away your salvation, but

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he will show up in your life to take you away from doing more productive activities for God.”⁵¹

Another way the deceiver urges us to relax from warfare is to think that all the important events of life are coming in the *future*. Therefore, we let down our guard, thinking the “big game” is coming later. We look to the horizon and miss the opportunities right in front of us. Alicia Chole said,

“We have a tendency to assume that the main thing is somewhere out there, not right here. So we treat today with less respect than we should, as though the current gift of time before us is simply a filler. In such an atmosphere, it is easy for us to rationalize indulging our appetites because today does not really count, or, we will deal with the issue later, or, it will not make a difference now anyway. All of which are blatant untruths. Today always counts.”⁵²

Another symptom of “relax, take a break” is when we start coasting by employing a legalistic list of dos and don’ts. Rather than engaging in dynamic spiritual conflict by looking “carefully how we walk because the days are evil” (Eph. 5:15-16), we can be enticed into a false sense of security by following a list of rules using our own strength. We think if we avoid the bad things and do the good things, we can be satisfied with a job well done. This list-making spirituality reveals how low we set the bar compared to God’s standard of walking in step with the Spirit (Gal. 5:25).

However, when we relax from spiritual warfare, we put ourselves in danger. The adversary wants us to settle for lesser things, ignoring the Spirit’s urging to pursue a life of adventure in Christ. He urges us to relax, settle in, take it easy, ignoring the passions He gave us for the Kingdom. Counter this lie by saying, **“I can find rest by taking on Jesus’ yoke” (Mt. 11:29).**

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It Was Your Fault

Another way the enemy immobilizes us is through false guilt. For example, the accuser may say, “You did something wrong, and now God is punishing you.” If we believe a lie like this, God gets the blame, and we feel like a failure. The truth is that many problems have nothing to do with our actions or God’s punishment. Sometimes we suffer just by living in the fallen world where tragedies strike. Other times the difficulty is because of the sins of others, through no fault of our own, or it may be the direct work of Satan.

This starts from a false assumption: “Everyone who is good deserves a comfortable life.” Then, when circumstances go bad, we tend to blame the victim. “I did something wrong that caused my stroke,” or, “I must have been a terrible dad since my son got addicted to drugs.” These misnomers not only make us vulnerable to the devil’s lies about ourselves, but also create a judgmental attitude toward others.

Furthermore, when people experience abuse, the adversary often says, “This was your fault because you’re ugly, gross, nasty, dirty, disgusting or unlovable.” He delights when we suffer the pain of abuse, but he also wants a second victory by having us blame the abuse on ourselves. Such ridiculous notions must be recognized for what they are: a lie from the pit of hell. Counter this lie by saying, **“In this world I will have tribulation, but Jesus has overcome the world” (Jn. 16:33).**

Just Try Harder

Another way we get discouraged and give up hope is when we try hard at something and then fall short.

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A fitting example comes from the sport of Track and Field, which has been a significant part of my life through several generations. My grandfather competed at the University of Wyoming, and my uncle John Lilly was a world-class middle-distance runner and Oregon State roommate of the legendary Dick Fosbury (inventor of the Fosbury Flop). As a boy I attended many of his track meets, meeting the outstanding athletes of the era. From elementary school through my college years at Fresno State, I competed as a high jumper and decathlete, and both of our sons were high school pole vaulters. As a result, I have watched hundreds of races over the years.

I heard a story about a boy sprinting down the back stretch, closing on the leader. Then he started to fade, watching one runner go by, then another, then another. His mother then yelled out to him, “Run faster! Run faster!” Finally, upon hearing his mother’s exhortation for the twentieth time, he came to a complete stop, turned to the stands, and shouted back, “Can’t you see I’m running as fast as I can?” He trotted a few more steps and then dropped out of the race altogether.

Like this mother, the accuser shouts at us, “Try harder, try harder!” And like the young runner, we try as hard as we can, hearing the same kind of discouraging instruction: just read your Bible more, just pray more! This advice is more often demoralizing than helpful. The enemy knows we are likely to give up when the admonishment is, “Try harder not to sin.”

When hearing the words, “just try harder,” be aware that it may be a scheme designed to lose heart and give up. There is a better way to build resilience than simply trying harder, which will be explained in later chapters. Counter this lie by saying, **“I produce fruit by abiding in the vine” (Jn. 15:5).**

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Big Begets Big

Another way people end up giving up is when they use the wrong measures of success. In the West we live in a celebrity culture built on the assumption that *bigger is better*, or “big begets big.” Believing that whatever makes a big first impression leaves a lasting impression, people trust in the spectacular event that makes a big splash. However, it is a general rule that whatever grows quickly will also die quickly. That which grows slowly generally lives longer.⁵³

In the Kingdom, the imaginative steward takes what God supplies and makes it grow slowly, over a lengthy period of time. It is not the home run that produces lasting fruit, but the infield hit, followed by a bunt, a stolen base, and brought home by a sacrifice fly. In the world, big begets big, but in the Kingdom of God, *small begets big*. Jesus illustrates this principle in the parables of the leaven and mustard seed (Mt. 13:31-33). It is slow and steady growth that produces lasting value.

Moreover, we are sometimes deceived into believing that Christ’s Kingdom is best advanced by a celebrity endorsement (the latest sports figure, actor, politician, or millionaire). When we are tempted to show favoritism toward those in power, we should be chastened by James 2:1-4:

“My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism. Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in filthy old clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, ‘Here’s a good seat for you,’ but say to the poor man, ‘You stand there’ or ‘Sit on the floor by my feet,’ have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?”

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Be watchful for distractions that promote worldly values where big begets big. Use the slow and steady approach that bears long-term fruit. Counter this lie by saying, **“I need to be faithful with little before I can be faithful with much” (Lk. 16:10).**

Follow Your Heart

Another temptation to passivity comes when people believe they should follow their heart rather than seeking God’s wisdom. True identity is not based on how we feel inside but is defined by Someone outside of ourselves. Our disposition toward the inner self (rather than outward truth about God) has made us weak and ineffective in spiritual warfare.

For example, the conventional wisdom is that people are happier when they are free to do whatever they want, without any consequences. On the contrary, studies show that when people live according to a strict code of moral conduct, with ramifications for our behavior, they are more hopeful, optimistic, and less likely to be depressed.⁵⁴ Therefore, many people suffer from emotional disorders because they lack a set of absolutes that exist outside of their personal experience.

Unfortunately, even Christian families can be affected by this scheme. From an early age people are conditioned to draw a circle around their personal preferences, evaluating every event as it relates to self. The Christian life becomes “my personal relationship with Jesus,” where everything is about “me and God.” The Bible is reduced to “my personal handbook for living,” the local church is there to “meet my needs,” and God exists to provide a “wonderful plan for my life.”

Gordon Fee explained it this way:

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“Both secular psychology and much Christian teaching focus on the inner self: How am I doing according to some set of criteria for wholeness? Focused on the inner struggle, we can scarcely see Christ or walk confidently in the way of the Spirit. Instead of living out the fruit of the Spirit, in constant thankfulness for what the Spirit is doing in our lives and in the lives of others, our individualistic faith turns sourly narcissistic – aware of our personal failures before God, frustrated at our imperfections, feigning the love, joy, peace, and gentleness we wish were real. Our turmoil crowds out openness to the Spirit Himself. In such spiritual malaise God almost always gets the blame.”⁵⁵

Counter this lie by saying: **“All wisdom and knowledge is hidden in Jesus, not me” (Col. 2:3).**

Preservation

One of the most effective schemes of distraction is “preservation,” a self-protective attitude that keeps us from stepping out in faith. Preservation sees life as zero-sum-game, where one person wins at the expense of the other. The world is seen as a pie to be split, where “I’ll get mine so others don’t take mine.” We anxiously cling to what little we have or attach ourselves to those with wealth and power to get more pie. We compete for a slice of control, attention, or possessions, believing there is only “so much to go around.”

In other words, preservation presents life in terms of limitations: the heavens are closed, and the sky is like an inverted bowl trapping us in. We can feel cooped up, living and dying in an existence where only the visible is real. Feeling enslaved, we believe we can never be free, living lives of extreme pain and boredom, seeking escape even if for a few moments.⁵⁶ Or as Thoreau lamented, “The mass of men

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lead lives of quiet desperation.”⁵⁷ Under these assumptions, we resist change because we could lose our slice of the pie.

Also, the logic of preservation is that God’s actions can be analyzed and predicted and then used for personal benefit, to appropriate His blessings. Therefore, this scheme produces a bureaucratic tendency, an obsession with the quantifiable, measurable, and predictable, where every problem has a cause-and-effect solution. As a result, preservationists value planning that produces likely outcomes. But no one can establish models about God because He cannot be predicted.

Furthermore, preservationists demand concrete answers. They despise ambiguity and resist the notion of mystery, such as battles coming from unseen spiritual realms. Although this scheme caters to our minds, it does not inspire our imaginations, resulting in cowardly avoidance of heroic efforts and bold initiatives. In financial terms, a preservation mindset is attracted to safe accounting methods and balanced ledgers rather than bold, aggressive venture capital initiatives. Instead of investing in a risky return on investment, preservation tempts us to take what is given and hide it in the ground for safekeeping.

But as the people of God, we should push back against the status quo because this fallen world needs to be set right. Life is not as it should be – not even close. So we need to resist the pull of preservation and be an agent of change. Take the 12 spies as an example. When they scouted the Promised Land, 10 came back with a preservation response, based on what they saw, “We can’t go in there; there are giants in the land.” But Joshua and Caleb refused to be boxed in by preservation and exercised faith by saying, **“God is with us, we can do it!”** (Num. 13:26-33).

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The Better Approach

Passivity is overreacting to a potentially unpleasant situation that may never happen. On the other hand, impulsiveness is trying to make something happen, so we do not suffer or miss out. The former results in distraction, the latter leads to destruction. To understand the difference, think about life as an unpredictable river. Impulsiveness causes us to launch a speedboat to outrun the current, rushing into the unknown without God's guidance. Passivity prompts us to stand fearfully on the riverbank without even getting our feet wet, believing we cannot trust God to protect us.

However, the best approach is simply to wade into the center of the water and let the current of God's presence set the pace, whether it is swift or still. That is how to avoid passivity and impulsiveness, producing a return on God's investment.

In all these schemes, Satan's purpose is the same: distract us from using the benefits Christ gave us. The deceiver will employ anything to keep us from focusing on Jesus, whether it is impulsive destruction or passive distraction. Our lives are full of spiritual enemies and schemes, littered with tribulation, trials, and difficulty (the not-yet Kingdom).⁵⁸ But if we stop to *Think Again*, we can catch ourselves before giving into these schemes. Not every thought in our heads is true. We can overcome by replacing lies with truth.

Examine these counterarguments to see which ones are most helpful:

- If I fail, it doesn't mean I will fail the next time because self-control is a process, not an event.
- Regardless of the pain I've had in my life, indulging myself will not take away the pain.

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- I can go on, even without that thing I so long for.
- Inconvenience, distress, discomfort, and difficulty are normal.
- I am in control of my reactions: I am not a victim of my feelings.
- I am primarily a spiritual being, not a sexual being.
- Denying myself doesn't mean I'm permanently losing a part of myself.
- Being mistreated and overlooked is the way Jesus lived.
- I am choosing this decision: nobody is to blame but myself.
- I am responsible for my reactions to everything.

Conclusion to Part II: Satan Impairs

Our bodies cannot tell the difference between truth and lies, but only what we believe. As a result, we are constantly bombarded by confusing and devastating messages that, if believed, result in destructive habits and strongholds. He wants us to give up our treasures voluntarily through various schemes, especially impulsive destruction or passive distraction.

Having lost us forever, the enemy pivots from keeping us blinded, to keeping us discouraged and dismayed. He put down his old weapons and picked up new ones. He acts as an infesting rodent and a devious con artist, designing a personalized plan of attack.

Thankfully, we are not left helpless in this battle. Even though the adversary is constantly deceiving us, we can learn to discern between truth and falsehood. We do not have to be victimized by the deceiver any more than I needed to believe there was a snake in my bed. We can face the problems of life by our own strength (which won't

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work), or we can conquer life's difficulties by employing the weapons God supplies, weapons that have divine power. We can learn to *Think Again*, developing skills that make us more resilient like Jesus, increasing our capacity to produce a return on investment.

As a result, our job is simply to *believe the truth and disbelieve lies*. This is the subject of the next chapters of Part III: We Produce.

Part III: We Produce

We take every thought captive to obey Christ.

2 Corinthians 10:5

Chapter 11

Employ Effective Weapons

WHILE THE ACCUSER'S ARITHMETIC is based on subtraction, we can resist his schemes to steal, kill, and destroy because Jesus offers abundant life! He wants to bless us to the point of overflowing for the benefit of others. God's work is rooted in multiplication, so He wants a return on His investment in us. Between Satan's *plundering* and God's *provision* is our *participation*. God uses us to continue His work of sabotage, where the playing field is our minds. We have the privilege of being God's agent of victory over the devil.

On one side the Satan *impairs*, on the other side God *supplies*. In the middle, we *produce* based on the choices we make. Lies have no power until we believe them, and truth needs a person to activate it before blessing is released. When we respond to the truth, God is glorified and the enemy frustrated.

We Produce ← God Supplies

On the other hand, when we participate in lies, God is grieved and the enemy wins.

Satan Impairs → We Produce

In other words, God's provision is given to unleash damage against the devil. He is looking to invest in daring people with daring plans, people who are willing to go where darkness reigns, people who are more afraid of missed opportunities than of failure. Mark Batterson said, "I would like to think that when I pronounce the benediction at the end of our church services, I am sending dangerous people back into their natural habitat to wreak havoc on the Enemy."⁵⁹

Think Again

But sometimes we don't want daring adventures. We prefer stability and clarity. We resist a life of upheaval and disorientation. We find uncertainty frustrating. We want to know where we are going so we can exercise control over our lives. In fact, much of our prayers and efforts are focused on how to manage our circumstances, to keep our house in order. But God can use disorientation to start new trajectories in our lives, to reorient us with new dependence on Him.

Therefore, instead of controlling our circumstances, we need to put more effort into *taking control of our thinking*. When we leave the doors of our minds wide open, we allow any stray idea to come in. Then when the idea starts to run rampant, we cry out to God to get the critter out of our house. The better strategy is to control unwanted entry, never allowing the pest to enter in the first place.

Weapons of the Flesh

Paul says there are two ways to deal with the problems of life: 1) by the flesh or 2) with weapons having divine power. "For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds" (2 Cor. 10:4). Dealing with life *by the flesh* is evident when we live as though everything is on our shoulders, believing we must be in control all the time. We act in our own strength, as if there were no God. We attempt to make life turn out the way we want, rather than simply doing what is right and trusting God with the results. We frantically manage our circumstances with gritted teeth and selfish determination.

By the flesh, we attempt to make life work on our own. We try to win the respect of people and find meaning in life, investigate answers and implement plans, we ensure nothing bad happens to our loved ones, and chase what gives us pleasure. This results in factions and divisions, power struggles, and competition for influence or

Employ Effective Weapons

possessions (Gal. 5:19-21; Js. 3:14-16). In the end we are left with inferiority, insecurity, inadequacy, guilt, worry, and doubt. *By-the-flesh* living leaves us bitter, depressed, angry, hyper-sensitive, and distrustful.⁶⁰

This drives us to work hard, pursue degrees, and try to be famous so we will be loved and admired, but become *workaholics and narcissists*. We try to please everyone and avoid hurting their feelings so we will be cherished and appreciated but become *co-dependent*. We demand to be in control of our environment and become *passive-aggressive*. We fight aging and death and become *obsessive* about our appearance, what we eat, and how much we exercise. We try to protect our families at all costs and become *compulsive or paranoid*.

Consequently, waging war by the flesh is easy to spot. It is full of desperation, anxiety, and disorder, constantly scrambling and never at peace. We are subjected to daily reminders of products that we need to be happy, leading to consumerism that provides no lasting satisfaction. This is one reason why Americans have become heavily dependent on antidepressants and comprises the most worry-prone culture in history, with 200 classified forms of mental illness.⁶¹ We attempt to compensate for our fears through careers, food, recreation, video games, drugs, achievements, and other addictions.

But God loves us so much that He will frustrate our attempts to fight with weapons by the flesh. When we pursue adequacy on our own, He takes us through a time in the *desert*. When we explore answers on our own, He allows us to experience *confusion*. When we seek security on our own, He allows us to go through *hard times*. When we secure pleasure on our own, He shows us the *destructiveness* of sin so we realize it's not as fun as we imagined. As we go through the desert, confusion, hard times, and destruction, He offers transformation

Think Again

into Christlikeness, providing we are willing to cooperate with Him in the process.⁶²

Weapons with Firepower

We can pursue inner calm and poise by controlling our *outward circumstances* (by the flesh), or we can find inner calm and poise through *inward conditioning* (cooperating with the Spirit to build resilience). When we submit to the Spirit, He will show us how to experience true and lasting adequacy, answers, security, and pleasure that cannot be taken away by circumstances. The weapons of the flesh are too weak to conquer the problems of life. We need weapons that have supernatural, divine power. We are no longer debtors to ineffective works of the flesh, but we now can live according to the Spirit's power (Rom. 8:1-12).

He has a different methodology, providing weapons that really work. He transforms us by making us strong on the inside, like our Lord Jesus. Building resilience means presenting our bodies as living sacrifices to the Spirit, in a repeated pattern of putting to death our unhealthy habits and replacing them with Christlike ones. By the Spirit, we can put the flesh to death (Rom. 8:12-15).

By mobilizing ourselves in this way, we gain spiritual discernment and courage to act. This makes us resilient by utilizing the weapons He provides. The following chapters describe five skills to increase this resilience, our capacity to produce a return on investment for the Kingdom. The first skill is “three-dimensional forging”: *demolishing* strongholds of the past, *detaining* lies of the present, and *defending* against disobedience in the future.

Chapter 12

Forge in Three Dimensions

THE FIRST SKILL IN building resilience is to pursue forging in three dimensions (past, present, and future)⁶³ based on 2 Corinthians 10:4-6: *For the weapons of our warfare . . . have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete.*

In other words, we can *demolish* the strongholds that have built up in our brains over time (past). We also can *detain* new lies that are raised against the truth (present). Finally, we can be prepared to *defend* the ground already taken by punishing disobedience that comes back (future).

Demolishing Strongholds (Past)

Strongholds have formed in our brains by the lies we have believed.⁶⁴ When ideas are presented (even by reading the words on this page), neurons form in our brains. It has been estimated that we have as many as 30,000 thoughts per day. These neurons cluster into branches called dendrites that become hardened over time. When we continue to reinforce these branches, after a few weeks of sustained belief, they grow and become permanent habits and attitudes.

Therefore, what starts as a seemingly harmless lie, can grow into a permanent stronghold if we let it. When a lie is believed several times, it becomes physiologically established in our brains, leading to anxiety, bitterness, and even mental or physical illness. Therefore, strongholds are formed in our brains by *what we believe*. For example, the enemy may suggest, “You’re not a Christian, look at what you just did!” If we accept this lie, believing that God has rejected us, a pliable physical structure forms in our brains at that very moment.

Think Again

Upon several encounters of believing that lie, it becomes a hardened branch in our brains.

After a few months of continual acceptance of lies, the stronghold becomes so automatic that we don't even think about it. Because Jesus said we speak out of the overflow of our hearts (Lk. 6:45), we begin to verbalize aspects of the deceptive stronghold without even noticing what we are saying. Negative talk starts spilling out in our conversations, planting seeds of lies in the brains of those who hear us, reproducing our poisonous thoughts in others.

Like Forging Metal

Praise God, strongholds can be destroyed and replaced with healthy brain structure, much like the process of forging scrap metal into valuable products by changing the metal's crystal structures (see Figure 1). First, the scrap metal is melted at 2500 degrees for several hours. Then it is poured into a large ingot that is pounded into shape, destroying the old crystal structures which are then replaced by a new, stronger structure. It is reheated for twelve hours to make it soft enough to press into shape, and then is pounded again into the desired form and cooled down in liquid for six hours. Finally, the master craftsman shaves off the rust and forms the piece into the finished product.



Figure 1: Scrap Metal Before Forging

Indeed, forging takes the existing molecules in scrap metal and re-forms their crystalline structure to make something new (see Figure 2).



Figure 2: Finished Product After Forging

Forge in Three Dimensions

In the same way, the Spirit takes who I am as Don Allsman, and forges me to be more like Christ. I am still Don Allsman and I don't lose my fundamental personality as an individual creation. I become restructured, re-crystallized, and re-wired in such a way that I retain my personhood but become re-shaped into the image of Jesus Christ. The result is a re-crafted facsimile of Christ as Don Allsman.

Although we are never a finished product, we are being transformed into who we are truly meant to be. The perfection of Christ is combined with each person's inherent uniqueness, a person created in God's image. The Spirit forges us into the image of Christ by pounding out lies and replacing them with truth. He takes the pile of scrap metal of our lives and molds us into a nozzle that delivers living water to a thirsty world. We demolish strongholds by rejecting lies and replacing them with truth. This crushes the toxic crystal structures in our brains, and forms new, stable structures in their place.

Sustained Practice

To demolish strongholds, we need a few minutes each day of focused concentration on God's truth revealed in the Word. This can be done through prayer, worship, study, meditation, or singing, but we must practice this day after day if demolition and transformation are going to occur.

We demolish these strongholds by examining the traffic of our thoughts. Then we decide which ones can stay and which ones must be destroyed. Just as lies turn into branches in our brains, truth can also form into branches based on what we believe. Research shows, after as little as three months of sustained belief in truth, we can begin to influence the people around us. In other words, in a short

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amount of time, God gives us enough mastery that we can start influencing others, generating blessings that overflow from our lives.

Detaining Lies (Present)

Besides demolishing strongholds of the past, we can take thoughts captive in the *present*. The best defense against a stronghold is to never allow it to take root, so, when a toxic lie comes at us, we can choose to *detain* it by taking it captive. This allows the formation of life-giving structure in our brains. The toxic invader never has a chance to be established. By affirming the truth at that moment, God creates Christlike resilience.

Because we are created in the image of God, we can stand outside of our feelings and evaluate them. We can observe a feeling and cross-examine it, just like I did when Cathy told me I did not have to put Clarence Thomas on the payroll. We can analyze a thought and either accept it or reject it. This means we are not victims of our past and can change at a biological level.

To take thoughts captive we must interrogate them, asking, “Is that thought friend or foe?” Sometimes we need to say out loud: “That is a lie and I won’t receive it!” We should call a thought out of the darkness and force it to come into the light, giving the lie a name. By engaging our feelings, we don’t allow them to rule over us. For centuries, when believers have been troubled by their thoughts, they have found it helpful to speak the truth out loud, reminding themselves that they belong to Jesus Christ and clothed in His righteousness.

Forge in Three Dimensions

The Enemy's Spin

Think about what happens when we hear devastating comments like these:

- We don't need you here, you're fired.
- I don't love you anymore.
- Your child has died.
- Your wife has cancer.
- Why can't you be more like your brother?

The instant we hear something like this, the devil rushes in to whisper his interpretation. He wants to put his spin on the situation, to twist their meaning so he can steal, kill, or destroy. At that moment, we can choose what to believe: 1) Satan's deceptive interpretation, building a destructive stronghold; or 2) God's encouraging interpretation that leads to abundant life, taking the thought captive:

- "We don't need you here, you're fired." (Yes, I have been fired from this job, but God has work for me to do elsewhere).
- "I don't love you anymore." (This person does not love me, but God loves me and wants to use me to bless others; He's not done with me).
- "Your child has died." (Yes, my child has died, but God will comfort me because He knows what it is to lose a child too).
- "Your wife has cancer." (Yes, my wife has cancer, but God will give me resilience to bring glory to his name).
- "Why can't you be more like your brother?" (I don't need to compare myself to my brother or sister or anyone).

Think Again

We are not defined by the accuser's meaning of these hurtful words. We are defined by *God's truth*. Like a security guard at a gate, we can detain a truck that appears to be carrying suspicious cargo. We can pull the truck to the side and investigate its contents before letting it inside the gates of our minds, interrogating thoughts and feelings and refusing them access. As the sentries of our minds, we can take thoughts captive, sending them away. By detaining toxic thoughts, we allow God's truth to dictate our feelings.

Defending Against Disobedience (Future)

Just because we *demolish* strongholds of the past and *detain* lies of the present, the devil won't stop coming back in the future with lies he employed in the past. We need to be "*ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete*" (2 Cor. 10:6). When our obedience has been complete by demolishing strongholds, we need to expect disobedience to come back in an attempt to rule again. Because our enemy will return, we must *defend* against vanquished foes.

In other words, we can be caught off guard, thinking we have gained control over some stronghold, only to see it reappear again. The enemy does not like to give up ground and will try to win it back. We must keep taking thoughts captive when they reappear and not let a toxic seed take root again. Larry Crabb said we need to shoot the adversary, "And if he doesn't stay dead, we must shoot him again, then beat him, then tie him down in the sand under a hot desert sun, turn loose an army of red ants on his body and walk away without sympathy. And then we must do it again and again and again, till we're home."⁶⁵

Going back to the image of forging metal, a metallurgist cannot assume parts will function without on-going maintenance. In fact, metal fails when subjected to repeated use in a corrosive environment.

Forge in Three Dimensions

In the same way, we need continued vigilance because Satan will try to revisit areas where he once had stronghold. He will try to mount a return attack at a future time. Where we once gained victory over a stronghold, we must defend against return invasions.

Consider the example of Jesus' temptation. He was victorious over Satan by taking thoughts captive. He countered toxic lies with life-giving truth. But at the end of Jesus' temptation, Luke 4:13 says, "The devil departed from Jesus until an *opportune time*." If the evil one looked for a later opportunity to tempt our Lord Jesus, we can expect him to do the same to us. Be ready to defend against future attacks.

This idea of returning disobedience is also found in Ephesians 6:13: "Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and *having done all, to stand firm*." We are to first withstand in the evil day (detaining thoughts of the present), but "having done all, to stand firm" (defend another round). This is not a one-and-done process, but a repeated defense of what has been demolished and detained. We must *defend* the ground that has been taken, standing firm against future attack.

Warning and Encouragement

While all this might feel overwhelming, we can find encouragement in the pain, remembering God's Word in James 1:2-4: "Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything." The forging process may be painful because it is often accompanied by trials. But the end result is maturity, completeness, and resilience, where we are

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not lacking in anything. Therefore, we can find joy even in the transformation process.

This 3-D forging process is not easy. Hebrews 12:11 says, “For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.” We must be willing to go through the pain, but when we do, God will equip us to *demolish* strongholds of the past, *detain* thoughts of the present, and *defend* against vanquished foes who return in the future.

Finally, avoid making judgments about cause-and-effect connections, because situations can be more mysterious and complex than what we observe. For example, not every illness is the sick person’s fault. In a fallen world, there are all kinds of genetically inherited diseases that are not caused by the patient’s faulty beliefs. This is one of the main lessons from Job: *not all suffering and disease come from sin*. If we blame the victim of disease for causing their own tribulation, we are in danger of collaborating with the father of lies, making the sufferer even more miserable.

Demolish, detain, and defend. This is what it means to be forged in three dimensions, which is the first skill in building resilience. As we *Think Again* in the forging process, we can experience fullness, freedom, healing, trust, and forgiveness that produces a return on His Kingdom investment. The next chapter explores another skill we can develop for resilience, designing personal defenses.

Chapter 13

Design Personalized Defenses

THE FIRST SKILL IN developing resilience was three-dimensional forging, dealing with strongholds of the past, present, and future. The next skill is to design personalized defenses to resist the schemes of the devil.

Satan plunders like a military leader who pitches a camp, studies the opponent's strength and fortresses, and then attacks on the weakest side. In the same way, he sizes us up, finds the weakest place, and tries to take us by storm. When this happens, we are often tempted to respond in self-destructive ways like binge eating, workaholism, drug abuse or obsessive shopping.

We might think that we can avoid this because we know the Bible and have regular devotions, but we are not magically exempted from trials. Instead, the Lord wants us to exercise our will to resist the devil. Every person is vulnerable to a personal scheme, a constellation of fiery darts that is effective for that individual. It is a scheme that will not work on another person, but it works on the targeted person nearly every time. And when the darts land in that unique combination they can burst a person's bubble, releasing shock, anger, fear, shame, rejection, or confusion (see Figure 3).

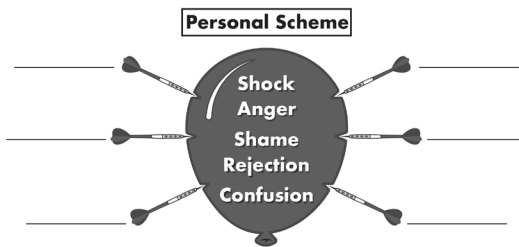


Figure 3: Response to Scheme

Think Again

I had this kind of balloon-bursting experience, which was the lowest point in over 30 years of full-time ministry. I remember wondering, “What am I doing being in ministry? What do I have to offer anyone?” I was in despair, so much so that I related to the Jamie Owens Collins song that said, “So you’ve lost your will to live, seems you’re down to your last friend, and the weight of the world keeps trying to pull you in.”⁶⁶ But out of this experience, I learned a valuable lesson of spiritual warfare: developing a personalized defense strategy.

After months of prayer, meditation, and talking with trusted people, I realized that the devil had been using a cocktail of conditions throughout my lifetime, designed to crush my faith (see Figure 4). After making an inventory of my most devastating experiences, the Lord revealed this diabolical combination: a trusted person in my life would surprise me with a scripted and unclear criticism, one that left no room for dialogue, accompanied by the assurance that this was for my good. Not only did I need to hear this vague and unjust critique, but I was supposed to appreciate it as well. These events were not angry reactions in the heat of the moment but were presented using a written document that had been carefully prepared. I realized when these elements occurred, it would burst my bubble, leading to shock, anger, fear, shame, rejection, and confusion.

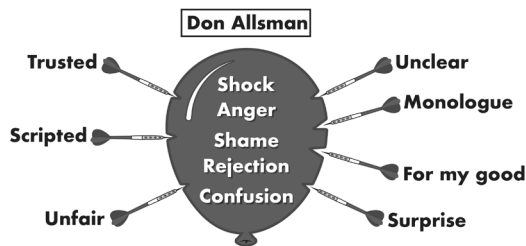


Figure 4: My Personalized Scheme

Design Personalized Defenses

Three Steps

While discovering the elements of this scheme was a good start, I then needed a personalized strategy for two reasons. First, to work through healing of past traumas, and second to craft a response to future attacks. This would equip me to better resist the devil, staying firm in my faith. Instead of floundering in a sea of chaos like before, I could assemble an approach to get my footing and stay grounded to fight future battles. The Lord guided me through three steps: 1) Search for a Bible passage that provides a foundational theme; 2) Draw upon the wisdom of other believers to identify the differences between God's role, the devil's role, and my response; 3) Construct a simple graphic representing a personalized protective shield that is easy to remember.

1. A Biblical Theme

After searching many passages, I found 1 Peter 5:6-10 especially helpful:

“Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.”

From this passage, I discovered six guiding principles. First, start with humility and a teachable heart. Second, God exalts us in a timeframe that may be beyond my comfort level. In other words, resolution may come after what feels like an eternity of waiting.

Think Again

Third, there is an adversary at work, seeking to devour. Fourth, be assertive to resist the enemy. Fifth, this battle is not isolated to me but is something people around the world are experiencing as well. I am not alone. Finally, as I do my part, God Himself will restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish me.

2. Wisdom from Others

Besides the Bible, I also found help from other believers, particularly Ignatius of Loyola, who lived centuries ago.⁶⁷ Something about his phrasing clicked for me in ways that I could understand. He emphasized the need for us to discern between the devil's work of "desolation," in contrast to God's work of "consolation." For example, consolation convicts us of sin, awakens our conscience, gives a sense of remorse, and offers hope to do things right the next time. Desolation, however, heaps condemnation and hopelessness to get us to give up. There is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:1)!

Sometimes we experience desolation because we become lazy in our pursuit of God, and we give the enemy a foothold. But most often God uses desolation to build up our capacity for producing fruit for the Kingdom, like an athlete who lifts weights to stretch her stamina. In our walk with Christ, we have to learn how to be faithful when the circumstances go bad or good feelings aren't present. In so doing, we learn to discern the difference between His consolation versus the enemy's desolation.⁶⁸

Desolation can also be recognized when we experience obstacles to faith, evidenced by darkness, doubt, turmoil, or a disturbance that can come from nowhere. However, consolation removes barriers to faith, resulting in courage, inspiration, and strength to do good works. When we are tempted to give up faith, hope, or love, or suddenly

Design Personalized Defenses

feel a sadness that will never end, this is desolation. By contrast, consolation is experienced when, unexpectedly, we are moved by love for God, shed grateful tears thinking about Jesus' suffering, or when our hearts become full of praise. Any time we suddenly feel faith, hope, or joy that turns our minds to the Kingdom of Heaven, any time we feel peace and quiet in our souls, or any time we feel secure in our salvation, that is consolation.

Another quality of desolation is that it can unfold slowly and subtly. In fact, the devil may start by suggesting good and holy thoughts, and then draw us into little deceptions that take root and grow. What starts sweetly can become foul. For example, a person might have a desire to read the Word to know Jesus better. But over time, the motivation can turn into a competition to know more Bible facts than others in the group. This can eventually degrade to a selfish ambition for attention that started with a pure heart for Christ.

Finally, Ignatius described consolation in terms of gentleness, lightness, and sweetness, like a drop of water softly entering a sponge. On the other hand, desolation is sharp, noisy, and disturbing, like a cascade of water crashing on a rock. Desolation can be identified by its tendency toward bondage and broken relationships, but consolation leads us to freedom in Christ and restored relationships. In short, the devil's desolation takes us away from God and others, while consolation (even in tough times), invites us closer to God and people.

Agency

Having gained a deeper understanding of the subtle differences between Satan's desolation and God's consolation, I became interested in our responsibility to reject the one and embrace the

Think Again

other, which is also called “agency.” Agency is another way to say “resist the devil” by taking responsibility for our reactions to events.

In other words, while we may not be responsible for the darts that come our way or the circumstances we are suffering, we are responsible for our reaction to them. This means we can stop blaming other people, stop blaming circumstances, and take ownership of our own reactions. We can learn how to show determination rather than allowing the devil to victimize us. We don’t have to let him bully us or rob us of our treasure without putting up a fight.

Asserting agency is important because when we retreat, he will attack in a more vindictive way than at first. When we give up our agency, he doubles down in a merciless way. Here is how Ignatius described it:

“The enemy is weak in the presence of strength but strong if he has our will. He will lose courage and take flight when we make a show of determination. In like manner, if we lose courage and we begin to retreat, the anger, rage, and vindictiveness of the enemy becomes great beyond all bounds. The enemy will lose courage and take flight as soon as a person who is following the spiritual life stands courageously against the temptations and does exactly the opposite of what the enemy suggests. On the contrary if a person begins to take flight and loses courage in the midst of fighting temptation, no wild beast on earth is more fierce than the enemy as he pursues his evil intention with ever increasing malice.”⁶⁹

What are some signs of this retreat? They can be seen when we blame people or circumstances, demonstrate childish reactions, or fall into destructive coping like eating, shopping, or watching too much television. Another sign is when we become obsessed with

Design Personalized Defenses

talking about our situation, when we just cannot get it out of our minds. These are signs that we are on the verge of giving up agency. These are warnings that it is time to make a show of strength, doing exactly the opposite of what the enemy suggests.

Exercising Agency in the Battle

The tension between consolation and desolation is the normal experience of spiritual warfare, which is why we must learn to *Think Again*. The first thought or feeling that comes upon us is completely powerless and inert until we bring it to life. The Spirit's offer of consolation has to be activated by our will, just as Satan's desolation has power only when we agree to it. So when we feel lonely, sad, or disturbed, we need to counter it with truth, and realize the emotion may be temporary.

Because of this, we should never make a big decision while we are in the middle of desolation. Instead, we should stand firm in the truth we had before the desolation appeared. Just as God guides us into wisdom, so the enemy wants to lead us to foolishness. We should double our efforts to pray or read the Word because in so doing we resist the devil and shorten the period of desolation. Consolation will not be long in coming.

Also, when we find ourselves in times of consolation, it is helpful to remember that desolation is inevitably coming so we are not caught off guard when it arrives. We can prepare ourselves to defend against lies so we can resist them more quickly. Consolation is also a time to remember our helplessness, so we are not swept up into pride. The tools are given to us to fight back and not be a victim, but they are supplied by the Father's philanthropy, the Son's provision, and the Spirit's power. God wants us to remember that victory only comes when we abide in the vine, not in our own strength.

Think Again

3. Constructing a Consolation Strategy

Armed with a biblical basis, and insight about consolation, desolation, and agency, I was ready to construct a personalized defense strategy. For me this was a kind of “shield of faith” to stand against the schemes of the devil, extinguishing the desolation darts of the evil one (Eph. 6:16). I got help from my wife and other believers as I went through the following steps.

First, I listed the nine conditions that formed the constellation of darts that had been consistently effective throughout my life: critical, no dialogue, trusted sources, unclear, scripted, unfair, bind, surprise, no concrete action (see Figure 5). Second, I identified what I wanted the shield to protect, the “balloon” I wanted to prevent being popped. In my case, I chose the word “confidence” based on Eph. 6:10-16 (to be strong in the Lord and the strength of His might, using the armor of God).

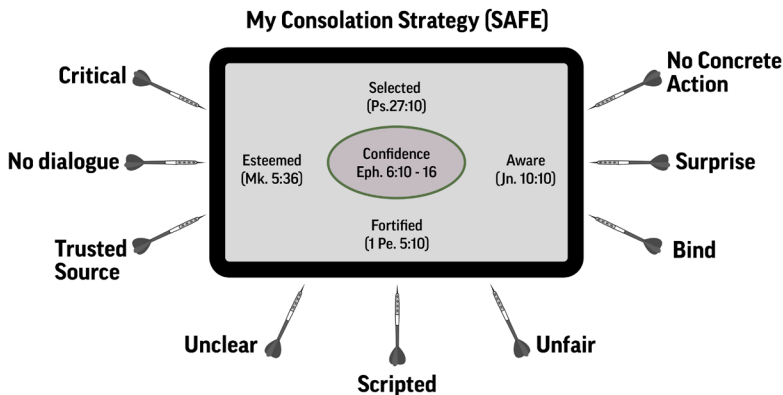


Figure 5: My Consolation Strategy

Third, I went back and remembered four verses that the Lord has used consistently throughout my life to help me weather storms,

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helpful passages that the Holy Spirit has embedded in my life. I also came up with a single word to represent each of the verses:

- Selected: My father and mother may forsake me, but the Lord takes me in (Ps. 27:10).
- Aware: The thief steals, kills, destroys (Jn. 10:10).
- Fortified: God Himself resources, confirms, strengthens, establishes (1 Pet. 5:10).
- Esteemed: Don't be afraid, just believe (Mk. 5:36).

These familiar passages formed a combination of truths I could employ to resist the devil, demonstrating agency. Meditating on this protective shield was also useful for me to heal from other traumatic events in my life. The repeated use of this strategy led me back to the same Jamie Owens Collins song mentioned above, "Don't give up, don't give in, give it all to Him, because He cares so much more than you know. When it seems who you really want to be is someone you'll never become, just look how far you've come."

Through this process the Lord helped me get perspective, to see how far I had come. I recognized how much God had been at work throughout my lifetime, helping me gain proper perspective in my ministry. Yes, the darts of desolation continue to come, and there is still a prowling lion seeking to devour. But there's also a sovereign Lord who provides consolation, and I am now better equipped to demonstrate agency, to stand firm and receive help in my time of need.

Steps to Form Your Shield

1. Identify a set of conditions that form your personalized scheme. The number of conditions isn't important. In my example, I

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had nine, but you may have only three. There are five conditions in Figure 6. Start this process by listing at least four difficult memories to see if a pattern emerges. This can be done in discussion with a trusted person or upon personal reflection.

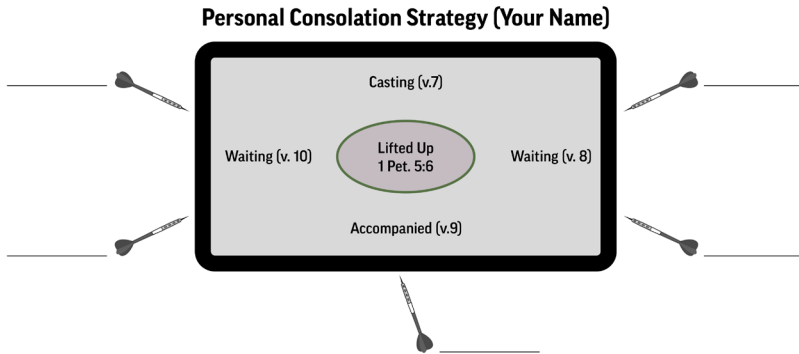


Figure 6: Your Consolation Strategy

2. Next, select a word or phrase describing the truth you want to believe despite the painful memories. In other words, what do you want the shield to protect, the balloon you want to shield from the darts? In Figure 6, the protected center is to feel “lifted up,” drawing from 1 Peter 5:6.
3. Then, formulate a set of truths that form a perimeter around the balloon. If possible, select Bible verses to support each wall of the perimeter. Get help from a pastor or friend if you find it difficult to select appropriate verses, or start with the example in Figure 6 from 1 Peter 5:6-10:
 - Casting (all your anxieties on Him, v. 7)
 - Watchful (for the devil, v. 8)
 - Accompanied (the same sufferings are happening with the brotherhood, v. 9)

Design Personalized Defenses

- Waiting (after suffering a little while, he will restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish, v. 10).

After more study and meditation, you may replace or rephrase four truths with different Bible verses. But the goal is to construct an easy-to-remember, personalized tool for healing the past and agency for the future.

4. Finally, create a graphic for future reference. It is helpful to develop your personalized defense graphic, but unless you practice agency, resisting the devil, the graphic will be of little value. It is a way to remind you of God's consolation, the Father's philanthropy, Jesus' provision, and the Spirit's power, but you must put effort into using these resources. You can put the graphic on your phone or as a card in your wallet, where you can pull it out as needed when you feel troubled. You can also review it each morning during your quiet time or at a time when you stop to reflect during a busy day.

Getting Help from Others

While these steps look simple on the surface, it can be difficult to do alone. Spiritual warfare is always a communal task. We should never fight in isolation. A friend or counselor can help us discover what our vulnerabilities are, and then help us devise a personalized consolation strategy.

Furthermore, sometimes depression has a biochemical source where it is important to get professional treatment. While we all must exercise agency to resist the devil, God also has provided experts to help us, especially when past trauma is involved. There are amazing new treatments that deliver measurable results at a biochemical level, such as EMDR.⁷⁰

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Some people resist counseling because mental health is not mentioned in the Bible. However, we have no problem using email, penicillin, cars, or airplanes, which are not in the Bible either. Since God has provided treatment for our ailments, we should take advantage of them so we can provide a return on God's investment. If we need professional Christian counseling to help us learn to exercise agency and resist the devil, by all means, we should do that. It is not unspiritual to get help, either from a professional or from a fellow believer or pastor.

In addition, when we refuse to get help, we place an additional burden of frustration on our loved ones. My wife Cathy was an audiologist for many years. Over and over she cared for clients who clearly needed hearing aids but refused to get them for any number of illegitimate reasons. Cathy would tell her patients they were shifting their responsibility to their friends and family who were having to shout to be heard. By refusing treatment, they only made life harder for those around them, so refusing professional help for trauma adds unnecessary pain for those who love us.

Is It Worth It?

Designing a personalized defense strategy may feel like a lot of work and not worth the benefit. Or there may be deep woundedness from the past, and the thought of opening those memories may be terrifying. And sometimes we think that you can figure this out without making it so complicated. But while it may seem difficult, discovering our vulnerabilities and designing a personalized strategy is well worth the effort. The alternative is repeatedly giving up blessings to the devil for the rest of your life, not to mention the distress our dysfunction causes loved ones or colleagues.

Design Personalized Defenses

Isn't it better to let healing begin, not just for us, but also for His glory? What the devil meant for evil; God means for good. He wants to take terrible situations and bring redemption, and He often does so by pointing out a place where we have been continually wounded. Therefore, in community with the brotherhood, and sometimes with professional help, cooperate with the consolation work of the Spirit. Resist the devil's desolation through agency to yield return on God's investment for the Kingdom.

Think Again by using a strategy to defend against personalized schemes.

Chapter 14

Adapt To Win

HAVING EXPLORED A PERSONAL defense strategy, we are better equipped to *demolish* past strongholds, *detain* current lies, and *defend* against future disobedience (3-d forging). These skills build resilience that yields an abundant return on investment for God. But we benefit from a third skill, a mind-set that constantly adapts to dynamic circumstances. To grow in resilience, we must also learn to *adapt to win*.

Because the adversary adjusts, we have to adapt as well. The devil doesn't sit still or remain static. This is why Peter warned us not to be surprised by painful trials (1 Pet. 4:12). Instead, we must change our approach under opposition and fluctuating conditions. Without adaptability, we will waste time and money, and be susceptible to anxiety and despair. But when we are flexible, we can stay fresh for the long haul and prevent burnout.

We often get worn out because we forget that life is uncertain and mysterious. Science explains only so much. We can stay sharp and alert if we don't overanalyze every situation. Even bad circumstances can be redemptive; opposition can mean we are on the right track. Innovation can emerge from challenging circumstances, because "necessity is the mother of invention."

On the other hand, good circumstances can be deceiving. When everything is working, we often stop adapting, falling back into old practices, thinking they are the reason for success. The enemy might even leave us alone, granting us paltry achievements to keep us from even greater fruit. Or worse, we can even fall into pride, thinking we are the source of our own triumph.

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Whether circumstances are good or bad, whether we feel confused or clear, the goal is to become more resilient, developing the ability to bounce back after challenging times. Resilience is displayed when everything in us wants to give up, but we have the fortitude to keep going. When others become cynical and despairing, resilient people pivot and go forward. When others are tempted to give up, give in to the crowd, or apply simplistic solutions, adaptable people hold loosely to their own approaches or strategies. This allows them to find creative solutions to underlying problems and open to new tactics.⁷¹

Discerning Good from Best

Adaptable people have a sharpened strength of character that shows up as being grounded, teachable, attuned, adaptable, and tenacious. They are quiet inside and not distracted by the noise within. They have been shaped by the Bible's teaching to integrate the presence of both good and evil and are not surprised when bad things happen. This gives them both courage to face trials and discernment in ambiguous situations.⁷²

Also, adaptable people can grow in wisdom by taking advantage of some opportunities and other times letting them go. They understand how to avoid a common investment pitfall called "the sunk cost fallacy," the tendency to continue activity when it should be abandoned. We find it difficult to give up when time or money has already been invested. Rather than admitting our mistake, we keep spending money on a wasted project, hoping it might turn around.

For example, after 30 minutes watching a movie, we find it's not what we hoped. But instead of changing the channel, we keep watching to the end because we don't want to admit we wasted that half-hour.

Adapt To Win

When we adapt to win, we can quickly admit an unwise decision before the situation gets worse.

Seeking Approval

Another obstacle to adaptability is the desire to *win the approval of people*. Throughout the history of human civilization, people have dedicated most of their physical and emotional energy to taking credit and avoiding blame, maximizing pleasure and minimizing pain. We devote ourselves to appearing right in others' eyes, hiding our inadequacies, and promoting our success.

No one escapes this temptation. The gangbanger running the streets wants to impress his posse. The college professor covets approval from other academics. Everyone wants to stand out among their peers, to gain recognition that feels necessary for happiness. We all pursue the esteem of our little crowd, even though we differ on how to achieve that respect.

We long to feel assured that we are approved, and sometimes that longing can turn into insecurity. When that happens, we can become petrified with so much fear that our minds aren't free enough to adapt. All our energy is wasted on getting approval. Living for admiration depletes our ability to innovate.

We may even find ourselves pushing our way into roles that put us at risk before we are ready. Chole said,

“Over the decades, I have witnessed with tears the collapse of truly exceptional men and women who were crushed by the premature, combined weight of too much applause, too much authority, and too little self-control. So when I see those I mentor rushing toward the future or longing to be noticed or hungry for responsibility, I breathe a silent prayer: Oh, Jesus, grant them the

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gift of hiddenness. For a few more years, please let them grow in quiet anonymity.”⁷³

Created to Be Significant

Resisting approval is counter-intuitive, because we are created by God to be significant. The impulse to be important is not evil. On the contrary, it is a quality embedded in us by God Himself. We are wired to be creative, to do things that *matter*, to be noticed and appreciated. We are built to be indispensable.

But the devil takes advantage of this desire, hoping we will take it upon ourselves to secure the approval of others. In a fallen world, the God-given drive to be significant can be twisted into an obsession to be accepted or become famous. Wondering if we really count, we can become terrified of being worthless, frantically pouring ourselves into activities to address our fear of insignificance.

This can be observed in children, who will do anything to avoid obscurity, even to the point of putting themselves in danger. All through life, we are desperate to be noticed, respected, and honored. We are warned by James 4:2-3: “You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.” We have wrong motives because we crave notoriety, no matter the effect it has on others.

For example, we can find ourselves inserting our way into every conversation or feel wounded when our contribution isn’t recognized. Or we may find it difficult when a discussion starts and ends without being included. This can lead to unhealthy thoughts like:

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- If I win that award, they will finally respect me.
- If I can get my article published, then I'll be somebody.
- If I earn that promotion, I will have arrived.

This desperation can even lead us to envy, wishing we could take what others have and make it our own. When we become envious of others' success, we become like Cain who murdered his brother. James said, "If you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts do not boast about it or deny the truth. Where you have envy and selfish ambition you will find disorder and every evil practice" (Js. 3:14-16). But how can we move from such a desperate desire for approval?

Releasing Self-Identity

The process begins by releasing our authority to define ourselves, to give up self-identification. In *Beyond the Obvious*, Hurty and DeYoung said,

"The essence of sin is pride. The essence of pride is what we are going to call self-definition. It is a disposition of spirit which says, 'I love myself and I will define for myself who I am.' It is an attitude that causes us to refuse to accept whatever is true, especially about ourselves. We create in our minds an image of who we are or who we wish to be, and then we set out to convince ourselves and everyone else that we truly are what we claim to be."⁷⁴

The authors go on to say that pride shows up in two ways: arrogance and insecurity. People either think too highly of themselves or they debase themselves by having too low of an opinion, but both are self-centered and not based on truth. On the other hand, Romans 12:3 says to think about ourselves with sober judgment, according

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to the measure of faith God has assigned. Therefore, to avoid pride, we need to see ourselves as we truly are, not too high, not too low. In other words, both self-exaltation and self-deprecation are contrary to truth and harmful.⁷⁵

This motivates us to reorient ourselves to live as close to the truth as possible; truth about self, truth about others, and truth about the world around us. Arrogant people are continually defending themselves, claiming rights, seeking honor for themselves, or putting on a façade to maintain their image. Conversely, insecure people put themselves down and, in the process, dishonor the image of God that is in them.

But Jesus is the perfect example of how to live by the truth. He is everything He claims to be. He is everything true and beautiful and good and holy. For Him to proclaim otherwise would be to lie. When people worshipped Him, he did not refuse, because the truth was that He was worthy to be worshipped. He didn't have false modesty, nor did He exaggerate His importance.

We can follow His example by accepting the truth about ourselves. This includes unpleasant as well as pleasant truths. We have weaknesses and shortcomings, but He has also gifted us with abilities and talents to serve Him and bless others. To fully acknowledge these abilities is not pride, it is freedom to leverage them for effective use. Therefore, we glorify God when we agree with the truth about ourselves, both good and bad.⁷⁶

Embracing Obscurity

But becoming adaptable takes more than a sincere attempt to live according to the truth. It takes a willingness to go a step further, to embrace obscurity, becoming invisible or anonymous, like Jesus.

Adapt To Win

Obscurity puts us in a position to be forged. Our source of pleasure switches from “the approval of people” to “the approval of God.” The Spirit can begin to demolish the stronghold of people-pleasing and replace it with a new pathway in our brains that enjoys pleasing God.

In other words, in those seasons when no one is clapping for us, when we feel underestimated, unappreciated, or minimized, God can transform us. In the painful silence of these moments, we have the opportunity to wrestle with what makes us truly significant. When no one is there to tell us why we are so valuable, we are left to look at Jesus and answer that question ourselves.⁷⁷

In essence, embracing obscurity brings us to a crossroads: If we proceed, it means being willing to get no credit and no notoriety. We may be overlooked, disregarded, and given no recognition for past performance, education, achievements, or experience. At this fork in the road, we can *go left*, becoming resentful, cynical, and bitter; or we can *go right*, submitting to obscurity that leads to freedom. When we face this level of selflessness, our real motives come out.

If we insist on receiving credit to build our reputation, we reduce the number of creative options before us. There’s only so much bandwidth available to make decisions, and the more we think about ourselves, the less attention we have for the tasks before us. We build a wall between our minds and the unlimited universe of imaginative options available to us.

But if we embrace obscurity, we are liberated to put our energy into the tasks God gives us, making use of the supplies God gives us to bless our world. We aren’t ruled by obsessions to be famous, make a name for ourselves on social media, become well known in our

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profession, or be recognized as a perfect parent or grandparent. Instead, we can spend our energy serving in quiet anonymity, because our contribution to the Kingdom is never in vain (1 Cor. 15:58). It is only when we embrace obscurity that we can produce a maximum return on God's investment.

Four Essential Attitudes

There are four attitudes that help us embrace obscurity, making us truly adaptable.

Attitude 1: You are Adequately Loved

The first attitude of embracing obscurity is believing that we are adequately loved by God. This is more than a theological acknowledgment of God's character. It must be a heartfelt, rock-solid conviction that God loves us and is *pulling for us*. God's adoring eyes have always been upon us. We had his attention all along, but we cannot see it because we have been too distracted by the sight of ourselves.⁷⁸

In other words, we must be confident in 2 Peter 1:3: We have been given everything we need for life and godliness. This means we can walk in safety and security, confident of God's work in human history. We can breathe a sigh of relief because we *do* matter. We *are* significant. We don't have to earn others' acceptance, because in Christ we are already accepted. *We belong!*

However, many people are incapacitated because they cannot accept God's forgiveness. Those who live in a constant state of guilt and bondage don't really believe that Christ's blood is sufficient to cover their sins. But when we have confidence that God in Christ has paid the price for all wrongdoing, we can confess sin, receive forgiveness,

and quickly move on (1 Jn. 1:9). He didn't go to the cross grudgingly, but willingly.

Others live under the yoke of slavery, believing their lot in life is to realize how sinful and worthless they are. They live each day trying to fight against pride by confessing sin and putting themselves down. Rather than living in the freedom of Christ, they believe the Christian life is essentially about how to deal with their sin. This is what Dallas Willard called "the gospel of sin management,"⁷⁹ where people get stuck in a repeated cycle of sin, shame, confession, finding it difficult to break out of their self-referential domain.

Conversely, when we know we are loved, we are free to live a risk-taking, adventuresome life. The reward is worth the risk. Our labor in the Lord is not in vain (1 Cor. 15:58). We are safe in the proven love of God, the sure word of Scripture. God never leaves us or forsakes us (Heb. 13:5). He does not leave us as orphans (Jn. 14:8). Because God has reduced the risk, we are set free to pursue the heroic efforts of any enterprise He assigns to us.⁸⁰

Attitude 2: Boring and Thankless Tasks

The second attitude of embracing obscurity is surrendering to boring and thankless tasks. Most people consider themselves above the gritty and relentless details, so they are unwilling to pursue what seems "beneath them." They say, "I didn't do four years of college to do that." But God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble (Jn. 4:6), and He may empower someone else to receive the credit we deserve, so we need to learn how to eagerly embrace this kind of obscurity.

These situations can reveal when we have a death grip on that which defines us: work, family, sexuality, reputation, or ministry. Tozer

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said, “We need to have taken from our dying hand the shadow scepter with which we fancy we rule the world.”⁸¹ Maybe it’s not so extreme as wanting to “rule the world,” but letting go of the scepter that controls our identity might be met with surprising resistance. Embracing obscurity means releasing whatever has made us well known up to this point. It may also mean sacrificing a career to make a greater Kingdom contribution (see Appendix 8).

Attitude 3: Releasing Bitterness

The third attitude of embracing obscurity is to forgive others and not see them as enemies. When we refuse to forgive, our minds are enslaved to bitterness. This is why Jesus taught us to pray that God would forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us (Mt. 6:12). If we believe that others are blocking our potential or stifling our goals, we lose sight that God is still in control.

We may think, “My leaders are shortsighted, my parents don’t understand, my boss is jealous, and my spouse is dragging me down. The old-timers at work shut down my innovative ideas, the young people don’t respect the wisdom of my experience, our board is out of touch, or the task force I serve on is misguided.” Is the Lord so weak that He can’t overcome these challenges? Is He unaware of our frustrations? Is He asleep on the job?

Without question, we are affected by the decisions of others, but they are not the ones holding us back. There is only one person who can destroy your future. *That person is you.* (Notice I stopped using “us” and used the word “you” to emphasize that embracing obscurity is your responsibility). You are the only one who can sabotage your potential by nurturing a bitter spirit.⁸² You can decide to joyfully trust God in spite of your frustration.

Attitude 4: You Can't Do This Alone

It is difficult for Americans to break free from individualism. They tend to read the Bible as it relates to themselves personally. When a verse says “you” they think “me” when it often means “you all” (plural). God intended us to live the Christian life in community. He works through His collective Body, and the Church is not just a collective summation of individual relationships with God. To become resilient, we need people who will help us get up when we are down. We need others to encourage us with hope when we feel hopeless.

We also need others if we are to see life clearly. Self-awareness is important in understanding the world around us and how we interface with it. Logic would dictate that self-awareness comes from a focus on self. But ironically, intense self-absorption only obscures our ability to see ourselves accurately. The most self-aware people are the ones who depend on others to give them feedback, to help them identify blind spots and misconceptions.⁸³ We need others to help us stay out of our little world.

In summary, we learn adaptability by living according to truth and embracing obscurity. This means learning to rest in His love, take on boring and thankless tasks, release bitterness, and get help from other people. When we embrace obscurity, we take up our cross, as Jesus commanded (Mt. 16:24). The way of Jesus was to seek obscurity first and receive exaltation later. For example, the obscurity of Good-Friday's crucifixion came first, and then Easter-Sunday resurrection came later. The obscurity of the cross was Jesus' way to obtain significance, and it is the way for us too.

In other words, when we sow obscurity, we will reap recognition. When we humble ourselves under God's mighty hand, He will lift us

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up at the proper time. He Himself will restore, strengthen, establish, and confirm us (1 Pet. 5:6-10).

Adaptability gives us freedom to *Think Again* about how to respond to shifting situations, an important skill in producing an ROI for God. But there is still another skill that helps us develop resilience: *cultivate your imagination.*

Chapter 15

Cultivate Your Imagination

AN APPRECIATION FOR “ADAPT TO WIN” is a prerequisite for the fourth skill in building resilience: “cultivate your imagination.” God’s way to create spiritual wealth is through the imagination and grit of heroic and sacrificial stewards, not through formulas or wooden paradigms. God’s design is to realize His venture capital return through people like us. Because it is in our nature to innovate, when our imaginations are unleashed, we naturally seize opportunities as they arise. Therefore, the nature of spiritual warfare doesn’t have to always be dreadful or scary. For us who are led by the Spirit, it can be an exciting adventure.

But innovations cannot be planned or predicted because they emerge from the daring imagination of an entrepreneur. For example, much has been written about innovators like Steve Jobs (Apple), Mark Zuckerberg (Facebook), or Sam Walton (Walmart). In sports, we marvel at the ingenuity of Olympic champions or professional athletes. And in the Church, we honor the imagination of the Reformers, John Wesley, or Martin Luther King Jr.

Like spiritual entrepreneurs, we enjoy doing projects that yield a good return. God has equipped us with tools and resources, then He leaves it to us to come up with creative approaches. In fact, those who love a good challenge can find God’s wind in their sails, even when situations become difficult or confusing. We can find energy when we walk in step with the Spirit, much like the rush that people get when they use their imagination in venture capital deals, competitive athletics, or other fields of creative endeavor.

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Buying Up Opportunities

Ephesians 5:15-16 says, “Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, *making the best use of the time.*” The phrase “making the best use of the time” means to “buy up opportunities,” which comes from the world of sailing (Latin for “toward the port”). The idea is that we need to be constantly aware of the winds and tides that shift one way or another, taking advantage of them to guide us toward the port, the end goal of an activity.⁸⁴

To be wise is to recognize these winds and tides are more favorable at one time than another. Therefore, wisdom sometimes involves *waiting*. Other times it means *acting quickly*. I loved playing basketball because it is a game of constantly looking for opportunities. The best players make instantaneous decisions to pass, shoot, dribble, cut, or drive, depending on what is available. Even when players do not have possession of the ball, they are constantly observing the situation to take advantage of opportunities that present themselves.

Likewise, when Paul talks about opportunities, he prays God will open doors so that he will take proper advantage of them. “Pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison – that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak. Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time” (Col. 4:3-4).

An example comes from the movie *Mission Impossible: Ghost Protocol*. Ethan wakes up to find himself in a hospital bed and waiting outside his room is a foreign agent ready to interrogate him. Without delay, Ethan assessed the surroundings using the resources available and crafted an ingenious approach. Stepping out on the window ledge, a truck appears below and he uses his belt to slide down a wire, landing on top of the passing truck, securing his escape through a

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crowd. In the same way, God gives us resources, but we need the imagination to use them.

We must also be ready for opportunities when we are experiencing trials. For example, when my mother passed away and we were in the midst of our own grief, we had to break the news of her death to several of her friends. Many of them burst into tears, needing words of comfort and encouragement. Out of the grace God gave us, we were able to be the source of strength to others. To recognize opportunities, we must be aware of our surroundings, because it is easy to drift through trials and miss important moments to minister.

Replace Preservation with Imagination

Another way to cultivate our imagination is to recognize *preservation*, a scheme of the devil described in Chapter 10. Preservation views life as a finite pie to be split, where each person must contend with everyone else for their share of the pie. It is based on fear of missing out, or losing what has already been gained. By contrast, cultivating imagination neutralizes this fear by viewing life as a sea of infinite possibilities where God can make more pies!

One manifestation of preservation is the hoarding of information. Our capacity for creative discovery is diminished when we use knowledge as power, gritting our teeth to get the upper hand, exploit situations, or win at all costs. But imaginative people see knowledge as something revealed by God for the blessing of others, not something to be used as a weapon.

They also embrace mystery, knowing God and His world can never be fully understood, which frees the mind for delightful epiphanies. For example, after years of conventional attempts to manufacture

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antibiotics, penicillin emerged when mold was found growing accidentally on a petri dish.

While the world gives preference to the rich, powerful, and influential as a means to get their piece of the pie, imaginative people see the value of God at work in anyone: the weak, the prisoner, the refugee, or a child. Some people make the mistake of equating American values with the Kingdom of God, believing that exercise of American power or celebrity endorsement is the best way to advance the Gospel. But God is not limited by political strength, and actually prefers to work through the poor, who are rich in faith (Jas. 2:5), producing an ROI through unseen people who will never be famous. Imaginative people see beyond the trappings of worldly power and invest in those who produce lasting fruit through humble service.

Preservation also appears when we cling tightly to relationships and circumstances. It is better to realize that people will come and go throughout seasons of life. The imaginative person gives attention to the people He sends across to our path, but is also able to let them go, having confidence that new opportunities are coming ahead. We grieve the losses but live in hope for the next season. Cathy and I have lost many relatives, friends and neighbors who moved on or passed away. We are sad for each loss, but we remind ourselves to use our imagination in anticipation of the next person God will send into our lives.

Imagination Attracts Critics

As we grow in cultivating our imagination, we should not be surprised when we attract critics. Those influenced by preservation are hostile to imagination, because it threatens what they are trying to preserve: their status quo, their life's work, their source of notoriety. Imagination calls into question the pretense of their agenda. People may say they want to be freed by imaginative ideas but they are often

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content with the quiet comfort of their complacent situation. Such people can feel threatened by those with hopes and dreams that challenge their provincial life.

Also, people fight back when the source of their security is threatened or ridiculed, so cultivating imagination can be seen as *launching a revolution*. People cling to the pretense that their little world is sufficient and so they can be profoundly resistant to self-criticism. They falsely assume they hold the gold-standard that others want to imitate. They are self-deceived, thinking their influence will live on forever. Therefore, they deny the truth that their share of the pie is theirs to keep forever, that their fading empire is in slow demise.

I watched this happen with friends in pastoral leadership who wanted to make changes in the structure of adult discipleship. One of the church's small group leaders resisted these changes, deluded by the assumption that his little enclave was the shining example for others in the church to imitate. Although his influence was slowly eroding, he put up a fight, saying, "You'll make changes to my group over my dead body." Within a few years, he was gone and without a following.

Also, critics will attempt to drag imaginative people down through criticism or discouragement. Every imaginative-Nehemiah has a preservationist-Sanballat, who tried to distract Nehemiah from his vision (Neh. 4:1-9). Sanballat did not hesitate to say how sloppy Nehemiah's work was; how unprofessional, unsophisticated, or backward. In the same way, people driven by preservation will not provide their own innovative ideas but will attack imaginative people to preserve their share of the pie.

For example, several people from the academic world have told my friend Dr. Don Davis that his leadership development curriculum

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(The Capstone Curriculum) was substandard, despite its widespread use in countries around the world and in prisons. They belittled his work by suggesting their own curriculum should be added to his 16-module masterpiece. When this happened, we called this critique the “seventeenth module syndrome.” The naysayers paid no attention to the fact that *Capstone* has trained thousands more leaders than they themselves have trained. As a result, we chose to ignore them, and chose partners who didn’t need to push their own agenda of preservation.

Attracts Dependence

When we cultivate imagination, we should also watch out for unhealthy dependence. Imaginative and fruitful people will attract people unwilling to carry their own load but quick to ask for help doing what they should do for themselves. But genuine empowerment does not come through pity. We must believe in people enough to let them struggle. We can help, but we can’t resolve everything for everyone.

In fact, people will request exceptions because of their “unique situation.” But when we lower standards for people who can meet those expectations, it is enabling, not empowering. That means we may be misunderstood as being harsh. But imaginative people keep watch for unhealthy dependence by having confidence in our own calling, the resourcing of the Holy Spirit to help others cultivate their own imaginations.

Formed by Anguish

Cultivating imagination is not all sweetness and light. In fact, imagination is formed out of a deep longing for things to be different, a discontentment with the status quo. When we wonder, “Why can’t

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I shake this persistent grief?” it shows that our imagination is still alive, that we haven’t fallen victim to the numbness of preservation. In fact, our anguish will drive us to liberate what has become enslaved, to contribute to the collapse of preservation’s status quo.

For example, consider the Israelite nation crying out against Egyptian oppression. Imagination was cultivated once the people had suffered long enough to consider leaving the security of Egypt, envisioning a new future as a new people (Ex. 3:9). Imagination envisions a fresh situation, a hopeful set of circumstances. Our work of the Kingdom is to have eyes to see what is bound, seeing into the despair of people, and imagining a different situation.

One way I cultivated this kind of imagination came through many years of subway commuting to my office in South Los Angeles. As I would emerge from underground to the corner of Wilshire and Vermont, I would often stop for coffee at one of the busiest and most diverse intersections in the world. Several ethnic groups walked through the massive courtyard, changing buses, going to school, or rushing to work. I saw people of all ages, socioeconomic levels, and occupations, including lawyers, nurses, students, homeless people, and construction workers. I would think about their hopes and dreams and fears, trying to see them as God saw them, people waiting to be liberated into participation in something meaningful and life-giving.

This is how to cultivate imagination, by looking beneath the surface of pain and despair to see a new situation of beauty and hope. Imagination sees what is created in the image of God, waiting to be set free by the Spirit, making people to be who they were meant to be. Imagination is not wiping the slate clean but building on the good that is already there. We need imagination to do that kind of work – to see the good and liberate it.

Think Again

But that kind of imagination involves anguish and pain. We are in good company because the prophets and apostles before us lived lives of anguished imagination. In fact, we may be given a prophetic ministry, where we faithfully do what God says even though no one will listen. The saints of old knew what it was to invite critics, attract unhealthy dependence, and craft a message out of their anguish. But there is yet another challenge to cultivating our imagination: It takes time, effort, and failure.

An ROI Takes Time, Effort, Failure

A good return on investment takes a long time to produce. Matthew 25:19 says, “Now after a *long time* the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them.” The effective stewards, those who doubled the venture capital given to them, took a long time to achieve that return. They did not pursue “get rich quick” schemes.

In fact, a return on investment is rarely achieved in a straight line, but typically involves ups and downs. (see Figure 7). The big payoff of investment is usually achieved by the compounding effect, the small actions that are repeated, which over time result in staggering, exponential results. Those who invest slowly and faithfully receive the bulk of the return in later years.

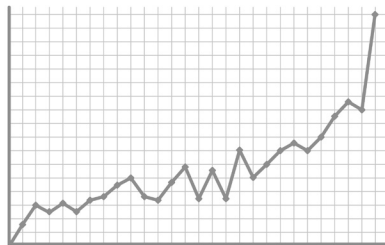


Figure 7: Compounding Effect

Cultivate Your Imagination

Imagination waits in expectation that God will give wisdom, but maybe not on our timetable: “They that wait upon the Lord will renew their strength” (Is. 40:31). This is not a despairing waiting, but a peaceful waiting, a sense of hopeful anticipation. Imagination is at work while we wait, like the expectation the apostles experienced when Jesus told them to wait for the coming of the Spirit.

Effort

Imagination also takes effort. It demands discipline, ambition, and courage. God is pleased when we try and fail but displeased when we play it safe, burying His treasure in the ground. The lazy steward was right to say: “I knew you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed” (Mt. 25:24). God wants us to be diligent, using our imagination so He can receive a return on His investment, receiving a harvest resulting from sowing seeds. He expects us to be clever and work hard to get the job done.

Imagination is not something that can be produced in a moment.⁸⁵ We can't just rise to the occasion. It must be built into us through diligent work so it gets ingrained in our habits and character. Just as a person cannot develop the physical flexibility to do the splits overnight, it takes effort to gradually cultivate imagination, through intentional practice and reflection.

Failure

Imagination also involves failure. Innovators are not troubled by failures because they are learning opportunities. A plant that goes to seed can be the source of a plentiful harvest in the future, so we should sow seeds and see what comes up. What seems like a spark of genius might fall flat. Then, to our surprise, a different approach

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works. Some of the best ideas come from second and third attempts. Even when we do our best to follow the Spirit's leading, some ideas will not work, some at a laughable level. But God can redeem everything.

Failure is also an ingredient of the investment principle called diversification, which is holding a variety of projects or assets in a portfolio. Since no one can ever be certain which project will work, diversification allows one investment to decline or fail, while others are successful. When an investor has several projects going at once, the overall return will usually be positive, even when some fail. In the same way, we should attempt several ideas for ministry without fear of failure.

Bringing It All Together

In his book, *Tempered Resilience*, Tod Bolsinger suggests three principles to help us use our imagination in difficult situations: 1) stay calm; 2) stay the course; 3) stay connected. When all seems lost, be a person who can stay calm. When it seems like God's ways are not working, stay the course, remaining committed to everything known about God before it all went wrong. When others succumb to blaming or divisiveness, be the kind of person who stays interpersonally connected with people. And most importantly, stay connected to the Vine.⁸⁶

When we aspire to stay calm, stay the course, and stay connected, we position ourselves to yield an ROI for God. Cultivating our imagination is more about calmness than techniques, more about perseverance than intelligence, and more about connection than cleverness. It is not just studying the Bible, it is applying biblical truth in creative situations, exercising wisdom that produces fruit and glorifies His name.

Cultivate Your Imagination

We can cultivate our imagination because we are fearfully and wonderfully made in the image of God. We are the light of the world (Mt. 5:14). We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them (Eph. 2:10). With unveiled faces, beholding the glory of the Lord, we are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit (1 Cor. 3:18).

But this good work is not limited to us. In fact, we can also help others yield their own ROI for God. They can learn to demolish strongholds in their own lives, detain thoughts as captives, and defend against disobedience that returns. As they grow in meditation, worship, and praise, they also can be forged from scrap metal to become the delivery system that provides living water for their network of family and friends.

In essence, when we care for hurting, confused people, devastated by the lies of the evil one, and point them to the life-giving truth of His Word, we produce a return on His investment. *When we cultivate imagination, God can make us into a fruit-making machine!*

Chapter 16

Replace Old Habits

ALL THE SKILLS IN the previous chapters are helpful. Imagination, adaptability, personalized defense, and 3-D forging will take us far. But if we are going to be resilient, yielding a robust return on God's investment, we need one more skill. *We need to replace old habits with new ones.* The only way we can change is by integrating new information into the existing thoughts and activities of our daily lives, but this happens over time, a bit here and a bit there.⁸⁷

The findings of epigenetics confirm that if we discipline ourselves through deep meditative thinking, using various parts of our brain, we learn how to capture and control our thoughts. As we pray and memorize Scripture, we can observe our thoughts, and think deeply about God's truth. This accelerates the brain's functioning, resulting in mental, physical, and spiritual healing. This process destroys toxic brain structures and replaces them with life-giving truth.

Informed by Scripture and epigenetic research, this chapter describes a 10-minute daily process I use to resist the devil and build resilience. There are a variety of methods to replace old habits and achieve the same outcome.⁸⁸ But one benefit of my suggested routine is that it is not too time-consuming.

Epigenetics Research

I engage in the daily challenges of spiritual warfare by drawing from epigenetics research.⁸⁹ Some of this research suggests five steps that re-structure different parts of the brain: 1) becoming aware of our thoughts; 2) going deep with our thinking; 3) putting thoughts on paper; 4) creating the change we want; 5) implementing a plan of action.

Think Again

I studied these five ideas and organized them into six steps that made sense to me, using the acrostic: “RESILE.” This is an odd word, but it is the verb form of the word “resilience;” that is, when we demonstrate resilience, we *resile*. Here are the steps:

R: Release Agenda

E: Examine Feelings

S: Sort Lies

I: Invoke Truth

L: Litigate Conflict

E: Employ Slogan

Although each step is linked to the whole, the primary goal is to get to the end (Employ Slogan), so it is vital to keep the process moving and avoid getting stuck along the way.

Release Agenda

Although every step of RESILE is an opportunity for dialogue with God, *Release Agenda* is a forced stop to subordinate myself to God’s will. I ask the Spirit to guide my thinking, leading me into truth so He can shape me into the image of Christ, like a metallurgist forming a brass nozzle from scrap metal.

To do this, sometimes I spend a moment considering the grandeur of His Kingdom compared to my relatively small role in His giant plan for the ages. This helps me place my problems in proper perspective, reminding me that all the answers in life are revealed to me by God, and never from my own insight or cleverness. Sometimes this step can be done in a few seconds, and other times I find it difficult to give God control of my life. But I wrestle with God until I can

Replace Old Habits

release my agenda to Him. If I get stuck, I start with the Lord's prayer, asking that His will be done in my life as it is in heaven.

Examine Feelings

The next step is to make a quick inventory of my feelings, listing out how I might be happy, sad, worried, confused, etc. This is not a time to evaluate these feelings, assign meaning to them, or counter them with truth. They just need to be identified, either in my mind or written down on paper. For example:

- I'm worried about my child's grades.
- I'm upset about my neighbor's fence falling down.
- I'm happy about my project at work.

Sometimes I must use a feelings wheel⁹⁰ just to find a name to what I'm feeling, and other times, I feel overloaded with so many emotions that I have to pick the one that is most dominant. The key is to get through this quickly to avoid getting bogged down by ruminating about many concerns. If this takes more than a couple of minutes to develop this list, set a timer for three minutes to keep moving.

This step is important because feelings are an indicator of how we are interpreting the circumstances in our lives. Like a metal detector, they help us evaluate where our mental energy is being applied at that moment, or like a thermometer that registers a fever. Bringing emotions out into the open is helpful, articulating what we are feeling, whether it is with a friend or just to ourselves. Sometimes the enemy's schemes are revealed just by putting words to our feelings.

While our attention is often drawn to negative feelings, it is also important to remember that Satan can use positive emotions to

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keep us from serving God. For example, people can be content in their sinful arrogance, exhilarated by the greed of conspicuous consumption, happy while plotting revenge, or captivated by the thrill of sexual immorality. Therefore, it is important to take stock of all our feelings, not just the negative ones.

Sort Lies

Using the list of feelings, I sort out where the enemy is trying to deceive me. What emotion is he twisting into a lie that results in distraction, discouragement, or self-destructive behavior? For example, if the feeling is concern about a child's grades, the enemy might be whispering, "Your child's bad grades will lead to unemployment and a lifetime of homelessness." This is clearly an exaggeration that can be labeled a lie.

This step is not the time to evaluate the lie, nor to counter it with truth. This is a time to simply identify the lies associated with feelings. Sometimes I find it helpful to ask myself "so-what?" questions, uncovering the lies behind the emotions. Using the example of anxiety over a child's grades:

- So-what? "If my child fails in school, she won't get into a good university."
- So-what? "If she doesn't go to a good school, there may not be anyone to care for me in my old age."
- So-what? "If there is no one to care for me, I will die alone under a bridge somewhere."

So-what questions can uncover the absurdity of our thinking. In this example, too much weight is given to a temporary season of difficulty at school, revealing a lack of trust in God and unreasonable pressure

Replace Old Habits

on the daughter. Events can be put into perspective by identifying underlying lies, fears, pride, or irrational assumptions.

The description of triggers listed in Chapters 9-10 on Impulsive Destruction and Passive Distraction can be helpful to keep moving at this stage. Or feel free to simply proceed to the next step, because sometimes the lie will come out through the next steps of RESILE. The main objective is to get to the last step, so keep moving.

During Examine Feelings, sometimes God reveals sin in my life that needs confession. The Spirit will show me that I am being defensive or blaming others for something I should own, so it's best to quickly agree, repent, and receive instant forgiveness.

Invoke Truth

The next step is to shift my brain into a different mode, to focus my mind on what is objectively true, to step back from my feelings and review the truth that applies to my situation. This is not time to interrogate or cross-examine my feelings, just to list the facts as a dispassionate observer.

This is where God uses the fruit of past Bible study, memorization, and meditation. The Spirit leads me into truth as I have invested in His Word. For those who do not know enough Scripture, there is no need to feel guilty, just work with what you already know. Let this be a motivation to dig deeper into Bible study at a later time, using a concordance or looking up verses online that relate to the situations that have been identified.

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Write the truth as a short affirmation, like the following that have been particularly helpful truths in my personal battles (also see Appendix 3 for more examples):

- His grace is sufficient in my weakness (2 Cor. 12:9).
- If I seek the Kingdom first, everything I need will be provided (Mt. 6:33).
- I have an enemy (1 Pet. 5:8).
- This is God's work, not mine (Mt. 9:38).
- I have everything I need for life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3).
- People are not my enemies; every problem has a cosmic origin (Eph. 6:12).
- No circumstances are beyond redemption (Rom. 8:37-39).
- I have the power to be content in all situations (Phil. 4:11-13).
- Everything I have received is by grace, not my accomplishments (Eph. 2:8-10).
- God is more powerful than the devil (1 Jn. 4:4).
- I am qualified to do His work (Col. 1:11-12; 2 Cor. 3:5).
- I walk by faith not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7).
- God loves me and has invested in me (Mt. 13).
- The Spirit leads me into truth (Jn. 16:13).

If it is difficult to come up with truths to affirm, make a list of feelings in one column and contrast it with truth in the other column. For example:

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| Instead of (<i>from Examine Feelings</i>) | You Can Affirm (<i>Invoke Truth</i>) |
|----------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| Nobody cares about me | You like me and others do too |
| I have no talent | You give me gifts to serve the body |
| I'm miserable | I can be content |
| I'm lonely | Thank you for my friends |
| I'm helpless | You never leave or forsake me |

As with the previous steps, I complete this step in just a few minutes so I'm not tempted to quit in frustration. Resist the urge to analyze history, trying to discover how beliefs went awry or what happened in childhood. Some thoughts and issues are too deep to figure out in this short exercise and may need a longer time of prayer, meditation, or professional counseling. I like to repeat what Catherine of Genoa said, "I will not wear myself out seeking beyond what God wants me to know. Instead, I will abide in peace with the understanding God has given me. And I will let this occupy my mind."⁹¹

Litigate Conflict

Once I have *Sorted Lies* and *Invoked Truth*, I need a way to reconcile the conflict between my feelings and the truth. "Litigate" is a legal term that describes how disputes are settled in a courtroom, so this step is designed to process through the emotions, lies, and truth to come to resolution.

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This is important because emotions are *followers* by nature, and we place our souls in danger when we let them take the lead. On the other hand, truth was *born to lead*. God's truth clears the fog in our minds, provides fences around our emotions, and frees us to make wise choices.⁹² However, we can know the truth in our heads, but until our hearts align with our heads, we can be confused and frustrated. For example, we can both feel lonely AND believe God will never leave or forsake us. Both can be true at the same time.

But it is difficult to accept the truth when our feelings are so strongly at odds with the truth. This is called "cognitive dissonance." For example, we can say we are forgiven, and that God delights in us, but in our hearts, we feel like we disappoint Him and He simply tolerates us. We may wish we could believe what the Bible says about His love for us, but instead we may feel distant from God. Therefore, *Litigate Conflict* is an attempt to eliminate cognitive dissonance by harmonizing truth with feelings, identifying the barriers and blockages that keep us stuck in our emotions.

Not Just Visualization

The self-help industry ignores cognitive dissonance by suggesting we can simply "visualize" or "verbalize" a desired outcome into existence. In other words, just "seeing it" or "saying it" will make it come true. People may visualize and verbalize with all their heart, but the "see it-say it" approach often makes people feel worse when their dreams do not come to fruition.⁹³ Another problem with this approach is that people assume that good circumstances will produce happiness, when what we really need is greater resilience to face difficulties.

This positive confession approach is more like magic, where people believe they can say the right incantations and their desired outcomes

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will appear. This places unreasonable expectations on God to give us whatever we desire, treating Him more like a genie or a servant. It also assumes that we know what is best for His Kingdom. The better way to overcome cognitive dissonance is to ask the Spirit for power to use agency against misbeliefs that stand in the way of truth. By identifying those obstacles, we can cross-examine them, interrogating them against the veracity of Scripture. In this way, we use truth like a thermostat, setting the temperature to bring our emotions into alignment.

As we *Litigate Conflict*, and our emotions start lining up with truth, we experience the faith described in Hebrews 11:1. We have the assurance (feelings) of things hoped for (truth), the conviction (feelings) of things not seen (truth). We have feelings of confidence despite the situation. We are at peace even in demanding situations. But if we have cognitive dissonance, by definition, we don't have faith. Therefore, it is important to wrestle through *Litigate Conflict* until we comfortably reconcile feelings with truth, eliminating cognitive dissonance.

How to Litigate Conflict

Some approaches to mental health focus on looking back to find the source of difficulty. While this may be helpful in some cases, RESILE is a forward-looking process to discover truth, resulting in a plan of action using agency. In other words, don't ask "why" questions (Why do I do this? Why do I feel this way?). Instead, ask "what" questions (What am I going to do about this?). We can spend so much time exploring the source of lies that we never get to the important part, which is creating a plan of action.

Research shows that the best way to do this is through *writing* (using an old-fashioned pencil/pen and paper). Educators know that the

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vibration of the pencil on paper transforms our brains.⁹⁴ This writing doesn't have to be limited to words and sentences (journal-style), but can be creative through sketching, doodling, making diagrams, using color, drawing charts, writing a poem, or composing a song. The method used for writing is not important.

The purpose is to be unencumbered by any given method, freely toggling back and forth between emotions and truth. Wrestle with cognitive dissonance until a path is found to move from stormy emotions to the protective canopy of truth. This can be a freeing experience, but it can also be messy, and probably non-linear. I often go back and forth several times before I reconcile my feelings to the truth. (For those concerned about confidentiality, simply tear up the finished work and throw it away, because it is the process of writing that is important, not the finished words on the page).

Litigate Conflict sometimes reveals how much energy we are expending to impress others, trying to please friends, family, my employer, or the world at large. Our activity should be important to God, not to me, or others. Also, this is a time when God reveals our need to forgive or gives us new compassion for people.

Like the previous steps, it is easy to get bogged down and take too much time on this step. But try to do this in a minute or two (see Appendix 10 for some ideas if you get stuck). Feel free to come back for a deeper exploration at a later time. The goal is to get to the next and final step without spending more than a few minutes litigating conflict.

Employ Slogan

The final step of RESILE is to implement a *plan of action*. It is the time I need to stop reflecting, stop analyzing, and start practicing

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agency, taking assertive action to change our thinking. This is the time to be decisive, to re-wire the circuitry of our brains. I sometimes ask the Spirit to help me become the person He wants me to be, then I take personal responsibility to put a plan in motion.

This is done by developing a short slogan that represents the change in thinking I want to implement. I have already spent time examining feelings, sorting lies, invoking truth, and litigating conflict. I have enough information to conceptualize a bridge from my feelings to truth. Then I simply need a concise statement to summarize all that previous thinking. Here are some sample slogans I've used:

- I don't have to amaze anyone.
- Love, unify, speak truth.
- I have time to enjoy every good work.
- Seek the Kingdom first.
- I am not assigned to fix every problem.
- I don't have to participate in toxic drama.
- Content and thankful.
- Live on the truth-grace plateau.
- Waiting renews strength.

These slogans have deep meaning, because each one represents significant meditation assembled from the steps of RESILE (releasing, examining, sorting, invoking, litigating). There is much reflection concentrated in this slogan, capturing all the previous steps into one short, pithy phrase.

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Seven Daily Repetitions

Having chosen a slogan, the next step is to schedule times throughout the day to repeat this slogan to myself. This forces me to focus my conscious mind on the slogan so my brain chemistry can be changed. Research indicates that *seven repetitions per day is optimum*. The repeated affirmation of truth is what God uses to demolish old structures and replace them with new ones that produce resilience. In fact, Psalm 119:164 says, “Seven times a day I praise you for your righteous rules,” so there is wisdom in the application of seven truth repetitions to forge us into His image.

For each of the seven repetitions, I take about 4-5 seconds to clear my mind of everything else, then I repeat the slogan. At first this was harder than I expected because my mind was distracted by many other thoughts. But the more I forced myself to pause, concentrate on the slogan, and remember all that it represents, the easier it became.

To do this well, avoid what some call “milkshake-multitasking.”⁹⁵ When we shift our attention haphazardly from task to task, we don’t focus our attention, resulting in shallowness, inability to make decisions, and passivity. It is important to stop multitasking and *Think Again* about the slogan so the forging process will form new structures in our brains.

Reviewing the slogan can be scheduled in a variety of ways:

- Put it on a 3x5 card for review.
- Recite it in connection with a Bible verse.
- Put it to music.
- Incorporate it into walking or exercise.

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- Review it during a quiet time.
- Put it on a bookmark to make it visible during fun reading time.
- Think about it during a TV commercial.

My Sample Schedule

I decided to fold these seven repetitions into existing events of my day, so they were not an additional burden to my schedule:

1. When I open my eyes from sleep, I remember the slogan.
2. Morning devotion: I take a few minutes to go through the RESILE process. Sometimes this takes a few minutes, and other times I take longer as time permits. But I always try to get to the point of *Employ Slogan*, so I have it for use throughout the day.
3. Around 10 AM, I work on three minutes of Scripture memory while on the treadmill and at the same time, I refer to my slogan as well.
4. As I leave my desk to eat lunch, I remember my slogan.
5. Around 3 PM I have a list of leadership affirmations I review daily, so I remember my slogan at the same time.
6. Going home from the office is another time to consider my slogan.
7. Brushing my teeth at bedtime is my final reminder for the day.

There are many occasions that I forget to do this, but I don't let that discourage me. Instead, I just keep working on this process to make myself available to His transforming work. Any time I can get in a repetition is good, and I try to resist the devil when he throws accusations of failure my way. Seven repetitions are ideal, but five is better than three, and one is better than none.

Think Again

This is important because resilience is created when we work at something with great effort, then stop to recover, and then try again.⁹⁶ In fact, this is how the best swords are made. The metal is heated up, then it is pounded with a hammer, then it is cooled in water, and then the process is repeated several times. In the same way, we become a useful tool in the Lord's hands when we work the process, take a break, and then repeat it again. It is this daily discipline of following this routine that makes us a vessel that yields a return on His investment.

An Example

In Chapter 7 I told the story about my friend Paul, who asked me to consider giving up my office. Had I used the RESILE process I would have avoided much grief. First, had I started to *Release Agenda*, I may have allowed the Spirit to change my focus from myself, and I would have been more open to an opportunity for God to build resilience in me.

Next, had I used *Examine Feelings*, I would have identified disrespect as the underlying emotion, given my feelings a name for the anger boiling inside of me. By moving to *Sort Lies*, I would have noticed the pillaging scheme of the enemy to have me voluntarily discard my ministry over something trivial.

Then, had I used *Invoke Truth*, I could have identified several facts:

- I may be missing some information that Paul has.
- Paul is a good friend and fellow warrior in ministry.
- Paul has not shown any history of disrespect up until now.
- There is an adversary who can deceive me.

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- Every problem has a cosmic origin and is rarely what it seems on the surface.
- Division is one of the devil's schemes.
- Satan's end goal is to con me into throwing away what I have of my own volition.
- Even if there is disrespect, forgiveness is God's solution of choice.

Having clearly defined my feelings and the truth related to the matter, I could have used *Litigate Conflict* to reconcile my feelings to the facts. Listing my feelings on one side and the truth on the other, God could have brought me to a place of recognizing my over-reaction. I would have been free to talk directly to Paul from a place of peace, giving Paul the benefit of the doubt based on past behavior, and with much less frustration.

Having done that, I could then discern how the Spirit wanted to use this situation to develop a slogan to repeat, allowing God to transform me at a biochemical level. Realizing that I was susceptible to jumping to conclusions rather than believing the best of people, I could have crafted the slogan: "Believe the best first." After repeating this slogan seven times a day for the next several days, I would have found a new ability to react to situations like this in a healthier way.

Final Suggestions

Having an explanation of the RESILE steps, here are some tips to maximize its application.

Find What Works: In our attempts to strengthen our resilience, the real goal is to cooperate with the Spirit to make us more like

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Jesus, not for us to become well-adjusted or self-actuated. This should not become a legalistic formula that replaces intimate and personal interaction with God. Whether it is the RESILE process (summarized in Appendix 9), or some other approach to *Think Again*, we need a daily discipline to create new habits that demolish, detain, and defend against the devil's pillaging work. Find a process that is natural and achievable.

Be Free with the Process: If possible, use the same slogan for several days or weeks to break the stronghold built in the brain. In general, try to stay on task with a slogan until there is victory in that area. But it is perfectly acceptable to shift to a different slogan on Day 2, then another on Day 3, because the Spirit may be directing into various places on various days. Also, do not feel constrained by the 10-minute guideline per day, especially at the beginning when the steps feel awkward. Take as much time as needed to get to a useful slogan.

Change the Slogan's Wording: Be free to change the wording of a slogan. Sometimes the RESILE process produced a different wording within the same theme. For example, I once went through a season of learning to rejoice in the midst of waiting and started with the slogan, "Waiting Renews Strength." Then a few days later it morphed into "Enjoy Future Restoration," which was a more powerful message for my brain. The theme did not change, but as I work on RESILE from day to day, a richer and more meaningful slogan often emerges. Sometimes, I'll stay with the same theme for several weeks, and other times I will shift to something new.

For External Processors: Some people process their ideas by talking and might feel that RESILE is better suited to internal processors. However, external processors can use the same RESILE steps by

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talking out loud with someone, rather than processing internally. The one exception is the *Litigate Conflict* step, where it is imperative to put pencil to paper to get the full effect of restructuring our brains. But even this can be done after talking about it first, and then recording the results on paper.

Pursue Spiritual Disciplines. RESILE assumes pursuit of the spiritual disciplines, such as reading the Word, praying, serving in a local church, etc. (see Appendix 4). These practices have been proven effective for God's people through the centuries, keeping us connected to the vine (Jn. 15:1-5) and equipping us for spiritual warfare. Therefore, this RESILE process is not meant to replace the spiritual disciplines, but to supplement them. In fact, it will be difficult to use RESILE without them.

Keep at it. Research shows that people do well for the first few days, and then it becomes difficult, and most people get discouraged and give up.⁹⁷ Stay with the process, trusting God to do the work of transformation. If all this feels overwhelming, consider the ideas in Appendix 5 to get moving again. Remember, it takes 21 days of persistent work before there is permanent change in brain chemistry. It takes three rounds of 21 days (63 days) before gaining mastery for discipling others.

Expect Return Offenders. As strongholds are demolished, remember to defend against return offenders. As victory is achieved, don't be surprised when old thoughts come back. Sometimes I have needed to stop using my current slogan, returning to an old one so I can fight an old battle again. Toxic thoughts will return, so we must defend against disobedience that returns in the future.

Think Again

Exercise your whole being. Notice how RESILE relates to various aspects of our whole person. *Release Agenda* addresses our will. *Examine Feelings* inventories our emotions. The steps *Sort Lies* and *Invoke Truth* focus our minds. *Litigate Conflict* reconciles our emotions to our minds. *Employ Slogan* causes us to initiate a plan by exercising agency. Epigenetics research suggests the best way to develop good brain functioning is to employ these different ways of thinking, one step at a time.

Conclusion to Part III: We Produce

The devil is eager to pillage, bombarding us with confusing thoughts and feelings. But due to the Father's philanthropy, Jesus' provision, and the Spirit's power, we have weapons to resist the devil and become more like Christ. We participate by interrogating thoughts, recognizing lies, and countering with truth. To the extent that we forge in three dimensions, develop personalized defense strategies, adapt to win, cultivate our imaginations, and replace old habits, we will grow in resilience and yield a return on God's investment.

To sum it all up, God supplies, Satan impairs, but we produce when we *Think Again*, in agreement with Don Francisco's song:⁹⁸

*Praise the Lord, hallelu, I don't care what the devil's gonna do
The word and faith is my sword and shield,
Jesus is Lord of the way I feel!*

Epilogue

The main idea in this book is simple to understand: Believe what is true and extinguish what is false. It's not highly philosophical. It's not mustering up willpower, trying harder not to sin. It's not adopting some new, trendy technique. It's simply doing what the Bible has always taught: believe the truth and allow the Spirit to build resilience by transforming us, even at a cellular level.

Therefore, we don't have to invest in complicated analysis, discovering the source of the lies. We don't need hours of expensive archaeological work digging into our past, years of searching for the source of a polluted stream. Instead, we can recognize where there is polluted water and replace it with fresh, living water. We can destroy toxic branches in our brain by replacing them with life-giving branches. As we allow the Spirit to transform us, He demolishes strongholds and forms new pathways that reflect the life of Jesus.

Although it is simple to comprehend, resilience is neither quick nor easy. We wish our problems would magically go away, or that someone else would come along to change our circumstances. Building resilience takes time because strongholds were built over many years. Renewing our minds requires perseverance. Forging is not easy because no discipline is pleasant at the time, but painful. But if we are willing to be trained through the hardship, God promises to produce a return on investment (Heb. 12:11).

Getting started is the hardest part. And if you are reading this book and have not yet made a decision to follow Jesus, I invite you to read Appendix 7 to understand what it means to receive Him as Lord and begin the adventure of serving in His Kingdom.

Think Again

A Second Read

This book was designed to equip people to be more productive for His Kingdom. Therefore, read it now and then re-read it in future years because every believer is in constant need of on-going transformation. We never outgrow the need to build resilience and we will never be so wise that we don't have to stop and *Think Again*.

Also, the first reading should be for personal application. But a second reading can be useful in helping others, discipling them to yield an ROI for the Kingdom. Therefore, consider this book for soul care, discipleship, and leadership development, not just for personal resilience.

Finally, while these principles and practices are designed for the adult believer, they can also be helpful in raising children to live a wise and fruitful life. Whether children decide to follow the Lord as adults or not, they will be stronger people if they learn from an early age to recognize lies and embrace truth. If you are a parent, grandparent, aunt, or Sunday school teacher, re-read this book with that child in mind.

Don't Deny Your Pain

Think Again is not an endorsement of triumphalism or positive confession. The beauty of the Spirit's forging is that we don't have to deny our pain. We don't need to live in fear that we somehow bring trouble upon ourselves by admitting our feelings.

On the contrary, we can agree with Jesus by saying, "In this world you will have tribulation" (Jn. 16:33). Like Paul, we can admit that we experience distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger, or sword (Rom. 8:35). We can find comfort from James, that despite

Epilogue

facing trials of many kinds, we can count it all joy (Js. 1:2-4). Because we are called not only to believe in him, but to suffer for him, we can freely acknowledge our heartaches (Phil. 1:29). It doesn't do us any good to ignore the misery we feel!

But despite all our vexations, remember that nothing begins to compare to the glory that awaits us: *“For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal”* (2 Cor. 4:17-18).

Praise God, we can *Think Again*, participating with Jesus to change the world!

Appendices

- Appendix 1: Common Lies That Create Strongholds
- Appendix 2: Using the Armor of God
- Appendix 3: Who Am I?
- Appendix 4: Spiritual Disciplines
- Appendix 5: Practical Steps When You Feel Overwhelmed
- Appendix 6: Identity and Narcissism In the West
- Appendix 7: How to Become a Follower of Jesus
- Appendix 8: Finding My Purpose
- Appendix 9: Resilience Worksheet (RESILE)
- Appendix 10: Ideas to Litigate Conflict
- Appendix 11: Abbreviations of the Books of the Bible

Appendix 1

Common Lies That Create Strongholds

The following are *lies* that masquerade as truth, from *Telling Yourself the Truth*.⁹⁹

1. The way to be liked by others is to be what others want me to be and to do what is most pleasing to them.
2. It is wrong and un-Christian to think of my own needs, or to consider my own needs important.
3. I should forget my own wants to please friends and family when they want me to.
4. Pleasing others is an insurance policy which guarantees that people will be nice to me in return. When I am in great need, they will forget their own needs to help me.
5. When others are displeased with me, I cannot enjoy one moment's peace or happiness.
6. Approval from everyone else is essential to my feeling of well-being and peace of mind.
7. God doesn't want me to be happy unless everyone else is approving of me.
8. Being what other people want me to be is the only way to be liked.
9. Pleasing others and doing what they expect of me is the only way to find friends.
10. If I don't give, give, give, I'm not a good Christian.
11. I must be appreciated for all I give.
12. My self-worth depends on the opinions of other people.

Think Again

13. If I don't do what other people want and expect me to do, they won't like me.
14. If I don't do what other people want me to do, I don't deserve their approval or friendship.
15. Other people have the right to ask anything they want of me in order that I won't offend anyone.
16. If others do not tell me I am a good person, then I must not be.
17. If someone does not like me, there is something wrong with me.
18. If someone is angry with me, it must be my fault.
19. It's my duty to make everybody happy and comfortable.
20. It's my duty to work my fingers to the bone for my family. If I don't, they might reject me.
21. In spite of how hard I work to earn approval, some people still don't like me and reject me; therefore I am terrible.
22. It's awful to be angry. I am angry; therefore, I am awful.
23. It's terrible to be a thing other people use. I am a thing other people use; therefore, I am terrible.
24. I can't conquer my bad feelings. Therefore, I am terrible.
25. I'm the way I am because I was born that way.
26. If I had a better education, I'd be better liked.
27. If I were like so-and-so I'd be a happier person.
28. If I were better looking, I'd be a happier person.
29. It's not what you know; it's who you know. That's why I'm not more successful.
30. If only I lived in a better neighborhood. Then I'd be happy.

Common Lies That Create Strongholds

- 31. This house depresses me.
- 32. I know I should change but I just can't.
- 33. The reason I drink is because of the pressures that I face every day.
- 34. The reason I curse is because everyone at the office curses.
- 35. The reason I steal is because my boss is too cheap to give me the raise I deserve.

The following lies and corresponding truths are from Telling Yourself the Truth¹⁰⁰ and can be helpful in a normal marriage relationship. However, some marriages have deep and serious problems that require professional help such as infidelity or personality disorders. Don't use these truths to justify staying in a dangerous situation or to excuse a spouse's bad behavior.

| Feeling | Truth |
|---------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| It's terrible to have a husband like mine | He is my God-given husband and although I would prefer him to act differently, I can live with him without making continued demands that only go unmet anyway. |
| It's impossible to be happy with the wife I have. | It would be nice if she would change, but it is not essential for my personal happiness. |
| I can't stand it any longer. | I can live a satisfactory and happy life even if he doesn't treat me as I want him to. My life can be fulfilling and enjoyable even if he never changes. |

Think Again

| Feeling | Truth |
|----------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| I'm wasting my life. | I'm not wasting my life. I'm believing in God to work in my wife's heart and make her the person He wants her to be. I am also believing God is working in my own heart, making me the person He wants me to be. |

Appendix 2

Using the Armor of God

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. [11] Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. [12] For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. [13] Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. [14] Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, [15] and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. [16] In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; [17] and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, [18] praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, [19] and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, [20] for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak. ~ Ephesians 6:10-20

What a delicious passage! It serves as a way to bring together the entire book of Ephesians, packaging all the previous points into a concise, cosmic message. It forms an actionable whole. The word “finally” (v.10) is not the last point in a series; it’s not like saying “buy milk, eggs, butter, and *finally* cake mix.” It is more like saying, “pick up milk, eggs, butter, cake mix, and *finally* make a cake.”

Think Again

We

In verse 12, Paul says that we wrestle (we don't do this alone). While this passage is often taught as a personal struggle, the whole book of Ephesians underscores that the Christian life is to be lived together with other believers. Walter Wink noted, "The metaphor of the church is like the Roman wedge, the most efficient and terrifying military formation known to that time and for some thousand years later. In fact, the instruction in this whole section is plural."¹⁰¹

Also, when we recognize the full weight of danger we face against the evil one, we will instinctively draw near to our comrades, even those with whom we may not otherwise be friends. Those who cause division show they don't recognize the terrible threat that is around them. They put themselves in harm's way by going it alone.

Wrestle

Next, Paul reminds us this is a *wrestling* match. As a child, I went to a summer sports camp that introduced me to several sports including wrestling. I quickly learned to hate wrestling. It was so sweaty, so invasive of another person's body. Wrestling involves all-out energy, struggling against another person as you look at him in the face. As much as I despised it, wrestling is a good metaphor for the Christian life, because we engage an opponent in a visceral way. This battle is not like the image of remotely located generals, lobbing missiles at far-away armies. This is hand-to-hand combat; messy, full of smoke, explosions, confusion, pain, and screaming.

True Enemies

Paul also dismisses any notion that people are our enemies. We don't wrestle with flesh and blood. The true source of attacks against us

Using the Armor of God

includes rulers, authorities, cosmic powers, and spiritual forces of evil. The image is of unseen, constant schemes aimed at us from every direction. Every problem has a cosmic origin, not a human one.

Schemes

We are to withstand these schemes, having done all to stand firm. We must not be conned. Scripture points to several references about the adversary's tactics: deceit, doubt, intimidation, alternative solutions, division, harassment, confusion, surprise.

First, we see that Eve was tempted to distrust God through *deceit and doubt*. "God is withholding good from you, so take matters in your own hands." The tragic result was that humanity was disinherited from paradise. Job was tempted to "curse God to His face" through *intimidation*. The enemy sought to frighten Job through the death of loved ones, financial losses, and health problems – all made worse by unhelpful friends.

Next, Jesus was tempted by schemes to disrupt God's plan through *alternative solutions*. The enemy offered Jesus a shortcut to achieve the Father's goals. First, Jesus was offered immediate gratification (turning stone to bread). But Jesus resisted, showing His trust in the Father for His needs. Next, He was offered influence and authority over all the kingdoms of the world. But Jesus refused the shortcut to the Father's path to greatness (which would be through the humiliation of the cross). Finally, Jesus was offered notoriety and applause (by jumping off the temple in spectacular style). But He trusted God for His fame, which we know is coming when "Every knee will bow and every tongue confess Jesus as Lord" (Phil. 2:9-11).

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Jesus will receive His rightful accolades, but only because He refused Satan's alternative solutions.

Third, the apostles explained how the evil one uses *division, harassment, confusion, and surprise*.

- **Division:** Paul warns believers in Ephesians 4:27 to avoid giving the devil a foothold. In-fighting and disunity are a dead giveaway that the enemy is affecting a situation.
- **Harassment:** In Acts 16, a fortune-telling evil spirit pesters Paul for many days.
- **Confusion:** In 2 Corinthians 11:13-14, Satan is said to masquerade as an angel of light.
- **Surprise:** In 1 Peter 4:12, Peter says “Do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.”

Deceit, doubt, intimidation, alternative solutions, division, harassment, confusion, and surprise are some of the devil's schemes. But God doesn't leave us defenseless. We have equipment and weapons to fight the adversary's schemes. We have armor we can use to fight off His attacks.

Actualize the Weapons

We have power to defend our treasure, but we must competently use the weapons He provides. We must use our mind, will, and emotions to make the equipment effective:

Using the Armor of God

| Because Of: | We Need: |
|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Deceit | A belt of truth (countering lies and half-truths) |
| Division and alternative (shortcut) solutions | A breastplate of righteousness (protecting right relationships with God and others) |
| Surprise and intimidation | Shoes of readiness (maintaining vigilance) |
| Flaming darts of confusion | A shield of faith (having confidence in the middle of trials) |
| Doubt about our eternal security | A helmet of salvation (believing in the certainty of our future) |
| Harassment | A sword of the Spirit guided by prayer (handling chaotic and dynamic situations with wisdom) |

Truth

The belt serves to integrate all the armor together. God is the God of all truth, not just truth from the Bible. Truth helps us recognize lies, and allows us to live a life of integrity, being aligned with the truth in every aspect of life.

Righteousness

We need righteousness to protect us. Righteousness is bigger than personal ethics, it is about having *right relationships*. First, it is maintaining healthy relationships within a community. The

Think Again

breastplate serves as shorthand for the many “one-another” commands: humility, gentleness, patience, love, forgiveness, kindness, joy, thanksgiving, mutual submission. The breastplate keeps us from ruining our human relationships.

Second, it means a proper relationship with God. When the devil tempted Jesus with three alternative solutions, Jesus trusted God for provision. In the same way the breastplate protects us from ruining our relationship with God through sin.

Readiness

We need readiness to protect us from being caught off guard because we can be surprised by health problems, unexpected death, or financial challenges. The Roman shoes of readiness had spikes to grip the ground, like the shoes of modern baseball batters who dig their cleats in for traction. In the same way, the readiness of the shoes is a picture of how we can get our minds ready so we are not surprised by trials.

In fact, in the Already/Not-Yet Kingdom, it is inevitable that we will experience suffering, which helps us deal with the element of surprise. Paul said not to be discouraged by his suffering because it was their glory (Eph. 3:13). He said to look “carefully how you walk because the days are evil” (Eph. 5:15). Jesus said, “In this world you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer for I have overcome the world” (Jn. 16:33).

This readiness (given by the Gospel of peace) is more than just personal salvation by grace. It has a much more transcendent view, where God revealed “His will, according to His purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth” (Eph. 1:10).

Using the Armor of God

The Gospel is Good News that *all of creation* will be made brand new (Rev. 21:5). The readiness given by the Gospel is confidence that “He put all things under His feet and gave him as head over all things” (Eph. 1:22).

We wear shoes of readiness to stand our ground, to stand firm and to remain calm and peaceful in the midst of a cosmic battle.

Faith

The shield of faith protects us from getting confused about God’s goodness. We can have confidence in what we hope for, certainty of what we don’t see (Heb. 11:1). We walk by faith not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7). We believe the unseen truth when all the visible evidence is just the opposite.

Moreover, the devil’s schemes are designed to cause distrust and lead to voluntary divestment of treasure. They play on our fears, when we should trust God for our needs. Every temptation is a scheme to distrust God, to drop our shield of faith. He urges us to trust our feelings and throw away our confidence in God. Eve gave in and lost faith, but Jesus stood firm and trusted the Father by faith.

Also, the flaming darts mentioned in this passage were arrows covered in pitch, and if they connected and lodged in a soldier, the soldier would suffer burns. The Roman shield was made of materials that would extinguish the flames on impact. It was not an individual shield, but a large interlocking network of shields that connected fellow soldiers, protecting everyone from all angles so no one had any cracks in their armor. Therefore, if a soldier isolated himself and pulled away, he would lose the protection of the unit.

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Therefore, Paul wanted to make sure we don't fight this fight alone, but together. When we separate from the body, we put too much pressure on ourselves, which makes us vulnerable to flaming arrows of distraction. The truth is we are not alone. God is with us and the Body is there to link our shields together for protection.

Salvation

When soldiers are hit in the head without a helmet, they become disoriented. In the same way, if we doubt our salvation, we become dazed, and vulnerable to other kinds of attacks. We need assurance of salvation to keep our wits about us. Therefore, the enemy will tell us that we are not saved, and if we *believe* that we are not saved, we will start *acting* like we are not saved. Having confidence in our eternal security is fundamental to spiritual warfare.

The Spirit and Prayer

We need the Holy Spirit to help us use the Word, and prayer helps us engage in the various trials and situations that emerge. The Bible (the sword of the Spirit) should be used with skill and guidance in conjunction with prayer. We are constantly thrown into situations that need all kinds of wisdom. Dr. Don Davis has referred to prayer as the “walkie-talkie of faith.” Through prayer, we ask for the necessary firepower we need in precarious situations.

As a result, the truth of God's Word needs to be applied with dexterity and wisdom. We apply offensive tactics, resisting the devil so he will flee (James 4:7; 1 Pet. 5:9). We also keep alert with perseverance. We pray for one another because if I am not in a chaotic moment, it is guaranteed that others are. The Spirit is constantly at work, giving us power, and making His Word known to us. As the Author of the

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Bible, He guides us to handle the Word while we pray all manner of prayers for ourselves and others.

To Advance the Gospel

In all this use of armor, we long to advance the Gospel (Eph. 6:19-20). Paul asks for prayer, summarizing all the previously mentioned themes of Ephesians:

- We have riches beyond description
- We have an adversary trying get us to relinquish our treasures
- We have power and equipment to resist his schemes

Christ Is Our Armor

The armor is given to us, and we must exercise our mind, will, and emotions to engage in spiritual warfare. But in another sense, the armor is a picture of God's provision in Christ. In several places we are told to "put on Christ" (Rom. 13:4; Col. 3:12; Eph. 4:24). As we become integrated and transformed to be like Christ, we take on all His attributes.

In fact, the elements of the armor can all be related to Christ Himself. We engage the enemy with power that is not our own, because we are united as a body to the Head.

- He is our belt of truth (the Way, the Truth, and the Life, Jn. 14:6).
- He is our breastplate of righteousness (1 Cor. 1:30).
- He is our shoes of readiness (who will soon crush Satan under our feet, Rom. 16:20).

Think Again

- He is our shield of faith (the Author and Perfecter of our Faith, Heb. 12:2).
- He is our salvation (the helmet of salvation, Is. 59).
- He is our sword (the Word of God, Jn. 1:1).

Take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm!

Appendix 3

Who Am I?

The following are affirmations of identity from *Victory over the Darkness*.¹⁰²

1. I am Christ's friend (Jn. 15:15).
2. I am chosen and appointed by Christ to bear His fruit (Jn. 15:16).
3. I am a slave of righteousness (Rom. 6:18).
4. I am enslaved to God (Rom. 6:22).
5. I am a son of God; God is spiritually my Father (Rom. 8:14-15; Gal. 3:26; 4:6).
6. I am a joint heir with Christ, sharing His inheritance with Him (Rom. 8:17).
7. I am a temple, a dwelling place of God. His Spirit and His life dwell in me (1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19).
8. I am united to the Lord and am one in spirit with Him (1 Cor. 6:17).
9. I am a member of Christ's Body (1 Cor. 12:27; Eph. 5:30).
10. I am a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17).
11. I am reconciled to God and am a minister of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18-19).
12. I am a son of God and one in Christ (Gal. 3:26-28).
13. I am an heir of God since I am a son of God (Gal. 4:7).
14. I am a saint (1 Cor. 1:2; Eph. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:2).
15. I am God's workmanship, His handiwork, born anew in Christ to do His work (Eph. 2:10).

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16. I am a fellow citizen with the rest of God's family (Eph. 2:19).
17. I am a prisoner of Christ (Eph. 3:1; 4:1).
18. I am righteous and holy (Eph. 4:24).
19. I am a citizen of heaven, seated in heaven right now (Eph. 2:6; Phil. 3:20).
20. I am hidden with Christ in God (Col. 3:3).
21. I am an expression of the life of Christ because He is my life (Col. 3:4).
22. I am chosen of God, holy and dearly loved (Col. 3:12; 1 Thess. 1:4).
23. I am a son of light and not of darkness (1 Thess. 5:5).
24. I am a holy partaker of a heavenly calling (Heb. 3:1).
25. I am a partaker of Christ; I share in His life (Heb. 3:14).
26. I am one of God's living stones, being built up in Christ as a spiritual house (1 Pet. 2:5).
27. I am a member of a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession (1 Pet. 2:9-10).
28. I am an alien and stranger in this world where I temporarily live (1 Pet. 2:11).
29. I am an enemy of the devil (1 Pet. 5:8).
30. I am a child of God, and I will resemble Christ when He returns (1 Jn. 3:1,2).
31. I am born of God so the evil one, the devil, cannot touch me (1 Jn. 5:18).
32. I am not the great "I am" (Ex. 3:14; Jn. 8:24,25,58), but by the grace of God, "I am what I am" (1 Cor. 15:10).

Appendix 4

Spiritual Disciplines

The spiritual disciplines are a means of transformation that God wants to bring about in us (Rom. 12:1-2). They are not a way to earn favor with God or to merit salvation. As an ambassador of Christ, we have already earned His favor because of Christ's work. But He desires to produce an ROI through us for His Kingdom, and the practice of spiritual disciplines is an important aspect of our productivity.

Dallas Willard defined the spiritual disciplines this way: "A discipline is any activity within our power that we engage in to enable us to do what we cannot do by direct effort."¹⁰³ In other words, we do the disciplines, but God does the transformation. One notable example of a spiritual disciple is practicing the sabbath. Jesus said "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" (Mk. 2:27), which means it is a gift from God for His creation, not a law to earn His favor. It can also be understood as a discipline, an activity that is within our power to do, which God uses to produce fruit in us.

Taking a day off from work each week, resting from normal work activities, has proven to be a huge blessing over the years. But it takes discipline to shut down and refuse to respond to distractions, even for one day. This can be because we enjoy our work and it's fun! But sometimes we have a challenging time observing the sabbath because we believe we are indispensable, believing our world would not be able to go on without our direct involvement. Other times, we find ourselves getting caught up in time-wasting habits that need to be broken, like social media, shopping, or excessive time on our cell phone. Therefore, the discipline of Sabbath can be helpful in breaking dependence on distractions by taking a day off.

Think Again

But there is even greater value coming from intentional spiritual practices and commitments. It serves as a trellis that supports the branches that are connected to the vine (Jn. 15), allowing for a fruitful life of discipleship.¹⁰⁴ These are not meant to be a set of regulations that followers of Jesus must follow to be saved or experience blessings. Instead, they are a support system that enables the disciple to receive the grace of the Spirit that furthers growth and effectiveness in a life of following Jesus.¹⁰⁵

Example from Sports

Like a professional athlete who has already made the team and simply wants to become a better player, we engage in the spiritual disciplines to become more effective in our representation of Christ. For example, if we start playing basketball, we have certain shooting habits in our legs, arms, wrists, and fingers. We may have good shooting habits in our legs and fingers, but bad habits in our arms and wrist.

How do we improve our game? Will it be by reading a book or watching a video? No, we improve the same way world-class basketball players improve. They find coaches who provide drills for them to do, and then they practice the drills over and over. They get rid of old bad habits and replace them with good habits through repeated practice and discipline. Professional basketball players are not born with dribbling and shooting abilities but developed those skills through disciplined practice.¹⁰⁶

In this regard, the Holy Spirit is our coach, and if we ask Him to teach us, He will transform our habits over time to be more and more like Jesus.

Spiritual Disciplines

Selected Quotes from Dallas Willard on Spiritual Disciplines (Divine Conspiracy)¹⁰⁷

“They are disciplines designed to help us be active and effective in the spiritual realm of our own heart, now spiritually alive by grace, in relation to God and His Kingdom. They are designed to help us withdraw from total dependence on the merely human or natural (and in that precise sense to mortify the ‘flesh,’ kill it off, let it die) and to depend also on the ultimate reality, which is God and His Kingdom. Thus, for example, I fast from food to know that there is another food that sustains me. I memorize and meditate on scripture that the order of God’s Kingdom would become the order and power of my mind and my life.”

“The disciplines do not confirm their value to those who only talk about them or study them ‘academically’ or hear others talk about them. One has to enter them with Jesus as teacher to find the incredible power they have to change one’s world and character. They are self- confirming when entered in faith and humility. And you don’t really need much faith and humility if you will just stay with them. They will do the rest because they open us to the Kingdom. This is an extension of Jesus’ emphasis on doing as a way of knowing the Kingdom. We will be able to do what He says to do as we are inwardly transformed by following Him into His life practices of solitude, service, study, and so forth. This is an essential part of what Paul calls ‘offering our bodies as living sacrifices’ (Rom. 12:2). It will result in the mark of the disciplined person, who is able to do what needs to be done when and as it needs to be done.”

“In particular, I had learned that intensity is crucial for any progress in spiritual perception and understanding. To dribble a few verses or chapters of Scripture on oneself through the week, in church or out, will not reorder one’s mind and spirit – just as one drop of water

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every five minutes will not get you a shower, no matter how long you keep it up. You need a lot of water at once and for a sufficiently long time. Similarly for the written Word.”

“In particular I did not understand the intensity with which they must be done, nor that the appropriate intensity required that they be engaged in for lengthy periods of undistracted time on a single occasion. Moreover, one’s life as a whole had to be arranged in such a way that this would be possible. One must not be agitated, hurried, or exhausted when the time of prayer and study came. Hence one cannot tack an effective, life-transforming practice of prayer and study onto ‘life as usual.’ Life as usual must go. It will be replaced by something far better.”

“What is clear and, for our purposes, essential is that a small number of them are absolutely central to spiritual growth. They must form a part of the foundation of our whole-life plan for growth as apprentices of Jesus. These are, on the side of abstinence, solitude and silence and, on the side of positive engagement, study and worship.”

“You will know this finding of soul and God is happening by an increased sense of who you are and a lessening of the feeling that you have to do this, that, and the other thing that befalls your lot in life. That harassing, hovering feeling of ‘have to’ largely comes from the vacuum in your soul, where you ought to be at home with your Father in His Kingdom. As the vacuum is rightly filled, you will increasingly know that you do not have to do those things – not even those you want to do.”

“Liberation from your own desires is one of the greatest gifts of solitude and silence. When this all begins to happen, you will know

Spiritual Disciplines

you are arriving where you ought to be. Old bondages to wrongdoing will begin to drop off as you see them for what they are. And the possibility of really loving people will dawn upon you. Soon you may even come to know what it is like to live by grace rather than just talk about it.”

Various Lists

There is no single, authorized “list” of spiritual disciplines. Different people describe them in different ways.

For example, Moreland organizes disciplines in two categories:

1. Disciplines of Abstinence: solitude, silence, fasting, frugality, chastity, secrecy, sacrifice.
2. Disciplines of Engagement: study, worship, celebration, service, prayer, fellowship, confession, submission.¹⁰⁸

Dr. Don Davis lists them in three categories:

1. Cultivating our Communion: The Inward Disciplines (Word, prayer, fasting, study).
2. Cultivating our Character: The Outward Disciplines (simplicity, solitude, submission, service).
3. Cultivating our Community: The Corporate Disciplines (confession, worship, guidance, celebration).¹⁰⁹

Books for Further Study (Available at Amazon.com)

The Divine Conspiracy, Dallas Willard, Harper

The Celebration of Discipline, Richard Foster, HarperOne

Tempered Resilience, Tod Bolsinger, IVP

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The God Question, J.P. Moreland, IVP Academic

Compelling Testimony, Dr. Don Davis, TUMI Press

The Spirit of the Disciplines, Dallas Willard, HarperOne

The God-Shaped Brain, Timothy Jennings, IVP

Appendix 5

Practical Steps When You Feel Overwhelmed

Sometimes we can feel overwhelmed by so much information and it becomes difficult to know where to start. Everyone feels this way at times. This list might help you know what to do when you are discouraged.

1. Ask God, what should I do next? Do not try to solve everything at once. Just take the next step. Once you know the next step, do the next thing well.
2. Develop a list of 3-5 values that are non-negotiable in your life. They serve as a compass when you get lost in the details so you can find your way and move forward. Strategies and methods change, but values never change.
3. Pay attention to the basics. Timothy Jennings said:
“Live in harmony with the physical design protocols for life, such as regular sleep, drink plenty of water, exercise mind and body regularly, avoid toxins, and eat a balanced diet. When mistakes are made, resolve guilt as soon as possible, forgive those who mistreat you, and don’t hold on to anger or grudges as such emotions activate the body’s inflammatory cascade. Resolve fear, as unremedied fear truly destroys. It is love that heals and restores, but genuine love is only experienced when lies about God are removed.”¹¹⁰
4. Follow the advice of Thomas á Kempis:¹¹¹
 - a. Strive to do another’s will rather than your own.
 - b. Choose always to have less than more.

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- c. Seek lower places in life, putting to death the need to be recognized and important.
- d. Always and in everything desire that the will of God be completely fulfilled in you.

Appendix 6

Identity and Narcissism in the West

For Americans in the 21st century, “finding my identity” is in style. Some would go far to say that there is nothing more important in life than finding personal identity. The assumption is, “If I can figure out my identity, I can live in accordance with it, have a happy life, and be a whole person.” Anyone who puts an obstacle in the way of that discovery will be criticized as grossly unfair.

In fact, people attempt to define themselves based on their ethnicity, gender, religion, class, generation, or a special interest. While some will self-identify using a single identity (“I am Asian” or “I am an engineer”), most Americans prefer to describe themselves as a unique composite of several personal interests. For example, “I am a Chevy-driving, Dodger-supporting, photography-loving, millennial, fitting enneagram profile #5, who likes drinking Mountain Dew.” For others, identity is based on their role as a parent, or a passion they have like gardening or environmentalism. Sadly, some even frame their identity by living vicariously through sports teams or celebrities.

Also, those who are unsure of their identity have an “identity crisis.” Identity politics is a recent term that is now embedded in the culture. But the pursuit of personal identity has not always been as prevalent as it is today. In fact, the notion of “finding identity” is relatively new.

But for most cultures and generations, identity has been defined by the family, clan, or tribe to which they belonged, often associated with their family’s role in the community (butcher, baker, or candlestick maker). None of these were matters of choice; a person was born into their identity. It then became each person’s duty to pursue a

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virtuous life, serving the community by making sacrifices for the greater good. For centuries, what set an individual apart from others was some act of sacrificial heroism, not personal identity.¹¹²

This notion continued into 1940s America. But after World War II, everything changed. The proliferation of products and services led companies to emphasize self-expression over practicality. Buying a car was no longer about meeting a practical transportation need, but an expression of one's individual identity.¹¹³ This opened the minds of Americans to a new way of thinking: purchasing products to define their individual identity.

By the 1960s, Americans rapidly lost interest in the traditional roles of duty, conformity, and community, turning instead to the pursuit of individuality and fame. Heroic sacrifice was replaced with the desire to become a *celebrity*, primarily by finding one's identity. And now, anyone who doesn't aggressively pursue their identity is seen as lacking character, and will be derisively called a zombie, drone, lemming, or sheep.

The following quotes come from two sources and provide helpful descriptions for understanding contemporary identity problems in the West.

Quotes from *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations*¹¹⁴

Christopher Lasch believes that since 1958, there has been a documented explosion in the number of people suffering from a vague, ill-defined anxiety, a dread that something is missing. More and more people have become self-absorbed, producing a desire for instant gratification, often referred to as "narcissism." He makes the point that psychological problems change over time and across different cultures. This suggests to me that the work of principalities

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and powers understand which deceptions are most effective in each culture, place, or time. Demonic efforts to steal, kill, and destroy are adapted to fit a cultural setting in order to keep people bound and under their controlling influence. Since the 1950s in the USA, narcissism appears to have been the strategy of choice for evil spirits to do their pillaging work. If so, it is helpful to know more about narcissism as a cluster of lies that is keeping Americans bound. People in other cultures will experience a different cluster of lies. The following includes many selected quotes from Lasch's book to provide a short primer on this subject (which is not written from a Christian perspective).

“People have convinced themselves that what matters is psychic self-improvement: getting in touch with their feelings, eating health food, taking lessons in ballet or belly-dancing, immersing themselves in the wisdom of the East, jogging, learning how to ‘relate,’ overcoming the ‘fear of pleasure’” (p. 4).

“He complains ‘of vague, diffuse dissatisfactions with life’ and feels his ‘amorphous existence to be futile and purposeless.’ He describes ‘subtly experienced yet pervasive feelings of emptiness and depression,’ ‘violent oscillations of self-esteem,’ and ‘a general inability to get along.’ He gains ‘a sense of heightened self-esteem only by attaching himself to strong, admired figures whose acceptance he craves and by whom he needs to feel supported.’ Although he carries out his daily responsibilities and even achieves distinction, happiness eludes him, and life frequently strikes him as not worth living. Often these patients suffer from hypochondria and complain of a sense of inner emptiness. At the same time they entertain fantasies of omnipotence and a strong belief in their right to exploit others and be gratified” (p. 37).

“Although the narcissist can function in the everyday world and often charms other people, his devaluation of others, together with

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his lack of curiosity about them, impoverishes his personal life and reinforces the ‘subjective experience of emptiness’” (p. 39).

“He therefore depends on others for constant infusions of approval and admiration. He ‘must attach [himself] to someone, living an almost parasitic’ existence. At the same time, his fear of emotional dependence, together with his manipulative, exploitive approach to personal relations, makes these relations bland, superficial, and deeply unsatisfying” (p. 40).

“In a society that dreads old age and death, aging holds a special terror for those who fear dependence and whose self-esteem requires the admiration usually reserved for youth, beauty, celebrity, or charm. The usual defenses against the ravages of age – identification with ethical or artistic values beyond one’s immediate interests, intellectual curiosity, the consoling emotional warmth derived from happy relationships in the past – can do nothing for the narcissist. To be able to enjoy life in a process involving a growing identification with other people’s happiness and achievements is tragically beyond the capacity of narcissistic personalities” (p. 41).

“He wants to ‘be known as a winner, and his deepest fear is to be labeled a loser.’ Instead of pitting himself against a material task or a problem demanding solution, he pits himself against others, out of a ‘need to be in control.’ As a recent textbook for managers puts it, success today means ‘not simply getting ahead’ but ‘getting ahead of others.’ He has little capacity for ‘personal intimacy and social commitment’” (p. 44).

“In the first three centuries of our history, the work ethic constantly changed its meaning. For the Puritans, a godly man worked diligently at his calling not so much in order to accumulate personal wealth as

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to add to the comfort and convenience of the community. Every Christian had a 'general calling' to serve God and a 'personal calling.' The Puritans recognized that a man might get rich at his calling, but they saw personal aggrandizement as incidental to social labor – the collective transformation of nature and the progress of useful arts and useful knowledge. They instructed men who prospered not to lord it over their neighbors. The true Christian, according to Calvinist conceptions of an honorable and godly existence, bore both good fortune and bad with equanimity, contenting himself with what came to his lot" (p. 53).

"Those who win the attention of the public worry incessantly about losing it. . . . He confuses successful completion of the task at hand with the impression he makes or hopes to make on others. . . . Impressions overshadow achievements" (p. 60).

"He advances through the corporate ranks not by serving the organization but by convincing his associates that he possesses the attributes of a 'winner'" (p. 61).

"Narcissistic patients 'are afraid of not belonging to the company of the great, rich, and powerful, and of belonging instead to the mediocre, by which they mean worthless and despicable rather than average in the ordinary sense of the term.' They worship heroes only to turn against them when their heroes disappoint them" (p. 84).

"We seek reassurance of our capacity to captivate or impress others, anxiously searching out blemishes that might detract from the appearance we intend to project. The advertising industry deliberately encourages this preoccupation with appearances. In the twenties, 'the women in ads were constantly observing themselves, ever self-critical. A noticeable proportion of magazine ads directed

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at women depicted them looking into mirrors. Ads of the 1920s were quite explicit about this narcissistic imperative” (p. 92).

“He extols cooperation and teamwork while harboring deeply antisocial impulses. He praises respect for rules and regulations in the secret belief that they do not apply to himself. Acquisitive in the sense that his cravings have no limits, he does not accumulate goods and provisions against the future, in the manner of the acquisitive individualist of nineteenth-century political economy but demands immediate gratification and lives in a state of restless, perpetually unsatisfied desire” (p. 172).

“What says ‘you are not guilty’ says also ‘you cannot help yourself.’ Therapy legitimates deviance as sickness, but it simultaneously pronounces the patient unfit to manage his own life and delivers him into the hands of a specialist. As therapeutic points of view and practice gain general acceptance, more and more people find themselves disqualified, in effect, from the performance of adult responsibilities and become dependent on some form of medical authority” (p. 230).

Quotes from *Overcoming the Dark Side of Leadership*, Gary L. McIntosh and Samuel D. Rima.¹¹⁵

“For the narcissistic leader, the world revolves on the axis of self, and all other people and issues closely orbit them as they get caught in the strong gravitational pull of the narcissist’s self-absorption. Narcissistic leaders ‘present various combinations of intense ambitiousness, grandiose fantasies, feelings of inferiority and over dependence on external admiration and acclaim.’ At the same time a self-absorbed leader is chronically uncertain of himself and experiences dissatisfaction with his accomplishments, which he tries to overcome by exploiting others in ways that will help elevate his

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self-image. In addition, narcissistic leaders have an overinflated sense of their importance to the organization and have an exhibitionistic need for constant attention and admiration from others, especially those they lead and any person or group to whom they report. In spite of their drive to achieve greatness, their restless ambition is rarely satisfied in a way that enables them to enjoy their accomplishments. Another characteristic is their ‘interpersonal exploitativeness,’ in which others are taken advantage in order to indulge [their] own desires or for self-aggrandizement.”

“Narcissistic leaders also tend to overestimate their own achievements and abilities while stubbornly refusing to recognize the quality and value of the same in others. Any recognition of someone else’s accomplishments or abilities is a threat to their own self-importance and risks the loss of the exclusive admiration they crave from their followers. Because narcissistic leaders tend to use others to advance their own goals, they are notorious for being unable to empathize with those they lead. This enables them to pursue their own ends without restraints. Though narcissism seems to be diametrically opposed to the concept of spiritual, servant leadership, it is all too common in the church and among spiritual leadership.”

“Christian leaders often use those they lead to enhance their own image and improve the way they feel about themselves. Far too many sermons are preached in an effort to gain the approval and admiration of followers, with little or no concern for God’s approval. The pastor or speaker who steps down from the platform and is immediately obsessed with whether his sermon was good is dealing with a prime symptom of narcissism.”

“Numerous churches have been destroyed by leaders who led the church into projects too energetic and costly for the congregation

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because he needed to feel good about himself. How easy it is for Christian leaders to use their organizations as nothing more than platforms from which they launch themselves on their chosen career path with little or no regard for the long-term health of the organization they were entrusted to lead.”

“When a pastor or Christian executive says to himself, ‘This church (or organization) would suffer if I ever left,’ it is a sign of narcissism. When the leader is constantly beginning new ministries, even when existing, essential ministries are not adequately staffed or effective, this is a sign of narcissism. Rather than ensuring that existing ministries are efficiently functioning, the narcissistic leader needs the kudos that come from new and unique ministries. However, once the ‘high’ of a new ministry launch is gone, the narcissistic leader provides little long-term oversight or maintenance.”

“Because ministry provides the ready justification that grandiose visions and risky ventures are necessary to accomplish God’s kingdom work, the church and Christian organizations provide fertile soil for budding narcissists. Tragically, because many followers of the narcissistic leader think all this activity is being done for God, they feel uncomfortable challenging their leader.”

Appendix 7

How to Become a Follower of Jesus

To become a follower of Jesus is to join God in His story of creation, incarnation, and re-creation.

CREATION

God Created: Beauty, purpose and evidence of His design are all around us. The Bible tells us that God originally planned a world that worked perfectly, where everything and everyone fit together in harmony. God made each of us with a purpose, to worship and walk with Him. “God saw all that He had made, and it was very good” (Genesis 1:31).

We Rebelled: The first humans refused God’s reign over them. We selfishly insisted on doing things our own way. The Bible calls this sin. We all sin and distort God’s original design. The consequence of sin is separation from God in this life, and for all eternity. “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).

We Searched: Life was not working on our own. When we realize life is not working, we begin to look for a way out. We tend to go in many directions trying different things to figure it out on our own. “They exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshipped and served something created instead of the Creator” (Romans 1:25).

INCARNATION AND RE-CREATION

God Initiated: Because of His love, God had a plan to win all creation back from rebellion. Through a chosen people (Jews), God revealed His plan to win back what was lost in our rebellion. He sent His Son Jesus, God in human flesh (incarnation), to live a perfect life according to God’s design. Jesus came to rescue all

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creation (re-creation), doing what we could not do for ourselves. He paid the penalty for sin by His sacrificial death, restoring our relationship with God. Jesus was then raised from the dead, proving His authority to give eternal life. “For God loved the world in this way: He gave His One and Only Son” (John 3:16).

We Respond: We agree with His truth and turn away from our former life. By admitting our sinful brokenness, we stop trusting ourselves and ask God to forgive us. We turn from sin (repent) and trust only in Jesus (believe), receiving new life, a new way of living, and a new community of fellow followers of Jesus. “For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourself; it is God’s gift, not from works, so that no one can boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9).

God Transforms: God changes us from the inside to be more like Jesus. As we get to know God better through the Bible and His people (the Church), He empowers us to follow His design for life, assures us of His presence, and gives us hope for eternity to come. “For it is God who is working in you, enabling you both to desire and to work out His good purpose” (Philippians 2:13).

We Represent: We are the continuation of Jesus’ work on the earth. Those who follow Jesus are assigned to continue Jesus’ good works as His ambassadors in the world. We love and serve others, and invite them to join His story of creation, incarnation, and re-creation. “Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God” (2 Corinthians 5:20).

You Decide: If you want to join His Story through Christ, all you need to do is ask. “For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Romans 10:13). You can talk to Him using

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words like these: “My life is broken and I recognize it is because of my sin. I need you. I believe Jesus came to live, die, and rise from the dead to rescue me from my sin and make me His ambassador. Forgive me. I turn from my selfish ways and put my trust in you. I know that Jesus is God, and I will follow Him.”

If you have responded to God's invitation to follow Jesus, the next step is to get to know Him better by studying the Bible so you can obey His teachings, join in regular relationship with His followers, and share what you discover with others.

Appendix 8

Finding My Purpose

I have heard a recurring theme in a variety of church settings that might be sending conflicting messages about participation in the Great Commission. The message I hear goes something like this: God has a purpose for you, but you need to find that purpose as quickly as possible to have a meaningful life. If you don't find that purpose, or don't discover it at an early age, you will miss out. While finding one's place in life is important, the current version is informed more by the culture than by what Jesus taught.

In fact, Sayers and Murton said we live in a “could-do” culture, where people are overwhelmed by a myriad of options.¹¹⁶ We face a barrage of enticing messages, individually designed by an algorithm, and hand-delivered through their phones. As a result, people are constantly seeking life hacks to maximize their experiences. They become like safe crackers, trying to find the ideal combination that opens the door to optimum satisfaction, driven by “Fear of Missing Out” (FOMO). But this constant pressure is only producing disappointment, exhaustion, and despair.

But there is a better alternative. Instead of scrambling to find my purpose, it is much better to abandon the search and plumb the depths of God's purposes. It's not so much that God has a “plan for my life” as He has a plan for the world and wants each person to become immersed in it. He revealed this plan through His Son, recorded it in His Word, operationalized it by the Holy Spirit, and conducted through the Church. The Church is not a place for individuals to collect helpful life hacks but is the agent of the Kingdom of God to bless the world.

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Therefore, how can people be liberated from the tyranny of FOMO and find freedom to live according to God's purposes? By aligning our heads, hearts, and hands with Christ's priorities.

Our Heads

First, we need to change the way we read the Bible and understand the Gospel. Jesus is at the center of both, but in America we tend to make Self the center. Michael Cooper said, "The gospel is about believing Jesus is God and giving him glory. When we make it about our sins, then the gospel becomes about us: 'Jesus did this for me.'"¹¹⁷ When the goal is to "find my individual purpose," Jesus' command to take up our cross gets lost in the process. We find our life only when we lose it (Mt. 16:25).

Therefore, we need a theocentric mind. Cooper continues,

"When Satan is successful, our focus becomes anthropocentric. If he can make us believe that the world revolves around our mission and our vision for ministry, then God's plan to unite all things in Christ will become a secondary or even tertiary act, consequently prolonging Satan's doomed reign on earth. We might do good things, but not the main thing."¹¹⁸

When we make Scripture about ourselves, we stop thinking about the bigger picture. This starts a vicious cycle of self-examination, a frantic search for identity and self-protection that can never find fulfillment because it is the wrong question. We are not meant to chase our purpose in life as a stand-alone decision. Rather we should seek the best way to contribute to His agenda with excellence.

Our Hearts

Second, we need to see that Jesus' priority is not for individuals (although he cares about each person), but his passion is for the

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nations (every tribe, people, language, nation, or “ta ethne” in Greek). In Mt. 24:14 he says the Gospel of the kingdom will be preached among ta ethne and then the end will come. God’s determining factor for the culmination of human history is connected to having a representative from all people groups on earth. In other words, the work is not done until the nations have been won.

Therefore, we need a missiological impulse.

When we read the Bible with a theocentric mind and a missiological impulse, it clears up our perspective. No longer do we ask, “How does this scripture apply to my life?” but ask, “Why is this scripture important to God?”¹⁹ This opens the narrative of the Bible in a fresh way. I don’t have to find my place in every verse, because truth be told, I don’t exist in every passage. Every part of the Bible relates to God’s plan for the ages, foretold in the protoevangelium (Gen. 3:15) and Abrahamic Covenant, where all nations will be blessed through his seed (Gen. 12:3). But not every passage of Scripture can be directly applied to Don Allsman.

Without a missiological impulse, the vacuum is filled with an individualist one that seeks self-actualization. However, a theocentric, missiological approach allows us to see that glorifying the Son through making disciples of all ethnic groups is the central organizing principle of human history. Paul and the other apostles did not seem concerned about helping individuals build their brand, but rather to understand their role in God’s purpose for the nations. Once people understand God’s objectives, their vocational choices become clearer because the set of criteria includes more than personal satisfaction and security. Therefore, churches should include the nations as a central theme in their preaching and teaching, not as an occasional theme to be explored from time to time.

Think Again

Also, a missiological impulse allows church leaders to engage their congregations in global mission not as a personal calling, but something the community does together. My friend Al Ewert grew up in a Mennonite farming community, in an era where the church saw world missions as central to their purpose. Either a family was deployed overseas or they worked their farm to financially support those who were sent. When the missionary returned home to report, everyone rejoiced together to hear the results of their corporate investment.

Consequently, when the focus is on discovering personal identity, fulfillment, or purpose, people become distracted. Cooper reminds us that this is true not just for individuals but also for ministries. The first love of the Ephesians was a desire to see everything united in Christ, a full proclamation of the Gospel so that more people groups would be around His throne. When they lost that first love, Jesus called them to repentance (Eph. 2:4). Organizations that were once Spirit-led can slip into institutionalism, making their own survival more important than God's glory in the nations.

A theocentric/missiological framework takes the timing and choosing of our destiny from our hands and brings our focus on God's plan to unite all things in Christ (Eph. 1:9-10).

Our Hands

Third, we need to change our actions to align with Christ's Kingdom principles. Instead of FOMO, we can be free to live each moment in calm and peaceful contentment under His reign. We allow the wonder of His story to lead us to worship, then worship naturally leads us to work. We are created to be significant, to make an effort that contributes to His purposes. But we live in a culture that confuses significance with notoriety. People have always found it difficult to

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serve in anonymity, but this is especially important in an age where celebrities are exalted, and selfies are the norm.

Therefore, we need hands that seek obscurity.

Unfortunately, young people face an especially toxic temptation to seek fame and fortune as Hollywood stars, professional athletes, singers, or social media influencers. Parents can feed this mania with non-stop activities to help them gain an advantage over their peers, sometimes even living vicariously through their children's accomplishments. This is much more about the American dream than Jesus' vision for His followers. Instead, children can be encouraged to seek an occupation where they can represent Christ in their workplace, as mechanics, bookkeepers, medical receptionists, or clerks at city hall. Real purpose is achieved when we practice a quiet influence as godly co-workers and friends, investing in personal interaction, not through the ruminations of celebrities with the most likes on their social media.

By contrast, Jesus' priority is for "the least of these" over the rich and powerful (Mt. 25), and He celebrates their qualities in the beatitudes. He instructs us how to live through passages like the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5-7). But living according to God's purposes requires sacrifice and discipline. We must deny ourselves and put on His yoke (Mt. 11:29). When we live as His ambassadors wherever we go, an appreciation for the unique talents of fellow believers emerges. If our church shares theocentric mind, a missiological impulse, and a willingness to take on thankless tasks, it opens our eyes to see how our own service is an encouragement to their local community.

Think Again

Head, Heart, and Hands

A person who pursues a “just-me-and-Jesus-and-Bible” religion, coupled with a desire to be rich and famous, is likely to burn out and blame God. However, long-term satisfaction in life comes from a theocentric mind (head), a missiological impulse (heart), and service done in obscurity (hands). Anyone who aligns themselves in this way will find it easier to find their place of significance because the bigger questions in life are already answered: it’s about giving Him glory (not what He does for me); it’s about His glory to the nations (not the sum total of personal relationships); it’s about preference for the least and lost (not for the rich and famous).

And if people are freed from the tyranny of “finding my purpose,” they may have the ability to relax long enough to engage in global mission as their top priority in life.

Appendix 9

Resilience Worksheet (RESILE)

Take 10 minutes per day using the following steps to build resilience, drawing near to God and resisting the devil. Step 5 must be done with pencil/pen and paper, but the other steps can be done in your mind or talking to another person out loud.

1. **Release Agenda (30 seconds):** Pray to release your agenda to God and submit yourself to His will for whatever He has for you, without qualification. Use the Lord's prayer if you need help getting started.
2. **Examine Feelings (2 minutes):** List at least one emotion you are feeling (e.g. glad, mad, scared, confused, sad, frustrated). Example: I'm happy about my job, worried about my son's grades in school, and frustrated that my neighbor leaves his trash cans out all week.
3. **Sort Lies (1 minute):** Among your list of feelings, which one might the enemy be using to deceive you into wrong thinking about yourself or others? Look especially for messages that lead you to wanting to give up in discouragement. Example: Because your son is getting bad grades, he is going to fail in life and end up on the streets.
4. **Invoke Truth (1 minute):** Look to the Word and prayer for the Truth that counters the lie you identified. Example: Getting bad grades doesn't mean he'll be homeless, and God will help me care for my son.
5. **Litigate Conflict (2 minutes):** Using pen/pencil and paper, start brainstorming how to reconcile the conflict between your feelings and the truth. Feel free to draw pictures, make a diagram, write a poem, or do something creative that forms a bridge that frees you from being dominated by feelings to living by the truth.

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6. **Employ Slogan (2 1/2 minutes):** End with a phrase that summarizes the action you will take to live by the truth in your situation. For example, “Bad grades today doesn’t mean homelessness tomorrow.” Schedule seven times during the day to stop what you are doing to take five seconds to repeat the slogan out loud. Here are some examples:

- I don’t have to amaze anyone
- I have time to enjoy every good work
- I am not assigned to fix every problem
- Waiting renews strength
- I don’t have to participate in toxic drama
- Content and thankful
- Live on the truth-grace plateau
- Look how far you’ve come
- Love, unify, speak truth
- Take His yoke
- It’s not all on me
- Enjoy future restoration
- Smile in the goads
- Provision in the moment

Appendix 10

Ideas to Litigate Conflict

Litigate Conflict is the fifth of six steps in the RESILE process, where a bridge is constructed to move from the chaos of our confusing emotions to a place of peaceful rest under the canopy of truth. This process can be creative, including journaling, sketching, doodling, making diagrams, using color, drawing charts, writing a poem, or composing a song. This can be a freeing experience, but it can be messy.

Here is a picture of what the process might look like (Figure 8). The left bank represents the steps to Examine Feelings and then Sort Lies. The right bank represents the step to Invoke Truth. The river represents Litigate Conflict, the turbulence blocking feelings from truth, making it hard to cross over to truth. Finally, the bridge represents a slogan that gives words to the agency needed to cross over the water from left to right, landing in the meadow of truth.

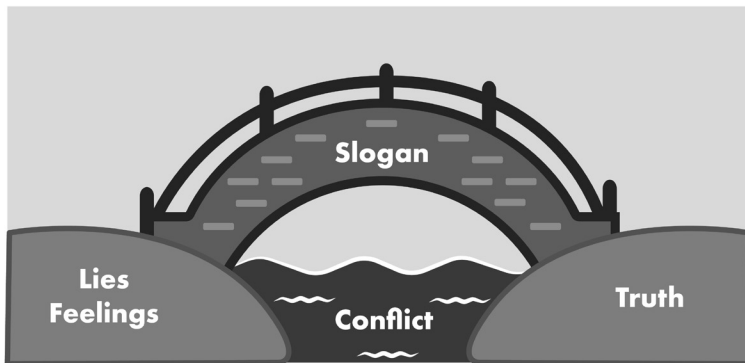


Figure 8: RESILE Steps

Think Again

Also, the following questions may help when *Litigate Conflict* is confusing.

1. Where am I being a victim rather than taking control of my reactions?
2. Who am I trying to please?
3. Do I need to forgive someone?
4. Is bitterness blocking me?
5. Is there some sin in my life that I need to confess?
6. Am I stuck on the “why” questions when I should be asking “what”?
7. What is the worst that could happen?

If this is still a struggle, seek professional counseling from a Christian who is trained to provide a more comprehensive plan for healing or building resilience than we can by ourselves.

Appendix 11

Abbreviations of the Books of the Bible

| | | | |
|-----------------|----------|--------------|-------|
| Genesis | Gen. | Isaiah | Is. |
| Exodus | Ex. | Jeremiah | Jer. |
| Leviticus | Lev. | Lamentations | Lam. |
| Numbers | Num. | Ezekiel | Ezek. |
| Deuteronomy | Dt. | Daniel | Dan. |
| Joshua | Josh. | Hosea | Hos. |
| Judges | Judg. | Joel | Joel |
| Ruth | Ruth | Amos | Amos |
| 1 Samuel | 1 Sam. | Obadiah | Obad. |
| 2 Samuel | 2 Sam. | Jonah | Jonah |
| 1 Kings | 1 Kings | Micah | Mic. |
| 2 Kings | 2 Kings | Nahum | Nah. |
| 1 Chronicles | 1 Chron. | Habakkuk | Hab. |
| 2 Chronicles | 2 Chron. | Zephaniah | Zeph. |
| Ezra | Ezra | Haggai | Hag. |
| Nehemiah | Neh. | Zechariah | Zech. |
| Esther | Esther | Malachi | Mal. |
| Job | Job | Matthew | Mt. |
| Psalms | Ps. | Mark | Mk. |
| Proverbs | Prov. | Luke | Lk. |
| Ecclesiastes | Eccl. | John | Jn. |
| Song of Solomon | Song | Acts | Acts |

Think Again

| | | | |
|-----------------|----------|------------|--------|
| Romans | Rom. | Titus | Titus |
| 1 Corinthians | 1 Cor. | Philemon | Phm. |
| 2 Corinthians | 2 Cor. | Hebrews | Heb. |
| Galatians | Gal. | James | Js. |
| Ephesians | Eph. | 1 Peter | 1 Pet. |
| Philippians | Phil. | 2 Peter | 2 Pet. |
| Colossians | Col. | 1 John | 1 Jn. |
| 1 Thessalonians | 1 Thess. | 2 John | 2 Jn. |
| 2 Thessalonians | 2 Thess. | 3 John | 3 Jn. |
| 1 Timothy | 1 Tim. | Jude | Jude |
| 2 Timothy | 2 Tim. | Revelation | Rev. |

About the Author

Don Allsman is the CEO of Completion Global, a Christian networking organization seeking to accelerate collaboration to accomplish Jesus' Great Commission. Founded in 2018, its mission is to mobilize the whole Church to its Kingdom purpose by getting every member involved, so every people group will be included in God's family. (Eph. 4:16, Mt. 24:14). This mission is expressed in three ways:

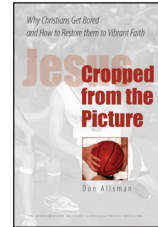
1. Awaken the Church to the opportunity of missions without leaving home
2. Empower the under-represented, especially people of color and the incarcerated
3. Create crowdsourcing tools to get everyone involved

Prior to starting Completion Global, Don served with World Impact for 30 years, a ministry dedicated to empowering the U.S. urban poor through evangelism, discipleship, church planting, and leadership development. He led the expansion of The Urban Ministry Institute (TUMI) satellite program by forming over 250 partnerships in 14 countries. He has authored books used to train leaders in the inner city and in prisons and has served on the advisory board of the Correctional Ministries and Chaplains Association. He earned a BS in Industrial Engineering, followed by an MBA and worked for several years in aerospace and management consulting.

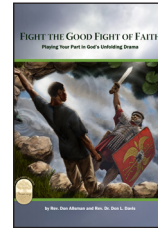
Think Again

Other Books and Training by Don Allsman (available at Amazon.com)

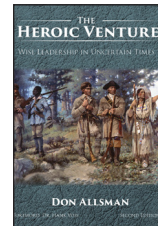
- Jesus Cropped from the Picture: Why Christians Get Bored and How to Renew Them to Vibrant Faith



- Fight the Good Fight of Faith: Playing Your Part in God's Unfolding Drama (co-written with Dr. Don Davis)



- The Heroic Venture: Wise Leadership In Uncertain Times (2nd Edition)



- Climbing Up: Preparing on the Inside for Service on the Outside (co-written with Cathy Allsman)



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