Satan Away

Your Self, My Self or Our Selves

Satan away? Or tell Satan: Away!

Ricky Kroeger

One Kingdom Worldwide

Satan Away:
Your Self, My Self or Our Selves
Ricky Kroeger
One Kingdom Worldwide
OneKingdomWorldwide.org
The Community Service and Support Network
CSASNetwork.org

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Gravitas: Reimagining the Sunday Lecture Model - Restoring Jesus' Conversational Model

Life: Living The Good Life God Offers Us (Revealing The Deception As Old As Time Itself)

Love: "Lord, teach us how to pray." Contemplations on the Prayers Jesus Taught Us

Leading: Uniting God's People to More Productive Service

Be a Part of the Solution: How to Start a Community Service and Support Network in Your Town or City

No More Sheep Holding Pens: 3 Years and Out!

Satan Away: Your Self, My Self or Our Selves

Search me, O God, and know my heart!
Try me and know my thoughts!
And see if there be any grievous way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting!

Psalm 139:23-24

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How to Read This Book

This is not a book to finish. It is a book to sit with.

Most of the books I have written were meant to be read with others: with your elders, your staff, your small group, your twelve or so. This one, like *Love*, is different. It is meant to be read alone, with God himself. It is between you and him.

So please read it slowly. One chapter at a time. Some chapters you may want to read twice. Some you may want to put down for a day or a week while God finishes what he started in you.

At the end of every chapter you will find a short time *Alone With God*. It has three parts.

- **Sit with this.** One passage of Scripture from the chapter. Read it slowly. Read it again. Let it read you.
- **Search me.** A few quiet minutes of listening. Begin with the words, "Father, here I am. Speak. I am listening." Then wait. Silence before God is not emptiness. It is expectancy. It is *conversational worship*, the ancient Hebrew meaning for what we call prayer. Each one closes with a reminder to keep that conversation going all day long, and a short declaration to carry with you into the day.
- **Pray.** A short closing prayer. Make it your own, or let it lead you into your own conversation with him.

You will hear me refer to four posters: Jesus' Attitudes That Bless, the Fruit of the Spirit, the Manipulate-to-Control Relationship Busters, and True Talmidim Will Evidence. They are reproduced in the Appendix, and they are free to download and print at OneKingdomWorldwide.org. Keep them on your phone and look at them often. Like a familiar passage of Scripture, they will keep showing you something new.

The book has three parts. Part One, *Your Self*, looks honestly at the self left to its own desires, and at where that road has always led. Part Two, *My Self*, turns the mirror around, so that we stop seeing selfishness only

in others and begin to see it in ourselves, and then shows the way out. Part Three, *Our Selves*, looks at what happens when the self is given up into the Family of God, and when we, together, do things *with* God.

Read it with an open heart. He is gentle. He is not here to condemn you. He is here to set you free.

Introduction:
Satan Away? Or Tell Satan: Away!

We have a way of speaking to one another sometimes where our message is along the lines of "Go for it!" In words like "Fire away!"

In other cases the meaning is more along the lines of "I wouldn't do it, but go ahead if that's what you want. It's your life. It's your choice." Sometimes it'll be said somewhat sarcastically, too. We say things like:

> "Aren't you just whistling past the graveyard? OK, whistle away then!"
>
> "Smoking in your own home around your own kids? OK, smoke away!"
>
> "You lost big at the casino again? Go ahead, gamble it all away!"
>
> "Fire away! Nobody is going to stop you."

So what would it mean to say, "Satan away!"?

It would mean: go ahead. Keep doing what the Adversary does. Keep putting yourself first. Keep accusing, keep opposing, keep grabbing what you want. Nobody is going to stop you.

And, if you really want to, nobody really can. That is the sobering part. God will not stop you. He has never controlled anyone. Since the Garden of Eden, he has informed us, warned us of the consequences, and let us choose.

But there is another way to read the title of this book.

> **Matthew 4:10**
> *Then Jesus said to him, "Be gone, Satan! For it is written, "'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.'"*

Satan: Away! That is what Jesus said in the wilderness. Same two words. Completely different meaning.

* * *

God or Not God

Every day, many times a day, we have decisions to make. God or Not God. Love or Not Love.

I have come to believe that it really is that simple. There is only God and Not God, love and not love. It is not so much about right and wrong as it is about love and not love. Being led by the Spirit of the living God or not. And every one of those decisions comes down to this: will I serve myself, or will I submit myself to God?

> **James 4:7**
> *Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.*

Here is what we learn from James. We do not have power over Satan. God does. He tells us that we can tell Satan to go away. But it is not us making Satan go away. It is God doing it, as we submit ourselves to him.

That order matters. Submit first. Then resist. If I try to tell Satan "Away!" while I am still serving myself, the words are just words. They become an incantation, and there is no magic or power in them. But when I humble myself before God and say, "Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior. Go away!" then the Adversary has to go.

* * *

Talmidim: Becoming More and More Like Jesus

So what is all of this for? What does God want to make of us, as we submit to him?

When Jesus called people to follow him, he called them to be his talmidim. The Hebrew word is *talmid*, and the plural is *talmidim*. Talmidim are what we in the USA erroneously call "disciples, students and apprentices." We do not really have a word for it in English.

Unlike the words disciple or student or apprentice that suggest a learning and doing process, the word talmid is a Hebrew term that describes a becoming process. Talmidim desire to become just like their rabbi. It is more than the practical application of the knowledge gained. It is more than taking actions based upon our understanding of his teachings. It was not just to know what the rabbi knew, but to more and more become what the rabbi was.

A talmid in Jesus' day was someone in the process of *becoming* more and more just like their rabbi: in his character, in his attitudes, in the way he treated people, in the way he walked with God. Jesus said it himself.

Luke 6:40

A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher.

Notice what that does not say. We never become Jesus. He is the original, and he always will be. We reflect his image. We become *more and more like him*, "from one degree of glory to another" (2 Corinthians 3:18).

That is the talmidic life, and it is the whole journey of this book. Every time the self climbs onto the throne, I look less like Jesus. Every time I submit my self to God, *I become more and more like him.* And here is the wonder of it: the more I look like him, the more fully I become the self God made in the first place.

Watch for those words as you read: *becoming more and more like Jesus*. They are the point of everything.

* * *

The Self God Made

Before we go any further, I need to say something very clearly. Your self is not the enemy.

This is a book about selfishness, and it would be easy to come away thinking that the goal is to hate yourself, or to become nobody. That is not it at all. God made your self. He knew you before you were born.

Jeremiah 1:5

Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.

God spoke those words to Jeremiah, a young man who protested that he was only a youth. But the truth in them reaches every one of us. Before I formed you, I knew you. Before you were born, I set you apart.

David put it this way.

Psalm 139:13-18

For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them. How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! If I would count them, they are more than the sand. I awake, and I am still with you.

Knitted together. Fearfully and wonderfully made. Every one of my days written in his book before one of them came to be. His thoughts toward me more than the sand.

That is your self, as God made it. Known. Formed. Treasured. Appointed.

Before I knitted you in your mother's womb, I knew you. If he knew *us* then, then in some way we knew *him* then. Not because we were somewhere else before we were born, but because he knew us first, and from the very beginning he placed something of himself in us.

Psalm 71:6

Upon you I have leaned from before my birth; you are he who took me from my mother's womb. My praise is continually of you.

Leaned on him from before my birth. When Mary, carrying Jesus, came to visit her cousin Elizabeth, the baby in Elizabeth's womb leaped for joy. Before he was ever born, John sensed the Lord.

We know him because we were first known *by* him. And, as Paul says, one day, "I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known."

Solomon said that God "has put eternity into man's heart." Every one of us was born with a longing we cannot quite explain, a sense that we were made for something, and for Someone.

And Paul tells us that God did not only make us. He made us *for* something.

> **Ephesians 2:10**
>
> *For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*

The Greek word for "workmanship" is *poiēma*, something carefully made, a work of art. It is the word our English word "poem" comes from. You are God's handiwork, created for good works that he prepared before you ever arrived.

There are works he desired for us to do that were laid out before we were ever born. And so, in some way, we carried a sense of "the plans he has for us" before we ever drew a breath.

> **Jeremiah 29:11**
>
> *For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.*

So the problem is not that we have a self. The problem is what happens when the self forgets who made it. When it stops receiving its life, its identity and its works from God, and tries to make them for *it*self. When *it* climbs onto the throne. That is selfishness: the self cut off from *its* Maker, trying to be *its* own god.

That is also why selfishness never satisfies. The self God made was made to lean on him. When it grasps instead, it is trying to fill a place

that only its Maker fits. More silver, more honor, more control, more of my own way: none of it will ever be enough, because none of it is him.

And here is the irony. Selfishness never makes us more ourselves. It makes us less. Every person we will meet in Part One became smaller, not bigger, as they grasped. And every person we will meet in Parts Two and Three became more fully who God made them to be, as they let go.

The verses on the opening page of this book come from the end of this same psalm. The psalm that begins, "You formed my inward parts," ends, "Search me, O God, and know my heart!" The One who made me is the only One who can truly search me.

* * *

A Life Worth Living

Underneath everything in this book is one question. What makes a life worth living?

Every one of us is asking it, whether we say it out loud or not. And every one of us is answering it, every day, by the choices we make. The self has *its* answer: get what you want. Be first. Be *right*. Be in control. More is better. The Adversary has been selling that answer since the Garden.

Jesus has a different answer.

> **John 10:10**
> *The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.*

There it is. The thief, and the Shepherd. The one who steals life, and the One who gives it abundantly.

The Adversary never says he is a thief. He always comes offering a better life. "Adam, Eve, if you eat from the tree, you will be like God." And to every one of us: "You deserve this." "Take it. Nobody will know." But what he is really doing is stealing. He steals our joy, our peace, our relationships, our children's trust. In the end, he kills and destroys.

In *Life: Living the Good Life God Offers Us*, I wrote about the deception as old as time itself: the lie that the good life is something we have to grab for ourselves. This book is about what that deception does inside of us, in the self, and how to be set free from it.

So when I say, "Just Satan away!" I am describing a life that looks worth living and is not. And when I say, "Satan: Away!" I am choosing the abundant life Jesus came to give: a life that is truly worth living, now and forever.

* * *

Your Self, My Self or Our Selves

This book has three parts, and they follow the three words of its subtitle.

Your Self is the self left to its own desires. We will look at it first in others, in the many people of the Bible who put themselves first, and whose selfishness, in the end, brought death. It is easier to see it in *them*. That is why we start there.

My Self is where the mirror turns around. Sooner or later each of us has to stop pointing at Cain and Saul and Judas and say, "That is me too." This is where the Relationship Busters become personal, and where Jesus' attitudes and the fruit of the Spirit begin to replace them.

Our Selves is the self given up. It is the self that cares more about "us" than about "me," and that has learned to do things *with* God, together with the rest of the *Family* of God. It is John 17 oneness, lived out.

* * *

A Word About the Adversary

In Hebrew, *satan* is not only a name. It is also a word. As a noun it means "adversary," one who opposes. As a verb it means "to accuse, to oppose." We will look at it closely in Chapter Six.

So when I say, "Just Satan away," I am saying, quite literally, "Go ahead, keep on accusing and opposing." And when I look at the Manipulate-to-

Control Relationship Busters poster, I notice that the first ones on it are exactly that: Judgment, Anger, Accusation, Condemnation.

When we use the Relationship Busters on one another, we are doing the Adversary's work for him.

That is what this book is about. It is about the many little ways we "Satan away" at one another every day, often without even knowing it. And it is about the One who sets us free to say, with him, "Satan: Away!"

* * *

Alone With God

Sit with this

> **Deuteronomy 30:19**
>
> *I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live,*

Search me

Father, here I am. Speak. I am listening.

Sit quietly for a few minutes. Ask him to show you one place in your life where you have been saying, without meaning to, "Just Satan away." Don't argue with what he shows you. Don't explain it away. Just let him show you, and thank him that he loves you too much to leave you there.

Continue in *conversational worship* (prayer) all day long.
1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Today I choose life.

Pray

> *Father, you have set before me life and death, blessing and curse, and you have let me choose. I choose you. Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior. That I would submit myself to you today, in every decision, large and small. That I would choose love and not "not*

love." And that, as I submit to you, the Adversary would flee from me. Amen.

Part One: Your Self

The Self Left to Its Own Desires

CHAPTER ONE

"You Will Be Like God"

It all started with a conversation.

Not a conversation with God. A conversation *about* God, with someone who did not have the woman's best interests at heart.

> **Genesis 3:1-6**
>
> *Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?" And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" But the serpent said to the woman, "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." So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.*

Notice what the Adversary did not say. He did not say, "There is no God." He admitted God exists. His gambit was much more subtle than that. He said, in effect, "God exists, but you cannot trust him. He is holding out on you. He doesn't want what is best for you. You deserve more."

And then the offer: *You will be like God.*

* * *

The First Your Self

Here is the irony. Adam and Eve were already made in the image of God. They already walked with him in the cool of the day. They already had dominion over the whole earth. They had everything.

God had formed the man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into him the breath of life. Everything Psalm 139 says about you was already true of them. Known. Formed. Treasured. Appointed to fill the earth and care for it. They did not need to *become* someone. They already *were* someone: God's own workmanship.

But "like God" was offered to them as something to *grab*, rather than something to *receive*. Take it for yourself. *Decide for yourself* what is good and what is evil. Put yourself on the throne.

That was the first time self took the throne. It has been trying to sit there ever since.

Notice what that really was. It was not the self becoming *more*. It was the self forgetting who made it. The serpent's offer only worked because, for a moment, they forgot they were already fearfully and wonderfully made.

He did not have to create a desire in them from nothing. He only had to get them to forget. Forget who made them. Forget that God is good. Forget what they already knew of him. That is still how he works. "Just Satan away" is a life lived in that forgetting. "Satan: Away!" is remembering whose we are.

Everyone wants to be God, until they realize their folly. I have seen it in boardrooms and in church board meetings, in marriages and in my own heart. The desire to be the one who decides. The one who controls. The one whose will is done.

God gave us dominion over the earth. He never gave us dominion over each other. But the self, left to its own desires, always reaches for both.

* * *

Information, Not Control

Look at how God handled the tree. He did not build a fence around it. He did not post an angel to guard it, not yet. He did not make it impossible to sin.

> **Genesis 2:16-17**
>
> *And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."*

He gave them information. Here is the tree. Here is the consequence. You choose.

That is what God has always done. He informs. He never controls. If I tell you, "If you rob that bank, you'll go to prison," I am not threatening you. I am giving you information. What you do with it is up to you.

The Adversary does the opposite. He hides the consequences. "You will not surely die." He makes the bad thing look good for food, a delight to the eyes, and desirable to make one wise. He never shows you the end of the road.

And notice what he was really offering. A better life. More than they had. A life more worth living than the one God had given them. That is always the pitch. But it was theft. In one afternoon, he stole the very life they already had: their openness with God, their trust in each other, their home in the garden. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy.

* * *

The Blame Game

When God came walking in the garden, the consequences began immediately. And the first thing the self did, once it was caught, was to protect itself.

> **Genesis 3:12-13**
>
> *The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate." Then the LORD God said*

to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

The woman whom *you* gave me. The serpent. Anyone but me.

Within minutes of the first sin, the first Relationship Busters appeared: accusation, rationalization, self-focus. Adam, who had sung over Eve, "This at last is bone of my bones," now pointed his finger at her. And quietly, *he pointed it at God too*.

That is what the self does when it is threatened. It protects *it*self, at the expense of everyone around it. It cannot help it. And it is where every broken relationship since has begun.

* * *

The Death That Followed

God had said, "In the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." And they did. Not that afternoon in their bodies, though death came for them in the end.

Genesis 5:5

Thus all the days that Adam lived were 930 years, and he died.

But something died that very day. Their openness with God died. They hid from him. Their openness with one another died. They covered themselves. Their trust died. Their relationships began to die.

Paul tells us that death came into the whole world through that one act.

Romans 5:12

Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—

That is the story of *Your Self*. It is the story of every person we will meet in the next several chapters. Each one, in their own way, reached for what was not theirs, *put themselves on the throne*, and found at the end of the road exactly what God had said would be there.

* * *

The One Who Did Not Grasp

But there is another story, and it is the most important one in this book.

> **Philippians 2:5-8**
> *Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*

Adam was a man who wanted to be like God, and grasped. Jesus was God, and did not grasp. Adam reached up and took. Jesus reached down and gave. Adam's grasping brought death to all. Jesus' giving brought life to all who trust him.

Peter tells us that Jesus left us an example. The Greek word there is *hupogrammos*, the original that a child traces over when learning to write. Jesus is not an example to consider. He is the original we trace, until *we become more and more like him*.

That is where this whole book is going. From the grasping self to the giving self. From Adam to Jesus. From "Just Satan away" to "Satan: Away!"

* * *

Alone With God

Sit with this

> **Philippians 2:5-7**
> *Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.*

Search me

Father, here I am. Speak. I am listening.

Where am I grasping? What am I reaching for that you have not given me? Where have I been the one who decides, controls, insists on my own way? And when I have been caught, whom have I blamed? Sit quietly, and let him answer.

Continue in *conversational worship* (prayer) all day long.
1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

I will receive, not grasp.

Pray

> *Father, I confess that I have wanted to live life on my own terms. I have reached for what you did not give me, and I have blamed others when I was caught. Thank you that Jesus did not grasp, but emptied himself for me. That I would have a heart after yours and his mind available to me. That I would receive from your hand, rather than take. And that I would trust that you are good, and that you are not holding out on me. Amen.*

CHAPTER TWO

Merciful, Gracious… and Honest

Before we look at the people who put themselves first, we need to look at God. Who is he? And how does he respond when we choose our self over him?

Moses asked God to show him his glory. And God did something remarkable. He passed by, and he described himself.

> **Exodus 34:6-7**
>
> *The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation."*

This is God's own description of himself. If you want to know who he is, start here.

* * *

Merciful and Gracious

Look at the first words out of his mouth. Merciful. Gracious. Slow to anger. Abounding in steadfast love. Faithful. Keeping steadfast love for thousands. Forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin.

That is a lot of mercy for one sentence.

So many people have grown up with a picture of God as an angry judge, waiting for them to make a mistake. That is not the God who passed before Moses. That is the picture the Adversary wants us to have, because if he can convince us that God is harsh and untrustworthy, he has won half the battle.

God is slow to anger. He is patient beyond anything we can imagine. As we will see, in almost every story in the chapters ahead, God warned, and waited, and warned again, long before the consequences came.

* * *

And Honest

But notice the last part of what God said about himself. "But who will by no means clear the guilty."

God is merciful. He is also honest. He will not pretend that sin does not matter. He will not tell us, as the serpent did, "You will not surely die."

Here is the truth that runs all through the Scriptures, and all through this book:

Although forgiveness is always available, the consequences of our actions – for the most part – will be allowed to play out in our lives.

I have watched this truth play out in my own life and in the lives of many people I have walked with these last 40 years. God forgives. Completely. Immediately. But he does not usually reach in and undo what our choices have set in motion.

* * *

Forgiven, Yet the Consequences Remained

Look at how often the Scriptures show us both at once.

When Israel refused to go into the land at Kadesh, Moses pleaded for them, and God forgave.

> **Numbers 14:20-23**
>
> *Then the LORD said, "I have pardoned, according to your word. But truly, as I live, and as all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD, none of the men who have seen my glory and my signs that I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and yet have put me to the test these ten times and have not obeyed my*

voice, shall see the land that I swore to give to their fathers. And none of those who despised me shall see it."

"I have pardoned." And yet that generation did not see the land.

When Nathan confronted David about Bathsheba and Uriah, David confessed, and God forgave him on the spot. "The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die." And yet the child died, and the sword never departed from David's house.

Moses himself, the most humble man on the face of the earth, did not enter the land after he struck the rock in anger at Meribah. God showed him the land from the mountain, and God himself buried him. Forgiven, loved, honored. And still, the consequence played out.

Galatians 6:7-8

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

* * *

For the Most Part

I say "for the most part," because there are times when God relents.

When the people of Nineveh turned from their evil way, from the greatest of them to the least, God relented of the disaster he had said he would bring. When Hezekiah was told he would die, he turned his face to the wall and prayed, and God added fifteen years to his life. Even Ahab, after the murder of Naboth, humbled himself before God, and God delayed the disaster until after his days.

God is merciful. He hears. Sometimes he steps in. But we cannot presume on it. More often than not, the seeds we have sown will grow, and we will eat their fruit.

* * *

To the Third and Fourth Generation

There is one more part of God's description of himself that we cannot skip. "Visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation."

This is not God punishing innocent children for what their parents did. Ezekiel makes that clear. "The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not suffer for the iniquity of the father." This is God telling us, honestly, how the world he made works.

What I do does not stay with me. My selfishness spills over onto my children, and their children. The anger I never dealt with becomes the anger they grew up with. The shaming I learned from my father, I pass on to my son, unless God interrupts it.

That is why the self matters so much. It is never just about me. We will come back to this in Chapter Seven.

But notice the contrast in God's own words. Iniquity visited to the third and fourth generation. Steadfast love kept for *thousands*. The consequences of selfishness reach a few generations. The consequences of love reach a thousand.

* * *

God Informs, Never Controls

Here is how I put it all together.

Since Eden, God has done the same thing. He tells us who he is. He tells us what is good. He tells us what the consequences will be. And then he lets us choose, and he lets the consequences play out.

That is not God being harsh. That is God respecting us. He does not want robots. He wants sons and daughters who choose him because they love him. And *love that is forced* is not love at all.

So he informs. He never controls. And that is exactly the opposite of what the Adversary does, and of what the self does, when it wants its own way.

* * *

Alone With God

Sit with this

> **Exodus 34:6**
> *The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness,*

Search me

Father, here I am. Speak. I am listening.

What picture of you did I grow up with? Is it the God who passed before Moses, or a harsher one? Are there consequences in my life right now that I have been asking you to take away, when what I really need is to receive your forgiveness and walk through them with you? Sit quietly, and listen.

Continue in *conversational worship* (prayer) all day long.
1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

He is merciful. I will walk with him through it.

Pray

> *The LORD, the LORD, merciful and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. Thank you for forgiving me. Thank you that your mercy is new every morning. That I would stop presuming on your patience. That I would sow to the Spirit and not to my own flesh. And that the steadfast love you keep for thousands would flow through me to my children and their children. Amen.*

CHAPTER THREE

When Desire Conceives

How does a good person end up doing a terrible thing?

Hardly anyone wakes up one morning and decides to destroy their marriage, betray their friend, or abandon their faith. It doesn't happen like that. It happens slowly, one small step at a time. James describes exactly how.

> **James 1:13-15**
>
> *Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.*

Desire. Conception. Birth. Growth. Death. It is the life cycle of selfishness.

* * *

His Own Desire

Notice where James starts. Not with the devil. Not with other people. Not with God. "Each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by *his own* desire."

The Adversary is real, and he is active. But he does not have to create desires in us. He only has to find the ones that are already there and bait the hook. "Lured and enticed" are fishing and hunting words. The bait looks good. The hook is hidden.

That is the serpent's method all over again. Good for food. A delight to the eyes. Desirable to make one wise. He never shows you the hook.

* * *

Sin Crouching at the Door

The very next story after Eden shows us the same pattern, and shows us God informing, not controlling, with his warning right in the middle of it.

> **Genesis 4:6-7**
>
> *The LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it."*

God saw the desire before it conceived. Cain was angry. His brother's offering had been accepted, and his had not. Envy was growing.

So God came to him, gently, and gave him information. "Why are you angry? Sin is crouching at the door. It wants you. But you can rule over it."

God did not stop Cain. He warned him. He told him the truth about what was crouching there. And then he let him choose.

Cain chose. Desire conceived and gave birth to sin, and sin, fully grown, brought forth death. His brother's blood cried out from the ground.

* * *

It Starts Small

I have walked with many people through the wreckage of choices they never thought they would make. Almost every time, if we trace it back, it began with something small.

A little resentment that was never dealt with. A little envy, nursed in private. A little anger and unforgiveness. A little "I deserve this." A little lie to cover something embarrassing. A little shortcut that nobody would notice.

None of those things feels like death. That is the deception. Desire, at the beginning, always feels like life. It feels like freedom. It feels like finally getting what I am owed.

Proverbs 14:12

There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.

* * *

Fully Grown

James says sin, "when it is fully grown," brings forth death. Sin grows. Left alone, it does not stay small.

The resentment becomes bitterness. The bitterness becomes contempt. The contempt becomes the cold silence at the dinner table, or the angry outburst, or the affair, or the divorce.

The little lie needs a bigger lie to cover it. Then a bigger one.

The little "I deserve this" grows into a whole way of life, organized around me: my comfort, my image, my way. And everyone around me learns to walk on eggshells, or lives surrounded by my silence.

This is why I keep coming back to the Relationship Busters poster. Every one of those Busters is a fully grown desire. Anger is desire frustrated. Coercion is desire demanding. Retaliation is desire wounded. Deception is desire hiding. Covetousness is desire unsatisfied.

* * *

The Wages

Romans 6:23

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Death is not always physical, at least not right away. Sometimes it is the death of a friendship. The death of trust. The death of a marriage, a ministry, a church. The death of joy. The death of a child's respect.

But it is always death. Something always dies when the self is put on the throne.

In the next several chapters we will look at the people of the Bible who walked this road all the way to the end. I have gathered the most serious of them into groups: those whose desire was for *more*, those whose desire was for *position*, and those whose desire led them to *accuse and oppose*. Their stories are hard. But they are in the Bible for a reason. They are a mirror.

* * *

The Door Can Be Ruled

Here is the good news in Cain's story, even though Cain did not take it. "You must rule over it." God would not have said that if it were impossible.

Desire can be caught before it conceives. The hook can be seen before the bait is taken. And even when sin has been born, it can be brought into the light, confessed and forgiven, before it is fully grown.

That is what the *My Self* part of this book is about. But first, we need to see clearly where the road leads.

* * *

Alone With God

Sit with this

> **James 1:14-15**
> *But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.*

Search me

Father, here I am. Speak. I am listening.

What is crouching at my door right now? Is there a resentment I have been nursing? An envy? Anger and growing unforgiveness? A little "I deserve this"? A little lie? Ask him to show you what it could grow into, if left alone. Then ask him what it would look like to rule over it today.

Continue in *conversational worship* (prayer) all day long.
1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Rule over it.

Pray

> *Father, you see every desire in me before it conceives. Thank you that you warn me, as you warned Cain. That I would hear you when you say, "Why are you angry?" That I would see the hook before I take the bait. That the small things would be brought into your light before they grow. And that I would rule over what is crouching at my door, by your Spirit. Amen.*

CHAPTER FOUR

The Graves of Craving

There is a place in the wilderness with a terrible name.

God was feeding his people every morning. Manna lay on the ground like frost, enough for every family, every day. It was a miracle they could eat. But they grew tired of it. They remembered the fish they ate in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions and the garlic. And they wept for meat.

God gave them meat. Quail, in such numbers that they gathered it for two days and a night.

> **Numbers 11:33-34**
> *While the meat was yet between their teeth, before it was consumed, the anger of the LORD was kindled against the people, and the LORD struck down the people with a very great plague. Therefore the name of that place was called Kibroth-hattaavah, because there they buried the people who had the craving.*

Kibroth-hattaavah. The graves of craving.

* * *

More

The first kind of selfishness we will look at is the simplest. It is the desire for *more*. More food, more money, more things, more comfort. It is the voice that says, "What I have is not enough. I need what you have too."

Jesus warned about it directly.

Luke 12:15

And he said to them, "Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."

The people at Kibroth-hattaavah had everything they needed. They had bread from heaven. But they despised what God gave them and demanded something else. The problem was never the meat. The problem was a heart that could not say, "Thank you. This is enough."

* * *

"I Coveted Them and Took Them"

When Israel conquered Jericho, God told them that everything in the city was devoted to *him*. They were not to take any of it for themselves. One man did.

Joshua 7:20-21

And Achan answered Joshua, "Truly I have sinned against the LORD God of Israel, and this is what I did: when I saw among the spoil a beautiful cloak from Shinar, and 200 shekels of silver, and a bar of gold weighing 50 shekels, then I coveted them and took them. And see, they are hidden in the earth inside my tent, with the silver underneath."

I saw. I coveted. I took. I hid. It is the pattern of Eden all over again.

And look at what Achan's private selfishness cost. Israel went up against the small town of Ai and was routed. Thirty-six men died. Families lost husbands and fathers because one man wanted a cloak and some silver. In the end, Achan and his household were stoned in the Valley of Achor, the valley of trouble.

Selfishness is never as private as we think it is.

* * *

"Shall I Take My Bread?"

Nabal was a very rich man. David and his men had protected Nabal's shepherds and flocks in the wilderness, night and day. When shearing time came, a time of feasting and generosity, David sent ten young men to ask Nabal for whatever he could spare.

> **1 Samuel 25:10-11**
>
> *And Nabal answered David's servants, "Who is David? Who is the son of Jesse? There are many servants these days who are breaking away from their masters. Shall I take my bread and my water and my meat that I have killed for my shearers and give it to men who come from I do not know where?"*

My bread. My water. My meat. My shearers. Nabal's whole world was "my."

His wife Abigail saved his household by her generosity, as we will see in Part Three. But when Nabal heard how close he had come to destruction, his heart died within him, and about ten days later, "the LORD struck Nabal, and he died."

* * *

Ministry for Profit

Balaam was a prophet. He actually heard from God. But when the king of Moab offered him money to curse Israel, he could not let it go. God told him no. He asked again. When he could not curse Israel, he found another way to earn his pay, teaching Moab how to lead Israel into sin.

Peter sums up his life in one line. He "loved gain from wrongdoing." Balaam was killed with the sword among the very people who had hired him.

It is a sobering thing to realize that a person can hear from God and still be ruled by the desire for more.

* * *

The Moneybag

And then there is Judas.

He walked with Jesus for three years. He saw the miracles. He heard the teaching. He was sent out with the others to preach and to heal. And all along, something else was growing in him.

> **John 12:4-6**
> *But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (he who was about to betray him), said, "Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?" He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it.*

Notice that Judas covered his greed with a spiritual-sounding concern. "Why wasn't this given to the poor?" The self is very good at disguising *it*self.

A few days later he went to the chief priests. "What will you give me if I deliver him over to you?" Thirty pieces of silver. And when he saw what he had done, he threw the silver into the temple, went out and hanged himself.

* * *

Keeping Back for Yourself

In the early church, believers were selling land and houses and bringing the money to the apostles, so that no one among them would be in need. A couple named Ananias and Sapphira sold a piece of property too. But they kept back part of the money for *them*selves, and brought the rest as if it were the whole.

They did not have to give *any* of it. Peter made that clear. The land was theirs, and the money was theirs. Their sin was not keeping some. Their sin was wanting the honor of generosity without the cost of it, and lying to God to get it.

Acts 5:3-4

But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God."

Both of them fell dead that day.

* * *

Solomon's Experiment

One man in the Bible tried the life of "more" more completely than anyone. He had the wisdom, the wealth and the power to try anything he wanted. And he did.

Solomon built houses and planted vineyards, gardens and parks. He gathered silver and gold, servants and singers, and many wives. He became greater than all who had been before him in Jerusalem. Then he wrote down what he found.

Ecclesiastes 2:10-11

And whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I kept my heart from no pleasure, for my heart found pleasure in all my toil, and this was my reward for all my toil. Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had expended in doing it, and behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun.

Whatever my eyes desired, I did not keep from them. That is the self with no limits at all. And at the end of it: vanity. A striving after wind. Nothing to be gained.

That is the testimony of the man who had it all. The life of "more" looks worth living, right up until you have it. And then it turns to wind in your hands.

* * *

What Craving Does

Look at what the desire for more did in each of these stories. It made people ungrateful. It made them hide. It made them lie. It made them use spiritual language to cover selfish motives. And it never, ever satisfied.

> **1 Timothy 6:9-10**
>
> *But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.*

The Relationship Busters poster lists Covetousness, Give to Get, Lies, Deception, and Self-Focus. Every one of them showed up in these stories. They will show up in our lives too, if we let craving rule.

The opposite of craving is not having nothing. It is contentment. It is the open hand. It is "Blessed are the poor in spirit." It is the fruit of the Spirit called self-control. And it is the poor widow, who put in two small coins, everything she had to live on, and whom Jesus held up as the greatest giver of all. We will meet her again in Part Three.

* * *

Alone With God

Sit with this

> **Luke 12:15**
>
> *And he said to them, "Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."*

Search me

Father, here I am. Speak. I am listening.

Where am I saying, "What I have is not enough"? What do I talk about as "my" that is really yours? Have I ever covered a selfish motive with

spiritual language? Open your hands, palms down, and release to him whatever you are clutching. Then turn them palms up, and receive.

Continue in *conversational worship* (prayer) all day long.
1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Today I am content. I have enough.

Pray

> *Father, you feed me every day. Forgive me for the times I have despised your manna and wept for what I did not have. That I would be content with what you give. That I would hold everything with an open hand, because it is yours. That I would never use spiritual words to cover selfish motives. And that my heart would say, every day, "Thank you. This is enough." Amen.*

CHAPTER FIVE

Grabbing for the Throne

The second kind of selfishness is harder to see, because it often looks like leadership.

It is the desire for *position*. To be first. To be in charge. To be the one people look to, praise, and obey. It wears nice clothes and speaks well, and it often gets things done. But underneath, it is the same old self, reaching for the throne.

> **James 3:14-16**
>
> *But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.*

Earthly. Unspiritual. Demonic. Those are strong words for something we often reward.

* * *

"Would You Seek the Priesthood Also?"

Korah was a Levite. God had given his family a holy calling: to care for the tabernacle and serve the people. But it was not enough for him. He gathered 250 well-known leaders of Israel and confronted Moses and Aaron.

"You have gone too far! All in the congregation are holy. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the LORD?"

It sounded like a call for equality. It was actually a grab for position. Moses saw right through it.

Numbers 16:9-10

is it too small a thing for you that the God of Israel has separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to himself, to do service in the tabernacle of the LORD and to stand before the congregation to minister to them, and that he has brought you near him, and all your brothers the sons of Levi with you? And would you seek the priesthood also?

Is it too small a thing? That is the question the self never likes to hear. The ground opened and swallowed Korah, Dathan and Abiram, and fire consumed the 250.

* * *

"What More Can He Have but the Kingdom?"

Saul began well. He was humble, even hiding among the baggage when they came to make him king. But somewhere along the way, the throne got into him.

He kept the best of what God told him to destroy, and then blamed the people for it. And when David came home from killing Goliath, and the women danced and sang, "Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his ten thousands," something broke in him.

1 Samuel 18:8-9

And Saul was very angry, and this saying displeased him. He said, "They have ascribed to David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed thousands, and what more can he have but the kingdom?" And Saul eyed David from that day on.

Jealousy. Rage. Spears thrown across the room. Years spent hunting a man who had done him nothing but good. Saul spent the rest of his life defending a throne God had already said would pass to another. He died on Mount Gilboa with three of his sons.

1 Chronicles 10:13

So Saul died for his breach of faith. He broke faith with the LORD in that he did not keep the command of the LORD, and also consulted a medium, seeking guidance.

* * *

Stealing Hearts

Absalom was David's son, handsome and charming. He got up early every morning and stood beside the road to the city gate. When anyone came with a case for the king, Absalom would call him over. "Your claims are good and right, but there is no man designated by the king to hear you. Oh that I were judge in the land! Then every man with a dispute or cause might come to me, and I would give him justice."

And when people bowed to him, he would take them by the hand and kiss them.

> **2 Samuel 15:6**
>
> *Thus Absalom did to all of Israel who came to the king for judgment. So Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel.*

Flattery. Manipulation. A warm smile and a hidden agenda. Absalom had even built a monument to himself, because, he said, "I have no son to keep my name in remembrance." He drove his father out of Jerusalem, and in the end was caught by his head in an oak tree and killed.

* * *

"I Will Be King"

When David was old, his son Adonijah decided not to wait.

> **1 Kings 1:5**
>
> *Now Adonijah the son of Haggith exalted himself, saying, "I will be king." And he prepared for himself chariots and horsemen, and fifty men to run before him.*

He exalted himself. It is the opposite of everything Jesus taught. "Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted." Adonijah's grab failed, and when he later tried again, quietly, by asking for the old king's companion as his wife, Solomon had him executed.

* * *

Seventy Brothers, and the Grandchildren

Some of the grabs for the throne in Scripture are almost too terrible to read.

Abimelech hired worthless men and murdered his seventy brothers on one stone, so he could rule alone. Three years later a woman dropped a millstone on his head from a tower. "Thus God returned the evil of Abimelech, which he committed against his father in killing his seventy brothers."

When Athaliah's son the king was killed, she "arose and destroyed all the royal family," her own grandchildren, so that she could rule. One baby boy was hidden away. Six years later he was crowned, and Athaliah was put to death.

That is where the desire for position goes when nothing stops it. It will sacrifice anyone, even family, even children, to sit on the throne.

* * *

Accepting the Glory

And then there is Herod Agrippa. He had already killed the apostle James with the sword, and when he saw that it pleased the people, he arrested Peter too. One day he put on his royal robes and gave a speech, and the crowd began to shout.

> **Acts 12:22-23**
>
> *And the people were shouting, "The voice of a god, and not of a man!" Immediately an angel of the Lord struck him down, because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and breathed his last.*

He did not give God the glory. He took it for himself.

* * *

It Shall Not Be So Among You

I have spent most of my life working with leaders. I have seen what the desire for position does in churches, in nonprofits, in businesses and in families. I have also seen it in myself.

It shows up on the Relationship Busters poster as Abuse of Power, Pride, Intimidation, Demanding, Rigid Expectations, and Trickery. It shows up in the pastor who cannot share the pulpit, the elder who must win every vote, the parent who must always be right, the spouse who must have the last word.

Jesus saw it in his own talmidim. James and John asked to sit at his right and left in his glory. The other ten were indignant, probably because they wanted those seats too. So Jesus gathered them all.

> **Mark 10:42-45**
>
> *And Jesus called them to him and said to them, "You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

It shall not be so among you. That is why I keep writing about co-leadership, gifts-based service, and the circle rather than the pyramid. God gave us dominion over the earth, not over each other.

The opposite of grabbing for the throne is "Blessed are the meek." It is Jonathan, the crown prince, stripping off his own robe and giving it to David. We will meet him in Part Three.

* * *

Alone With God

Sit with this

> **Mark 10:43-44**
> *But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all.*

Search me

Father, here I am. Speak. I am listening.

Where do I need to be first? Where do I need to win, to be right, to be seen, to be in charge? Is there someone whose success I have quietly resented, the way Saul resented David? Is the calling you have given me "too small a thing" in my eyes? Let him show you.

Continue in *conversational worship* (prayer) all day long.
1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

I am here to serve, not to be served.

Pray

> *Lord Jesus, you came not to be served but to serve. Forgive me for every time I have reached for a throne that was never mine. That I would be content with the calling you have given me. That I would rejoice when others are praised. That I would never exalt myself, but give you the glory in everything. And that, among us, it would not be so. Amen.*

CHAPTER SIX

Doing the Accuser's Work

The third kind of selfishness is the one this book is named for.

In Hebrew, *satan* is a verb before it is a name. It means "to accuse, to oppose." David used it when he prayed about people who repaid his kindness with hostility. "In return for my love they accuse me." "Those who render me evil for good accuse me." That word is the Hebrew verb *satan.*

As a noun, it means "adversary." The Hebrew Bible uses the same word for human adversaries, like the ones God raised up against Solomon. It even uses it for the angel of the LORD, who stood in Balaam's road "as his adversary."

And of course it becomes the name of our Adversary.

> **1 Peter 5:8-9**
>
> *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,*

> **Revelation 12:10**
>
> *And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God."*

He is the Adversary. He is the Accuser. That is what he does, day and night.

* * *

The Accuser in the Courtroom

The prophet Zechariah was given a vision of a heavenly courtroom.

Zechariah 3:1-2

Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him. And the LORD said to Satan, "The LORD rebuke you, O Satan! The LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is not this a brand plucked from the fire?"

Joshua was standing there in filthy clothes. The Accuser had plenty to work with. But God did not argue the case. He rebuked the Accuser, took off the filthy garments, and clothed Joshua in clean ones.

That is what God does with accusations against his people. And it shows us something important. Accusation is the Adversary's work. Rescue is God's.

* * *

When We Satan Away at Each Other

Now look again at the Manipulate-to-Control Relationship Busters poster. The first four are Judgment, Anger, Accusation and Condemnation.

When I accuse you, judge you, condemn you, or oppose you to get my way, I am doing what the Accuser does. I am, quite literally, "satan-ing" you. I am doing his work for him.

That is a hard thing to hear. It was hard for me to write. But I believe it is one of the most important truths in this book. The Adversary does not need to show up in person when he can get the people of God to do his work toward one another.

Let me show you what it looks like when it is fully grown.

* * *

Naboth's Vineyard

King Ahab had everything a man could want. But next to his palace was a vineyard that belonged to a man named Naboth, and Ahab wanted it for a vegetable garden. Naboth said no. The land was his family's inheritance from the LORD.

So Ahab went home, lay down on his bed, turned his face to the wall and would not eat.

His wife Jezebel took care of it. She wrote letters in Ahab's name and set up a fast. She seated two worthless men opposite Naboth and had them accuse him. "You have cursed God and the king." They took Naboth outside the city and stoned him. And Ahab went down to take possession of the vineyard.

Accusation. Lies. Abuse of power. Coercion. All for a vegetable garden.

> **1 Kings 21:19**
>
> *And you shall say to him, 'Thus says the LORD, "Have you killed and also taken possession?"' And you shall say to him, 'Thus says the LORD: "In the place where dogs licked up the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick your own blood."'*

Both of them died as Elijah had said. Even so, notice God's mercy. When Ahab humbled himself, God delayed the disaster. He is merciful and gracious, even to Ahab. But the *consequences* still came.

* * *

Wounded Pride

Haman had been honored by the king above all the other officials. Everyone at the king's gate bowed down to him, except one man. Mordecai would not bow.

Haman went home and gathered his friends and his wife. He told them about his riches, his many sons, his promotion, and his invitation to the queen's private banquet.

> **Esther 5:13**
>
> *Yet all this is worth nothing to me, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate.*

Look at that. All this is worth nothing to me. One man's refusal to honor him poisoned everything he had. And his wounded pride grew into a plot to destroy not just Mordecai, but all of Mordecai's people. He built a gallows fifty cubits high.

They hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai.

Retaliation always comes back around. Jesus said it this way: "With the measure you use it will be measured to you."

* * *

Under a Show of Friendship

Joab was David's commander, loyal and capable. But twice, when another man was about to take his place, Joab took care of it. He took Abner aside at the gate "to speak with him privately," and stabbed him. Years later he greeted Amasa, "Is it well with you, my brother?" and took him by the beard to kiss him, with a sword in his other hand.

Treachery. Retaliation. Protecting his position, under a show of friendship.

When Solomon came to the throne, he gave the order. "The LORD will bring back his bloody deeds on his own head." Joab was executed at the altar he had run to for safety.

* * *

Lust Disguised as Love

One more story, and it is a painful one. Amnon, David's son, convinced himself he was in love with his half-sister Tamar. With a friend's crafty advice, he pretended to be sick and asked that she come and make him food. Then he forced himself upon her.

> **2 Samuel 13:15**
>
> *Then Amnon hated her with very great hatred, so that the hatred with which he hated her was greater than the love with which he had loved her. And Amnon said to her, "Get up! Go!"*

What he called love was only desire. Once it was satisfied, it turned to hatred, and he threw her out and bolted the door. Deception, abuse, shaming, rejection: the self using another person, then discarding her. Two years later Absalom had him killed.

It is the clearest picture in the Bible of the difference between agape love and selfish desire.

* * *

Resist Him

So what do we do with all of this? We start by recognizing whose voice it is.

There are three voices in our heads. Our own. The Enemy's. And God's still small voice. The Enemy's voice accuses. It accuses us before God, and it whispers accusations about others into our ears. "She did that on purpose." "He always does this." "They don't respect you." "You deserve better."

When I hear that voice, I have learned to stop and say, "Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior. Be gone." Not as an incantation. As a submission. And then I ask God, "What do *you* see in this person? Agreeing with you *for them*, what would you have me do or say?"

> **Ephesians 4:26-27**
>
> *Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil.*

Anger that we hold on to gives the devil an opportunity. A foothold. A place to work from. Every accusation I nurse is an open door.

The opposite of accusing is advocating. We will close this book with that. But for now, it is enough to say: "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy."

* * *

Alone With God

Sit with this

> **Zechariah 3:2**
>
> *And the LORD said to Satan, "The LORD rebuke you, O Satan! The LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is not this a brand plucked from the fire?"*

Search me

Father, here I am. Speak. I am listening.

Whom have I been accusing, out loud or in my head? Whose "refusal to bow" has poisoned everything else I have, the way Mordecai's refusal poisoned Haman's world? Where have I done the Accuser's work for him? Ask the Father what *he* sees when he looks at that person.

Continue in *conversational worship* (prayer) all day long.
1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

I will not do the Accuser's work.

Pray

> *Father, you rebuke the Accuser, and you clothe your people in clean garments. Forgive me for doing his work toward others. That I would recognize his voice when he whispers accusations in my ear. That I would not let the sun go down on my anger, nor give him any opportunity. That I would see others as you see them, brands plucked from the fire. And that, as I submit to you, the Adversary would flee. Amen.*

CHAPTER SEVEN

To the Third and Fourth Generation

In every story we have looked at so far, the selfish person died. Adam, Achan, Nabal, Judas, Ananias, Saul, Absalom, Haman, Ahab. Each of them reaped what they had sown.

But there is a harder truth in the Scriptures. Very often, the one who sows the selfishness is not the only one who reaps it.

> **Exodus 20:5-6**
>
> *You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.*

* * *

Abel

The first death in the Bible was not the death of a sinner. It was the death of a righteous man, killed by his brother's envy.

Cain lived. He was marked, and he wandered, and he built a city. But Abel died. Cain's selfishness took his brother's life.

That is what selfishness does. It always costs someone else something. Sometimes everything.

* * *

David's House

David was a man after God's own heart. I have written about that many times. And yet one season of selfishness in David's life cost more lives than almost any other story in Scripture.

He stayed home when the kings went out to battle. He saw Bathsheba from his roof. He took her. When she became pregnant, he tried to cover it up. When the cover-up failed, he had her husband Uriah, one of his most loyal men, killed in battle.

Nathan came to him with a story about a rich man who took a poor man's only lamb. David was furious. "The man who has done this deserves to die!" And Nathan said, "You are the man."

David confessed. And God forgave him, immediately.

> **2 Samuel 12:13-14**
>
> *David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD." And Nathan said to David, "The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die. Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the LORD, the child who is born to you shall die."*

Forgiven. And still, the *consequences* played out. The child died. Then, as Nathan had said, the sword did not depart from David's house. His son Amnon violated his daughter Tamar. His son Absalom killed Amnon. Absalom drove David from Jerusalem and was killed. His son Adonijah grabbed for the throne and was executed.

One season of "*Your* Self" cost Uriah, a baby, and three sons their lives.

* * *

The Children

When Herod the Great heard from the wise men that a king had been born in Bethlehem, he saw a threat to his throne. He did not know which child it was. So he killed them all, every boy in Bethlehem and the region around it, two years old and under.

> **Matthew 2:18**
>
> *"A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be comforted, because they are no more."*

Herod's selfishness, his desire to keep his position, was paid for by the children of Bethlehem.

I have come to believe that the Enemy's primary goal in this world is to harm children. If he can hurt them, through the selfishness of the adults around them, they will grow up blaming God. He is the Accuser, and he loves nothing more than to get children to accuse their Father in heaven for what the people around them did.

Jesus did not take this lightly.

> **Matthew 18:6**
>
> *but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.*

* * *

Knitted Together

Why would the Enemy aim at the children? I believe it is because of what they are.

Every child was knitted together in their mother's womb. Every child is fearfully and wonderfully made. God's eyes saw each one's unformed substance, and in his book were written every one of the days formed for them, before one of them came to be. "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you."

And every child comes into the world with something of God already placed in them: a trust, a longing, a sense of eternity. David said, "From my mother's womb you have been my God." Children believe easily. They trust easily. Jesus said that unless we turn and come to the Father like children, we will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

A child is God's *poiëma*, his workmanship, freshly made, with good works prepared for them to walk in. When the Adversary harms a child, he is defacing God's work of art. He is trying to teach them that the One they were born trusting cannot be trusted. And when our selfishness wounds a child, we are helping him do it.

So here is something every parent, grandparent, teacher and neighbor can do. Tell the children who they are. Read them Psalm 139. Say to them, "God knew you before you were born. He made you on purpose. He has good works prepared for you." A child who knows that is much harder for the Accuser to convince that God cannot be trusted. And help them understand what I have written in greater detail in my book *Life*, because sooner or later every child asks the hard question.

Why has he allowed so much evil and destruction to have a place to wreak its havoc? How could this good and gracious and loving God allow such a thing?

> *Before the beginning God had the choice of either giving us life or never giving us life. And if he never gave us life, those of us that would have chosen him for eternity would have never been given the chance. The opportunity for an abundant life and a loving relationship with him for all eternity would never have been more than a possibility that God himself chose not to allow. A better question, or maybe observation, would be: Would a good and gracious and loving God choose to never give us the chance?*

You might want to read that over again.

All need to have the chance *to choose*. Those who accept him and those who reject him are both described in this parable. God birthed good people, but the Enemy corrupts a portion.

> **Matthew 13:24-30**
>
> *He put another parable before them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field, but while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also. And the servants of the master of the house came and said to him, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds?' He said to them, 'An enemy has done this.' So the servants said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' But he said, 'No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up*

the wheat along with them. Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, "Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn."""

"An enemy has done this." That is what our children need to hear. The harm in this world did not come from the Father who knitted them together. It came from the Enemy, and from people who chose their own selves over him. God lets the wheat and the weeds grow together for now, so that not one stalk of wheat is lost. Every child is given the chance to choose him.

God is good. An enemy has done this. And *you* can choose *him*.

* * *

What We Pass On

This is where the third and fourth generation becomes personal. It is not only kings and murderers who pass their selfishness on.

The father who uses anger to control his family raises a son who uses anger to control his. The mother who goes silent to punish, raises a daughter who goes silent to punish. The parent who always has to be right raises a child who either always has to be right, or who never believes they could be.

We pass on the Relationship Busters. We learned them from someone, and we teach them to someone, usually without a word being said. Children learn from what they see, far more than from what they hear.

I have seen this in families in many countries. And I have seen something else too.

* * *

A Thousand Generations

God does not stop at the third and fourth generation. He goes on: "showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me."

The consequences of selfishness reach a few generations. The consequences of love reach a thousand.

That means the chain can be broken. One person, submitting their self to God, can turn a family line. The anger I inherited does not have to be the anger I pass on. The shaming I learned does not have to be the shaming my grandchildren grow up with. The addiction of my parent does not have to be an addiction I adopt. When God interrupts the pattern in me, he interrupts it in everyone who comes after me.

This is not something we do in our own strength. Ezekiel tells us that each person is responsible before God for their own choices. "The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not suffer for the iniquity of the father." Each generation can choose. And by his grace, each generation can choose differently.

* * *

Satan: Away! for Their Sake

So this is the last thing I want to say in Part One. When I tell Satan, "Away!" I am not only doing it for myself. I am doing it for my children. For my grandchildren. For people I will never meet, who will be shaped by what is passed on through me.

The Enemy wants to harm the children. God wants to bless them, to the thousandth generation. Whichever one of them I serve today, in how I speak and how I act, will be felt long after I am gone.

* * *

Alone With God

Sit with this

> **Exodus 20:6**
>
> *but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.*

Search me

Father, here I am. Speak. I am listening.

What did I inherit? Which of the Relationship Busters did I learn from the people who raised me? Which am I passing on to my children, my grandchildren, or the younger people around me? Ask him to show you one pattern, one link in the chain, that he wants to end with *you*.

Continue in *conversational worship* (prayer) all day long.
1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

It ends with me.

Pray

> *Father, you keep steadfast love for thousands. Thank you that the chain can be broken. That the patterns I inherited would end with me. That the children in my life would see you in me, and not the Accuser. That nothing I do would cause one of these little ones to stumble. And that your steadfast love would flow through my family to a thousand generations. Amen.*

Part Two: My Self

Turning the Mirror Around

CHAPTER EIGHT

Seeing, but Never Perceiving

We have spent seven chapters looking at other people. Adam and Eve. Cain. Achan. Saul. Absalom. Ahab and Jezebel. Haman. Judas.

It is easy to see the selfishness in them. That is why we started there. But if we stop there, we will have missed the whole point. Because the Pharisees could see the selfishness in everyone else too.

Now the mirror has to turn around.

* * *

The Heart, Not the Mind

I was asked recently in an interview about a passage I return to again and again. Jesus had just told the parable of the sower, and his talmidim asked him why he spoke to the crowds in parables.

> **Matthew 13:13-17**
>
> *This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. Indeed, in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says: """You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive." For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.' But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.*

The mind is not even mentioned here! The emphasis is on their *hearts*! In fact, it is their *minds*, their way of *thinking*, as they lean on their *own* understanding, that *closed* their eyes and ears!

Do you lean on your mind and *your way of thinking* like that, too?

* * *

Leaning on My Own Understanding

This is where the self hides best. Not in obvious greed or open rebellion, but in my own thinking. My own reasoning. My own certainty that I have figured it out.

> **Proverbs 3:5-6**
> *Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.*

The religious leaders of Jesus' day were the smartest people in Israel. They knew the Scriptures better than anyone. They had memorized whole books of the Bible as boys. And they looked straight at the Son of God and could not see him. Their *minds*, leaning on their own understanding, had closed their eyes.

It is still happening. We can know a great deal *about* Jesus and still not perceive what he is doing right in front of us. We can be right about everything and still be wrong in our *hearts*. We can win every argument and lose every relationship.

* * *

"Their Heart Has Grown Dull"

Jesus said their *heart* had grown dull. In Hebrew thinking, the heart, the *lev*, is not only the place of feeling. It is the center of the person: the will, the choices, the deepest loyalties.

A heart grows dull the same way a knife does. Slowly. With use. Every time I choose my own way over God's, every time I lean on my own understanding instead of trusting him, every time I nurse a resentment

or justify a Relationship Buster, my heart gets a little duller. A little harder to cut through.

And a dull heart closes the eyes and ears. I stop seeing what God is doing. I stop hearing his still small voice. I stop perceiving the needs of the people around me. I see only what serves my self.

Matthew 5:8

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

The pure in heart SEE God. Not only someday in heaven. Now. They see what the Father is doing, and they join him in it. Anger, judgment and the need to control cloud our vision. A pure heart sees clearly.

* * *

Balance

So where do we go with this? We do not throw away our minds. Jesus told us to love the Lord our God with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength. All four. In balance.

The problem is not that we have minds. The problem is that, for many of us, the mind has taken over. We have been taught to know the right answers, believe the right things, and figure everything out. Our hearts have been left behind.

Lord, give us balance, with our hearts after the Father, and our minds balanced by the mind of Christ, available to us.

1 Corinthians 2:16

"For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ.

* * *

Stop Trusting Your Mind to Figure Everything Out

Here is what I said in that interview, and I will say it to you now, as gently and as strongly as I can.

Stop trusting your mind to figure everything out! *You* are not that smart. Neither am I. But lean instead on the One who can help you see, perceive, hear and *understand with your heart*, and *you* will be participating with God himself for the benefit of those around you!

That is the turn from *Your Self* to *My Self*. It is not getting smarter. It is getting humbler. It is admitting that I cannot see clearly on my own, and asking him to open my eyes.

In a way, it is remembering. Long before my mind learned to figure things out, my heart leaned on him. "Upon you I have leaned from before my birth." To turn is to come back to the trust I started with.

* * *

Lead Us Not Into Temptation

Jesus taught us to pray, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

He is leading you away from the temptation to lean on your own understanding, to put yourself on the throne. He is leading you, so that you, and all of us, would be delivered from the evil *you* would do!

Notice how that prayer moves. It starts with me, but it does not end with me. When I am delivered from the evil I would do, *we* are delivered too: my family, my church, my neighbors, everyone who would have been hurt by it.

And notice where it all leads, in Jesus' words. "Understand with their heart and turn, and I would *heal them.*" See. Hear. Understand with the heart. Turn. Be healed. That we would help those around us to see and perceive and hear and understand with *their* hearts, that they might turn and be healed too.

* * *

Alone With God

Sit with this

> **Matthew 13:16**
> *But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear.*

Search me

Father, here I am. Speak. I am listening.

Where am I leaning on my own understanding? What have I been so sure about that I may not be seeing it clearly? Is there a person, or a situation, I have figured out in my mind, but never once asked you about? Don't think your way through this one. Just sit, and let him show you.

Continue in *conversational worship* (prayer) all day long.
1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Lord, open my eyes.

Pray

> *Father, I confess that I have trusted my own mind to figure everything out. My heart has grown dull, and I have not seen what you are doing. That you would help me to purify my heart, open my eyes to see and perceive what you are doing, and open my ears to hear. That I would understand with my heart, and turn, and be healed. That my heart would be after yours, and my mind balanced by the mind of Christ. And that I would help those around me to see, perceive, hear and understand with their hearts too. Amen.*

CHAPTER NINE

"Get Behind Me, Satan!"

Of all the times Jesus said "Satan: Away!" the most surprising is not in the wilderness. It is on the road, to one of his closest friends.

Peter had just made the great confession. "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus had blessed him for it. "Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven." It was one of the high points of Peter's life.

And then, minutes later, this.

> **Matthew 16:21-25**
>
> *From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you." But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man." Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."*

* * *

Through a Friend

Peter loved Jesus. He did not want him to suffer. What he said sounded like loyalty. It sounded like love.

But Jesus heard another voice behind it. The same voice he had heard in the wilderness, offering him the kingdoms of the world without the

cross. "Far be it from you, Lord!" was the same temptation: take the easy way. Protect yourself. Save your life.

This is one of the most important things I have learned about the Adversary. His voice does not always come through enemies. Sometimes it comes through people who love us. Sometimes it comes through people who mean well. And sometimes, more often than I like to admit, it comes through me.

* * *

The Things of Man

Look at how Jesus explained it. "You are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."

There it is again: *the mind*. Peter's mind was set on human things. Safety. Success. A Messiah who would win, not suffer. A kingdom with Peter near the top. It all made perfect sense, to the mind of man.

That is what makes the self so hard to see in My Self. When I set my mind on the things of man, my reasoning will always sound right to me. Of course I should protect myself. Of course I should get what I deserve. Of course I should avoid pain. Of course I should win this argument.

But the things of God often look like loss. A cross. An open hand. A lower seat. Forgiving someone who does not deserve it.

* * *

Deny Himself

Then Jesus said the words that this whole book turns on.

"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself."

Not deny himself certain things, like dessert during a fast. Deny *himself*. Say no to the self. Take it off the throne. Stop letting *it* make the decisions.

But I want to be careful here. Jesus is not asking me to deny the self God made, the self he knitted together in my mother's womb, the self

he knew before he formed me. He is not asking me to hate myself, or to become nobody. He is asking me to deny the self that has taken the throne. The grasping self. The false self that the Adversary keeps offering me in place of the one God made.

"And take up his cross and follow me." The cross was not a burden to carry around. It was the place where you died. Jesus was saying: the self has to die, every day, for you to follow me.

And then the promise. "Whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."

Will find it. The self I lose is the grasping self. The self I find is the one God knew before I was born, the one with good works already prepared for it. Denying myself is not the end of me. It is the way home to who he made me to be.

And then Jesus asked a question that every one of us has to answer.

> **Matthew 16:26**
>
> *For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?*

The whole world. That is what the Adversary offered Jesus on the mountain, and Jesus said, "Be gone, Satan!" Even the whole world is not worth a soul. It is not a life worth living if it costs me my eternal life.

Every person we met in Part One tried to save their life. Achan saved some silver. Saul saved his throne. Haman saved his pride. Judas saved thirty pieces of silver. All of them lost it. Jesus gave the same warning with just one name: "Remember Lot's wife. Whoever seeks to preserve his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will keep it."

* * *

My Self

This is why Part Two is called *My Self*. It is not enough to see the Adversary's voice in Peter. I have to learn to hear it in me.

When I hear myself saying, "Far be it from me to forgive her after what she did," I need to hear Jesus say, "Get behind me, Satan."

When I hear myself saying, "This shall never happen to me. I won't be humiliated like that," I need to hear him say it again.

When I hear myself giving someone else advice that would protect them from what God is doing in their life, because I am uncomfortable watching them suffer, I need to stop and ask whose voice that is.

When I hear myself rationalizing a Relationship Buster, "They deserved it," "Someone had to say it," "I was only being honest," I need to recognize that this is the mind of man, not the mind of God.

* * *

Peter's Story Did Not End There

Here is the hope. Jesus did not give up on Peter.

The same Peter who heard "Get behind me, Satan" would later deny Jesus three times. And Jesus would restore him three times, on a beach, over breakfast. "Do you love me? Feed my sheep."

And the same Peter, years later, would write these words to the churches:

> **1 Peter 5:6-9**
>
> *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,*

Peter knew what it was to be used by the Adversary's voice. He knew what it was to fail. And he learned how to humble himself, cast his anxieties on God, and resist.

So can I. So can you.

* * *

Alone With God

Sit with this

> **Matthew 16:24-25**
> *Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."*

Search me

Father, here I am. Speak. I am listening.

Where have I set my mind on the things of man rather than the things of God? Where have I been trying to save my life? Is there something I have said to someone I love, out of kindness, that may actually have been the Adversary's voice? Ask Jesus to show you, and listen for his tone. He corrected Peter firmly, and he never stopped loving him.

Continue in *conversational worship* (prayer) all day long.
1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

My eyes are on you, O God!

Pray

> *Lord Jesus, you said, "Get behind me, Satan," to a friend you loved. Say it to me when I need to hear it. That I would set my mind on the things of God and not the things of man. That I would deny myself, take up my cross daily, and follow you. That I would stop trying to save my life, and lose it for your sake, and find it. And that, like Peter, I would be restored every time I fail. Amen.*

CHAPTER TEN

Submit, Then Resist

If I could give you only one chapter of the Bible to read alongside this book, it would be James 4.

Most of us know verse 7. "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." But James 4 is much more than one verse. It is this whole book in a single chapter: *Your Self*, *My Self*, and *Our Selves*.

Read it slowly.

James 4:1-10

What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, "He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us"? But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

* * *

Where Fights Come From

James begins with a question every family, every church and every nation needs to answer. "What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you?"

And his answer is not what we expect. Not the other person. Not politics. Not money. Not even the devil. "Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?"

My fights with you begin as a war inside me. I want something. I don't get it. So I fight. I covet. I can't have it. So I quarrel. Even my prayers are about me. "You ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions."

That is *Your Self*, in three verses. And it is exactly where the Relationship Busters come from. Every Buster on that poster is a desire that has not gotten its way, turned outward against another person.

* * *

But He Gives More Grace

Then comes the turn. "But he gives more grace."

I love those five words. After everything James has just said, after the fighting and coveting and selfish praying, God does not give up on us. He gives more grace.

But notice who receives it. "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

The proud person is the one still sitting on the throne. God does not fight our pride by forcing us off. He simply opposes it, and lets it run into the consequences. The humble person is the one who has stepped down. And to that person, God gives grace upon grace.

* * *

Submit Yourselves Therefore

"Submit yourselves *therefore* to God."

That little word "therefore" matters. It ties submission to humility. Because God gives grace to the humble, therefore submit to him. Step down from the throne. Put yourself under his hand.

And only *then*: "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."

Submit, then resist. That is the order. I cannot resist the Adversary while I am still serving my self, because my self is exactly what he is using. As long as I am on the throne, he has a foothold. When I step down and God is on the throne, he has nothing to hold on to.

This is why "Satan: Away!" is not a magic phrase. I have heard people shout at the devil, rebuke him, bind him and command him, while they were still angry, still proud, still holding on to a grudge. Nothing happens. The words are just words. They have become an incantation with no power.

But when I humble myself before God and say quietly, "Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior. Be gone," something real happens. Not because of my words, but because of my submission to the One who has all power and authority. It is not me making Satan go away. It is God doing it, as I submit myself to him and say what he has for me to say.

* * *

Draw Near

"Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you."

This is the positive side of resisting the devil. It is not only pushing something away. It is moving toward Someone. And the promise is that he moves toward us too.

That is what *conversational worship* is. Drawing near. Talking with him throughout the day. Listening for his still small voice. "Father, here I am. Speak. I am listening." The closer I am to him, the more clearly I recognize the other voices for what they are.

* * *

Cleanse, Purify, Mourn

Then James gets very practical, and very uncomfortable. "Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep."

Hands are what I do. Hearts are what I want. Both need cleansing.

And "double-minded" describes so many of us. One part of me wants God. Another part still wants my own way. I want to follow Jesus, and I want to win this argument. I want to be humble, and I want to be noticed.

The answer is to mourn. "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." Not a gloomy religion, but an honest grief over what my self has done to God and to others. That grief is the doorway to comfort.

* * *

Humble Yourselves

And the chapter ends where it began: "Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you."

The self wants to exalt itself. Adonijah "exalted himself, saying, 'I will be king.'" James says: humble yourself, and let God do the exalting, in his time, in his way.

* * *

Do Not Speak Evil Against One Another

And then, the very next verse:

> **James 4:11**
> *Do not speak evil against one another, brothers. The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law.*

That is *Our Selves*. Once I have submitted to God and resisted the devil, the first thing that changes is how I speak about you. I stop doing the Accuser's work. I stop judging. I start building up.

So here is James 4, all in one breath. My passions cause our fights. God gives grace to the humble. Submit to him. Resist the devil. Draw near. Cleanse. Mourn. Humble yourself. And stop speaking evil against one another.

Your Self, My Self, Our Selves.

* * *

Alone With God

Sit with this

> **James 4:7-8**
> *Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.*

Search me

Father, here I am. Speak. I am listening.

Is there a quarrel in my life right now? What passion in me is at war, underneath it? Have I ever tried to resist the devil without first submitting to you? Where am I double-minded? Palms down: release your self to him. Palms up: receive his grace.

Continue in *conversational worship* (prayer) all day long.
1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

I submit first. Then I resist.

Pray

> *Father, you oppose the proud and give grace to the humble. I humble myself before you now. I submit myself to you. Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior. That every passion at war within me would come under your hand. That the Adversary would flee, because I am yours. That I would draw near to you all day long, and find you drawing near to me. And that I would not speak evil against my brothers and sisters, but build them up. Amen.*

CHAPTER ELEVEN

From Relationship Busters to Be-Attitudes

So far in Part Two we have turned the mirror around. We have seen how the mind leaning on its own understanding closes our eyes. We have heard Jesus say, "Get behind me, Satan," to a friend. We have learned to submit, then resist.

Now the question is: what replaces the self, once it steps down from the throne?

Paul answers that question in the same breath as he describes the problem.

> **Galatians 5:19-23**
>
> *Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.*

Two lists. The works of the flesh, and the fruit of the Spirit. The self, and the Spirit.

* * *

Three Posters

This is where three of the four posters I keep referring to come together.

The *Manipulate-to-Control Relationship Busters* poster is the works of the flesh in everyday language: Judgment, Anger, Accusation, Condemnation, Shaming, Demanding, Ultimatums, Intimidation, Threatening, Coercion, Retaliation, Abuse of Power, Going Silent, Pride, Give to Get, Lies, Deception, Self-Focus, Rigid Expectations, Rationalization, Rejection, Trickery, Covetousness, and things like these.

Every one of them is the self trying to get its way by controlling someone else.

The *Attitudes That Bless* poster shows the very attitudes that Jesus himself walked around in. That is why they are often called the Be-Attitudes. "I am gentle and lowly in heart," he said. Poor in spirit. Comforted when we mourn. Meek. Hungry and thirsty for righteousness. Merciful. Pure in heart. Peacemakers. Rejoicing even when persecuted.

The *Fruit of the Spirit* poster is what grows when the Spirit is at work in us: Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness and Perseverance, Gentleness, Self-Control.

Here is how they fit together. Walk in Jesus' attitudes. Monitor yourself for fruit of the Spirit results, in your language and in your actions. And never use manipulate-to-control strategies.

* * *

Put Off, Put On

Paul describes this as taking off old clothes and putting on new ones.

Colossians 3:8

But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth.

Colossians 3:12-14

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven

you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

You cannot just take off the old self and stand there. Something has to be put on in its place. If I only try to stop being angry, the anger finds another way out. But if I put on compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience, there is no room left for the anger.

* * *

A Replacement for Every Buster

In *Leading*, I wrote that for every manipulate-to-control strategy, there is a fruit of the Spirit replacement. I want to bring that list here, because this is where it belongs. It is what *My Self* looks like when the self has stepped down.

- Instead of accusing, judging and condemning to justify our demands, we inform with Gentleness.
- Instead of using blame, anger and malice to threaten and coerce, we encourage with Kindness.
- Instead of using shame and silence to subtly threaten abandonment, we explain with grace and in Peace.
- Instead of threatening vengeance, retaliation and retribution, we share in compassion and Goodness, describing with hope the joyful outcome available.
- Instead of lying and deceiving "for their own good," we train to produce Patience and Perseverance.
- Instead of abusing whatever power we think we have, we coach to develop Self-Control.

Notice that every replacement still deals with the situation. The fruit of the Spirit is not weakness. It does not pretend nothing is wrong. It informs. It encourages. It explains. It describes the outcome. It trains. It coaches. That is exactly what God does with us.

* * *

Love Does Not Insist on Its Own Way

If I had to put the opposite of the self into one phrase, it would be this one.

> **1 Corinthians 13:4-7**
>
> *Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.*

"It does not insist on its own way." That is the death of the self, in eight words.

Try reading 1 Corinthians 13 again, but put four words in front of every "love": selfless, sacrificing, forgiving, unconditional. "Selfless, sacrificing, forgiving, unconditional love is patient and kind." That is agape. It is the kind of love parents give their children, before their children are old enough to give it back. It is the kind of love Jesus gave us on the cross.

* * *

What Are Your Eyes Saying?

The Relationship Busters are not only words. On the poster, I ask: What are your eyes, face, body language, volume and tone saying? Are you trying to threaten and intimidate, or nurture and facilitate?

This is where the self is often most hidden. I can say all the right words with a raised voice, a hard face, or arms crossed, and every person in the room knows exactly what I mean. A sigh can be an accusation. A look can be a threat. Silence can be a punishment.

When the self steps down, the face changes too. The voice softens. The eyes look for what God is doing in the other person.

* * *

Spiritual Automation

People sometimes ask me whether this ever gets easier. It does.

When we first start practicing Jesus' attitudes, it takes effort. We have to stop, catch ourselves, and choose. But over time, the attitudes become automatic, like brushing your teeth. You don't have to think about it anymore.

I have been practicing this for three or four decades now. I still snap sometimes. But rarely. And when I do, I can see it much more quickly, own it, and make it right.

That is what Paul means by fruit. Fruit is not forced. It grows. And it grows naturally from a healthy root, which is the Holy Spirit's presence in us, as we stay connected to the Vine.

> **2 Corinthians 3:18**
>
> *And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.*

From one degree of glory to another. Not all at once. *More and more like him.*

* * *

What a Life Worth Living Feels Like

Look at the fruit of the Spirit again, slowly. Love. Joy. Peace. Patience. Kindness. Goodness. Faithfulness and Perseverance. Gentleness. Self-Control.

If someone asked you to describe a life worth living, could you do much better than that? A life full of love. Joy that does not depend on circumstances. Peace in the middle of the storm. Relationships marked by kindness and gentleness instead of fear.

That is what Jesus meant by abundant life. It is not *having* more. It is *being* more fully alive.

And now look at the Relationship Busters poster again. Anger. Accusation. Condemnation. Shaming. Intimidation. Retaliation. Lies. Is anyone's life made better by those? Not the person on the receiving end. And not the person using them, either. Every Buster steals life from both people.

Peter quotes a psalm that puts it plainly.

> **1 Peter 3:10-11**
> *For "Whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit; let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it.*

Whoever desires to love life. Do you want a life you can love? Peter says it starts with the tongue. Stop using your words to accuse and deceive. Seek peace. Pursue it. The Relationship Busters and the good life cannot live in the same house.

As I worked all over the world for many decades, I learned that every major religion agrees about this: if you will live the way Jesus taught, your life and the lives of those around you will be better. But Jesus did not only *teach* that way. He *is* The Way. And he gives his own life, by his Spirit, to all who follow him.

* * *

His Workmanship

Here is something that surprised me when I first saw it. The fruit of the Spirit is not God replacing me with someone else. It is God bringing out the person he made me to be.

"We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works." The Relationship Busters were never the real me. They were the self on the throne, defacing God's work of art. Gentleness, kindness, patience and self-control are not foreign to me. They are what I was made for.

So as I *become more and more like Jesus*, I also become more fully myself, the self God knit together and knew before I was born. The original and the copy *were always meant to look alike*.

* * *

Alone With God

Sit with this

> **Colossians 3:12**
> *Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience,*

Search me

Father, here I am. Speak. I am listening.

Look at the Relationship Busters poster, slowly. Which ones do I reach for first when I don't get my way? What are my face, my eyes and my tone saying, even when my words sound right? Which fruit of the Spirit would you have me put on in their place, this week? Let him choose one.

Continue in *conversational worship* (prayer) all day long.
1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Put off. Put on.

Pray

> *Holy Spirit, I cannot grow this fruit by myself. I need you. That I would put off anger, wrath, malice and slander, and put on compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience. That I would walk in Jesus' attitudes, until they become as natural to me as breathing. That I would never insist on my own way. That my face, my eyes and my tone would nurture and facilitate, and never threaten or intimidate. And that I would be transformed, more and more, into the image of Jesus. Amen.*

Part Three: Our Selves

The Self Given Up

CHAPTER TWELVE

"If I Perish, I Perish"

Part One was about the self that grasps. Part Two was about the self that steps down. Part Three is about what happens next: the self given up, for others and into the Family of God.

In Part One, we met many people who tried to save their lives and lost them. Now I want you to meet some who did the opposite.

The Bible is full of them. People who, when it came down to it, cared more about "us" than about "me." Some of them died for it. Some of them lived. All of them found life, just as Jesus promised.

> **Philippians 2:3-4**
> *Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.*

What strikes me most, as I read their stories, is how often they are set right beside someone from Part One. It is as though God put them there on purpose, as mirrors.

* * *

Jonathan and Saul

Saul clutched the kingdom so tightly that he spent his life hunting David. His son Jonathan, the crown prince, the one who should have been king, did the opposite.

> **1 Samuel 18:3-4**
> *Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul. And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was on him and gave it to David, and his armor, and even his sword and his bow and his belt.*

The robe. The armor. The sword. Everything that marked him as the heir, he gave away. Later, when David was hiding in the wilderness, Jonathan went to him and "strengthened his hand in God." "You shall be king over Israel," he said, "and I shall be next to you."

Same family. Same throne. One grasped it and died. One gave it away, and his name has been honored ever since.

* * *

Abigail and Nabal

Nabal said, "Shall I take my bread and my water and my meat and give it to men who come from I do not know where?" His wife Abigail heard about it, and without a word to him, she loaded donkeys with bread, wine, sheep, grain, raisins and figs, and rode out to meet David and his four hundred angry men.

> **1 Samuel 25:23-24**
>
> *When Abigail saw David, she hurried and got down from the donkey and fell before David on her face and bowed to the ground. She fell at his feet and said, "On me alone, my lord, be the guilt.*

On me alone be the guilt. She took her husband's sin on herself to save her whole household. And she kept David from shedding blood he would have regretted for the rest of his life. "Blessed be your discretion," David said, "and blessed be you."

A peacemaker. Gentle. Generous. The exact opposite of the man she was married to.

* * *

Judah, Transformed

Years before, Judah had been the brother who said, "What profit is it if we kill our brother? Come, let us sell him." And they sold Joseph for twenty pieces of silver.

Now, many years later, standing before the Egyptian governor who was secretly Joseph, Judah faced losing his youngest brother Benjamin. And the man who once sold one brother offered himself for another.

> **Genesis 44:33-34**
>
> *Now therefore, please let your servant remain instead of the boy as a servant to my lord, and let the boy go back with his brothers. For how can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me? I fear to see the evil that would find my father.*

That is what transformation looks like. Not a different person, but the same person, changed. Joseph could not hold himself back any longer, and wept so loudly that the whole house of Pharaoh heard it. And from Judah's line, the Messiah would come.

* * *

Moses

When Israel made the golden calf, God told Moses he would destroy them and make a great nation from Moses alone. It was the kind of offer the self dreams of. Moses turned it down.

> **Exodus 32:31-32**
>
> *So Moses returned to the LORD and said, "Alas, this people has sinned a great sin. They have made for themselves gods of gold. But now, if you will forgive their sin—but if not, please blot me out of your book that you have written."*

Blot me out. Take my name out of your book, instead of theirs.

* * *

Esther

Haman had built his gallows and written his decree. Esther was queen, safe in the palace. To go to the king without being summoned could mean death. Mordecai sent word to her. "And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

Esther 4:16

"Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my young women will also fast as you do. Then I will go to the king, though it is against the law, and if I perish, I perish."

Haman sought his own honor at others' expense. Esther risked her life for others. Same palace, same king. One was hanged. One saved her people.

* * *

Boaz and the Nearer Kinsman

Onan refused to raise children for his dead brother's widow, because they would not be his. In the book of Ruth, a nearer kinsman had the right to redeem Naomi's land and marry Ruth. He wanted the land. But when he heard about Ruth, he said, "I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I impair my own inheritance."

Boaz paid the cost. He redeemed the land and married the Moabite widow. And their great-grandson was King David. Their name is in the genealogy of Jesus.

* * *

Barnabas and Ananias

In Acts 4, just before Ananias and Sapphira kept back part of their money while pretending to give it all, Luke introduces us to someone else.

Acts 4:36-37

Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

He gave all of it. Later, when everyone in Jerusalem was afraid of Saul, Barnabas brought him to the apostles and vouched for him. When John

Mark failed, Barnabas gave him a second chance. A son of encouragement. The very opposite of an accuser.

* * *

The Poor Widow

Judas kept the moneybag and helped himself to what was put into it. But in the same temple where Judas would one day throw down his thirty pieces of silver, Jesus sat and watched the people put their money into the offering box. Many rich people put in large sums. Then a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins.

> **Mark 12:43-44**
>
> *And he called his disciples to him and said to them, "Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on."*

Everything she had. No one was watching but Jesus. She had no honor to gain, the way Ananias and Sapphira wanted honor. She simply trusted God with all she had to live on.

That is the open hand. "Blessed are the poor in spirit."

Stephen, and the One He Copied

As Stephen was being stoned, he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

Where did he learn that? From his Rabbi, who prayed on the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

Stephen was tracing over the original. And standing there, holding the coats of the men who threw the stones, was a young man named Saul, who would become Paul.

* * *

Whoever Loses His Life

Not everyone in this chapter lived longer because of what they did. Stephen died. Jesus died. But every one of them found life.

> **Matthew 16:25**
> *For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.*

That is the great reversal at the heart of this book. The self that grasps, loses. The self that gives, finds. Consequences play out for good as well as for harm. "The one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life."

And all of them were tracing over one original.

> **John 15:13**
> *Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.*

* * *

Alone With God

Sit with this

> **Philippians 2:3-4**
> *Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.*

Search me

Father, here I am. Speak. I am listening.

Which of these mirrors do I need to look into? Am I more like Saul or Jonathan? Nabal or Abigail? Ananias or Barnabas? Is there someone in my life right now whose interests you are asking me to put ahead of my own? Is there a robe you are asking me to take off and give away?

Continue in *conversational worship* (prayer) all day long.
1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

You first.

Pray

> *Lord Jesus, you laid down your life for your friends, and you call me friend. That I would count others more significant than myself. That I would look to their interests, and not only my own. That, like Jonathan, I would rejoice to see others lifted up. That, like Abigail, I would be a peacemaker. That, like Barnabas, I would encourage. And that, like Stephen, I would forgive, even those who hurt me most. Amen.*

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

"No One Said It Was His Own"

In the last chapter we met people who gave themselves for others, one at a time. Now we go one step further: the self given up into the Family of God.

This is the hardest part of the book to describe, because it is not something I can do alone. *Our Selves* only happens together.

> **Acts 4:32-35**
>
> *Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.*

* * *

One Heart and Soul

Read that first line again. "Of one heart and soul."

Not one opinion. Not one program. Not one personality. One heart and soul. They had become, in some real way, one self.

That is what Jesus prayed for on the night before he died.

> **John 17:20-21**
>
> *I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you,*

Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

That they may all be one, *just as* the Father and the Son are one. That is the standard. Not a church that gets along. A family that shares the very life of God.

* * *

"My" Becomes "Our"

Remember Nabal? "My bread, my water, my meat, my shearers."

In Acts 4, no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own. The word "my" had been replaced by "our." Not because anyone forced them. No one made them sell their land. Peter told Ananias plainly that his land had been his own to keep. They gave because they had been given a new heart. *Their* selves had been given up into something bigger.

And look at the result. "There was not a needy person among them." "Great grace was upon them all." Earlier, Luke tells us, "the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved."

When "my" becomes "our," God moves.

* * *

Every Joint Doing Its Part

Paul describes the Family of God as a body.

Ephesians 4:15-16

Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

Every joint. Each part working properly. No one is the whole body, and no part can say to another, "I have no need of you."

And every joint is different, because every one of us was knit together differently. Psalm 139 is not about a mold. It is "my inward parts," "my frame," "the days that were formed for me." God made each of us on purpose, for a particular place in the body. When I envy someone else's place, I am despising the way he made *me*. When I say to another part, "I have no need of you," I am despising the way he made *them*.

The self wants to be the whole body. Or at least the head. But Christ is the head. My job is to be the joint he made me to be, holding on to the parts around me, so that the whole body grows and builds itself up in love.

* * *

Priscilla and Aquila

Priscilla and Aquila were tentmakers. They took Paul into their home and worked alongside him. They opened their home to a church. When they heard a gifted young preacher named Apollos who did not yet understand everything, they did not correct him in public. They "took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately."

And at some point, Paul says, they "risked their necks for my life."

That is *Our Selves*. Home, work, money, safety, even their lives, all held open for the sake of others. No titles. No platform. Just two people whose "my" had become "our."

* * *

Epaphroditus

The church at Philippi sent Epaphroditus to bring a gift to Paul in prison and to care for him. While there, he became so sick that he nearly died. And what was he worried about? That the church back home would be upset to hear he was sick.

> **Philippians 2:29-30**
>
> *So receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honor such men, for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me.*

Honor such men, Paul says. Not the famous ones. The ones who risk themselves quietly, for others.

* * *

The Mirror of Babel

There is a counterfeit of *Our Selves*, and it is as old as Genesis.

> **Genesis 11:4**
> *Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth."*

Let us build ourselves. Let us make a name for ourselves. That is "we," but it is "we" without God. It is a whole group of people serving their collective self. Our name. Our tower. Our way to heaven.

It is possible for a church, a ministry, a family or a nation to be very united and still be Babel. Unity around our selves is not the unity Jesus prayed for. The question is not only "Are we together?" but "*Whose* name are we building upon? Is it *his* or *ours*?"

* * *

It Starts With One

I know it is easy to read Acts 4 and feel discouraged. Most of us have never seen anything like that.

But it never starts with a whole church. It starts with one person who stops saying "my." Then two. Then a handful. Jesus started with twelve or so. I have seen it happen in living rooms, in small groups of three to five, around kitchen tables, long before it ever shows up in a whole congregation.

You cannot *make* it happen. But you *can* be one who stops saying "my."

* * *

Alone With God

Sit with this

> **Acts 4:32**
> *Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common.*

Search me

Father, here I am. Speak. I am listening.

What do I still call "mine" that you may want to make "ours"? My home? My time? My money? My gifts? My opinions? Am I a joint holding others together, or a part trying to be the whole body? Where might I be building a name for myself, even in the Family of God?

Continue in *conversational worship* (prayer) all day long.
1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Not mine. Ours.

Pray

> *Father, Jesus prayed that we would be one, as you and he are one. That I would be part of the answer to his prayer. That "my" would become "our" in my heart. That I would be the joint you made me to be, holding on to those around me in love. That we would never build a name for ourselves, but only build with you. And that, among us, there would not be a needy person. Amen.*

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

"It Seemed Good to the Holy Spirit and to Us"

There is one more step beyond *Our Selves*. It is not only that we do things together. It is that we do things together *with God*.

> **1 Corinthians 3:9**
>
> *For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building.*

God's fellow workers. Not God's servants only. Not God's tools. Fellow workers. Creative earthly collaborators with the Creator of the universe.

* * *

The Council in Jerusalem

The early church faced its first great argument. Gentiles were coming to faith. Did they have to become Jews first? Be circumcised? Keep the law of Moses?

People felt strongly on both sides. There was "no small dissension and debate." So the apostles and elders came together. And look at how they handled it.

They talked. They disagreed openly. Peter told what God had done among the Gentiles in the house of Cornelius. Barnabas and Paul told of the signs and wonders God had done through them. James searched the Scriptures and found what the prophets had said. They listened to one another, and they listened to God.

And then they wrote a letter with one of the most remarkable sentences in the Bible.

Acts 15:28

For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements:

It seemed good to the Holy Spirit *and to us*.

Not "the leaders have decided." Not "the senior pastor has ruled." Not even only "God has said." The Holy Spirit and us. Together. That is what decision-making looks like when the self has stepped down.

When the churches received the letter, "they rejoiced because of its encouragement."

* * *

Discussion, Not Debate

This is why I keep writing about conversational learning.

Debates are about winners and losers. Discussion is about collective wisdom. In a debate, my self has to win. In a discussion, we are all searching together for what God is saying.

Iron sharpens iron. But when only one person is allowed to be the iron, relationships fail. The council in Jerusalem worked because everyone was allowed to speak, and everyone was willing to listen, and everyone was willing to be changed.

The self cannot do that. The self needs to be right. Only a people who have submitted their selves to God, and to one another, can say, "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us."

* * *

Our Part, God's Part

When I went through the Scriptures looking for the times when "we" did something "with" God, I noticed a pattern. In almost every story, there is our part, and there is God's part.

The priests carried the ark into the flooded Jordan. As soon as their feet touched the water, God stopped the river.

A boy gave five loaves and two fish. The disciples sat the people down and passed out the food. Jesus multiplied it, and they all ate and were satisfied.

The people at Lazarus' tomb rolled away the stone. Jesus called, "Lazarus, come out." Then the people unbound him.

Four friends carried a paralyzed man to Jesus and, when they could not get through the crowd, they dug through the roof. "When Jesus saw their faith," he forgave and healed their friend.

We do the possible. God does the impossible. We step into the water, roll away the stone, pass out the bread, carry our friend. And God does what only God can do.

* * *

Works Prepared Beforehand

> **Ephesians 2:10**
> *For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*

Read that verse again, and notice the words "we" and "beforehand."

God did not make us and then wonder what to do with us. Before Jeremiah was born, God had appointed him. Before one of David's days had come to be, every one of them was written in God's book. And before you and I arrived, God prepared good works for us to walk in. Not only for *each* of us, but for *us*, together.

When God spoke through Jeremiah to his people in exile, he said, "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope." Every "you" in that promise was plural. He was speaking to a whole people. The plans he has for us were always meant to be walked out together.

That changes how I see the needs around me. I do not have to invent my own works, or carry every need in the world on my shoulders. My part is to see what the Father has already prepared, and walk in it *with* him and with the people he has placed around me. With a pure heart, I

will SEE what the Father is doing, and *creatively collaborate* with him to *participate* with him in it, doing *my* part. That is why I keep asking, "Is this mine to do?" If it is, he prepared it beforehand, and he will be in it. If it is not, he has others he will send.

The self wants to write its own story. But the story was already being written, in his book, before I was born. The joy of *Our Selves* with God is finding out, together, what he has already prepared, and walking in it.

That is a life worth living. Luke describes what it looked like in the first days of the church: "And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people."

Glad and generous hearts. Not grasping hearts. Not anxious hearts. Glad ones. That is what happens when people stop living for themselves and start walking together, with God, in the works he prepared for them. Life becomes abundant. Not because they have more, but because they are finally living the life they were made for.

* * *

Nehemiah's Wall

When Nehemiah came to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, the city had been in ruins for well over a century. He gathered the people and said, "Let us rise up and build." And they did. Priests and goldsmiths, perfumers and merchants, rulers and their daughters. Each family rebuilt the section by their own house.

> **Nehemiah 4:6**
>
> *So we built the wall. And all the wall was joined together to half its height, for the people had a mind to work.*

When the enemies threatened them, half worked while half stood guard, and those who carried loads did their work with one hand and held a weapon in the other. In fifty-two days, the wall was finished.

Nehemiah 6:16

And when all our enemies heard of it, all the nations around us were afraid and fell greatly in their own esteem, for they perceived that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God.

Every family. Every section. Together. *With* God. Not *for* God.

* * *

Antioch

In the church at Antioch, there was a team of prophets and teachers from very different backgrounds: a Levite from Cyprus, a man named Simeon who was called Niger, a man from North Africa, a man who had grown up with Herod, and a former persecutor named Saul.

Acts 13:2-3

While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

They were not planning a strategy. They were worshiping and fasting, together, listening. And the Holy Spirit spoke. It was God who sent them. The church simply *recognized what he was doing* and released them.

That is what Jesus meant when he said, "The Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing." The pure in heart SEE what the Father is doing, and they join him in it. Together. *With*. Not *for*.

* * *

Not by Might

When the exiles returned to rebuild the temple, they laid the foundation and then stopped. For years. Opposition, discouragement and their own busyness got in the way.

Then God stirred them up, and spoke through the prophet Zechariah to Zerubbabel, their leader.

Zechariah 4:6

Then he said to me, "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts."

That is the heart of *Our Selves with* God. The work is ours. The power is his. Not by our might. Not by our power. Not by the strength of our collective self. By his Spirit.

* * *

Alone With God

Sit with this

Zechariah 4:6

Then he said to me, "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts."

Search me

Father, here I am. Speak. I am listening.

Where am I trying to do your part, by my own might and power *for* you? Where am I refusing to do my part, waiting for you to do everything? Who has God placed around me to do things *with*, and *with him*? In my decisions, could I honestly say, "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to *us*"?

Continue in *conversational worship* (prayer) all day long.
1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

***With* him. Not *for* him.**

Pray

Father, thank you that we are your fellow workers. That I would do my part, step into the water, roll away the stone, pass out the bread, and trust you to do yours. That, in our collective wisdom, our decisions would be made together, in conversation with you and with

one another. That I would see what you are doing, and join you in it. And that everything we build would be not by might, nor by power, but by your Spirit. Amen.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

The Adversary and the Advocate

We began this book with a word: *satan*. Adversary. Accuser. One who opposes.

I want to end it with another word.

> **1 John 2:1**
> *My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.*

The Adversary accuses. The Advocate pleads for us.

* * *

Two Voices in the Courtroom

Remember the courtroom in Zechariah's vision? Joshua the high priest stood there in filthy clothes, and Satan stood at his right hand to accuse him.

The Accuser was not lying about the clothes. They really were filthy. That is what makes accusation so powerful. It is often based on something true.

But there was another voice in that courtroom. "The LORD rebuke you, O Satan! Is not this a brand plucked from the fire?" And the filthy garments came off, and clean ones went on.

Paul saw the same courtroom.

> **Romans 8:33-34**
> *Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.*

Interceding. Pleading. Advocating. That is what Jesus is doing right now, at the right hand of the Father, for *you*.

> **Hebrews 7:25**
>
> *Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.*

He always lives to make intercession. Day and night, the Accuser accuses. Day and night, the Advocate intercedes. And the Advocate wins.

The Accuser says, "Look at you. Look at what you have done." The One who formed you says, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you. I knitted you together. I wrote your days in my book. I prepared good works for you." The Accuser speaks about your filthy garments. Your Maker speaks about his workmanship. And he is the one who gets the last word.

* * *

Another Helper

Jesus also promised that he would not leave us alone.

> **John 14:16**
>
> *And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever,*

The word for "Helper" is *paraclete*: one called alongside. Comforter. Counselor. Advocate. The Holy Spirit is not only in heaven pleading for us. He is right here, alongside us, every moment.

So we have an Advocate with the Father, and an Advocate within us. And we have an Adversary who prowls around like a roaring lion.

* * *

Who Will We ***Be*** to Each Other?

Now here is the question this whole book has been leading to.

If the Adversary accuses, and the Advocate pleads, which one am I to the people around me?

When my wife disappoints me. When my child disobeys. When a fellow believer hurts me. When someone at church does it wrong, again. When a leader fails. When someone votes differently than I do. Am I standing at their right hand to accuse them? Or am I standing beside them to plead for them?

Every time I judge, accuse, condemn, shame or oppose to get my way, I am doing the Adversary's work. I am "satan-ing." I am saying to my self, maybe without even meaning to, "Satan away."

And every time I inform with gentleness, encourage with kindness, explain with grace, pray for them, speak well of them, and stand with them, I am doing the Advocate's work. I am *becoming more and more like Jesus*, who is *always* interceding.

* * *

The Ministry of the Advocate

So what does it look like to be an advocate instead of an adversary?

It looks like asking and agreeing with the Father for the benefit of the people who hurt us. Jesus told us to join *with him* in conversational worship *for* our enemies and those who persecute us. You cannot accuse someone and pray for them at the same time for very long. One of them will win.

It looks like speaking about people as though they were in the room. "Do not speak evil against one another."

It looks like assuming the best. "Love believes all things, hopes all things."

It looks like going to someone directly, gently, privately, instead of talking about them to others.

It looks like receiving correction, and saying "thank you," instead of turning the tables.

It looks like Barnabas, bringing the man everyone was afraid of to the apostles, and saying, "Let me tell you what God has done in him."

It looks like Stephen. "Lord, do not hold this sin against them."

* * *

Adversary or Advocate?

So here is the question this whole book has been asking, in its sharpest form.

Will I "Just Satan away"? Keep accusing, keep opposing, keep grasping, keep putting my self first, and let the consequences play out, in my life and in my children's lives, to the third and fourth generation?

Or will I submit myself to God, and tell Satan, "Away!"? And then turn to the people around me and *become more and more like Jesus*, by the power of the Holy Spirit: an *advocate* rather than an adversary?

* * *

Alone With God

Sit with this

> **Romans 8:34**
> *Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.*

Search me

Father, here I am. Speak. I am listening.

First, receive it for yourself. Jesus is interceding for you, right now. That the Accuser's voice be silent. Then ask: To whom have I been an adversary? Who needs me to become their advocate? Ask him for one name, and one way to begin.

Continue in *conversational worship* (prayer) all day long.
1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Today I will be an advocate.

Pray

Lord Jesus, thank you that you continually make intercession for me. When the Accuser speaks, that I would hear your voice instead. Holy Spirit, my Helper, stay alongside me, in me, and whisper what I need to hear. That I would never again do the Adversary's work toward the people you love. That I would become an advocate: praying for them, speaking well of them, standing with them, and pleading their case before the Father. And that I would become, more and more, like you. Amen.

Conclusion:
Satan, Away!

This is not a decision you make once.

I wish it were. I wish I could tell you that if you pray the right prayer today, the self will never climb back onto the throne. But that has not been my experience, and I do not think it was Paul's either. "I die every day," he said.

The self is persistent. The Adversary is patient. Every morning, the throne is there, and something in me wants to sit on it.

So every morning, I choose again.

* * *

Every Morning

Here is what that looks like for me.

Before the phone, before the news, before the day's list starts talking to me, I submit myself to God. "Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior. You formed me, and you know this day. It was written in your book before it came to be. You have prepared good works for me to walk in today, and you know the plans you have for us. Order my steps today. BE my thoughts, my needs, my words and my deeds."

If I notice the old voice already whispering, an accusation about someone, a resentment from yesterday, a craving for more, I say it quietly: "Satan, away." Not as an incantation. As a submission. And then I draw near to God, and he draws near to me.

Then, through the day, I watch. Not with anxiety, but with an attentive spirit. Are my words producing fruit of the Spirit results, or pressure? Is my face nurturing and facilitating, or threatening and intimidating? Am I

SEEING what the Father is doing in the people around me, or only what they are doing to me?

When I snap, and I still do sometimes, I try to see it quickly, own it, and make it right. Usually that means going back to someone and saying, "I am sorry. I was wrong. Will you forgive me?" There is no shame in that. It is what talmidim do.

* * *

Watching for Growth

The fourth poster, True Talmidim Will Evidence, is how I watch for growth over time. Not to judge myself, and certainly not to judge others, but to see whether I am *becoming* more and more like Jesus.

Read through it slowly. Hearts after the Father, in Jesus' attitudes. Fruit of the Spirit language and actions. The unity of John 17. Knowing God's voice and following him. Only saying and doing what the Father gives me to say and do. The elimination of anger, judgment, condemnation, hierarchy and manipulate-to-control behaviors from my life.

That last one is the whole of this book. It does not happen overnight. It happens from one degree of glory to another. But it does happen. I have seen it in my own life, and in the lives of many people I have walked with. It is the evidence that the self is losing its grip, and the Spirit is gaining ground.

* * *

Are You Addicted to Self?

I sometimes ask people, "Are you addicted to self?"

Most of us are. And like any addiction, it is beaten one day at a time. Not by willpower, but by surrender. By admitting I cannot do this on my own, turning my life over to God, and doing the next right thing *with him* today.

The good news is that you do not have to win tomorrow's battle today. You only have to submit yourself to God this morning. And then again

this afternoon. And then again tonight. Eventually, you will realize that you are in conversational worship all day long. As Paul said, unceasingly.

* * *

A Life Worth Living

We started this book with a question: what makes a life worth living?

The self says: more. Solomon tried more, and found wind. The 25 people of Part One tried more, and found death. The thief always promises a better life, and always steals the one we have.

Jesus says something else. On the night before he died, he told his Father what life really is.

> **John 17:3**
>
> *And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.*

Eternal life is not only a long life, it is a *kind* of life. It is knowing God. And remember: he knew you first. Before he formed you in the womb, he knew you. In some way, you have been longing to know him more deeply ever since. That longing is not a weakness. It is the deepest thing in you. It is the self God made, calling you home. So live your life in The Way Jesus described and showed us as an example, a *hupogrammos*, so that we *more and more become* copies of the original. *More and more* in the attitudes of Jesus. *More and more* producing fruit of the Spirit.

So here is what I have come to believe, after more than 40 years of walking with God and with his people in many countries. The life worth living is not the one where I get my way. It is the one where I know him, and walk with him, and do the good works he prepared for me, together with the people he has placed around me. It is the life of love, joy and peace. It is a life of glad and generous hearts. It is abundant life, and it begins now.

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. Jesus came that we may have life, and have it abundantly.

Choose life.

* * *

The Road Ahead

So here is where I will leave you.

Look back at Part One once in a while. Not to condemn yourself, but to remember where the road of *Your Self* always leads. Achan. Saul. Haman. Judas. They are there to warn you, and God informs before the consequences come.

Live in Part Two. *My Self.* Every day, turn the mirror around. See your own heart. Submit, then resist. Put off the Relationship Busters, and *more and more* put on Jesus' attitudes and *more and more* produce fruit of the Spirit.

And reach for Part Three. *Our Selves.* Find twelve or so, or three to five, or even just one who will join you in living it out *together.* Stop saying "my." Become an advocate instead of an adversary. And do things together, *with* God. Not *for* God. There's a big difference. We are one with him. He is the Vine; we are the branches. We can do nothing worthwhile without him. Working *for* him is under *our* power. Working *with* him is under *his.*

God or Not God. Love or Not Love.

You choose. He will not force you. He never has. He has only told you the truth, and shown you, in Jesus, what love looks like.

Satan, away!

* * *

Alone With God

Sit with this

> **Galatians 2:20**
>
> *I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*

Search me

Father, here I am. Speak. I am listening.

Take a few extra minutes this time. Ask him what he has been saying to you through this book. Which chapter does he want you to come back to? Which Relationship Buster is he asking you to lay down? Which person is he asking you to advocate for? Write down what you hear, and keep it where you will see it.

Continue in *conversational worship* (prayer) all day long.
1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Satan, away!

Pray

> *Father, crucified with Christ, the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. Strengthening me, that I choose you every morning, and every hour. That in conversational worship, I submit myself to you unceasingly, and that the Adversary flee. That the Relationship Busters be eliminated from my life, one by one, and Jesus' attitudes take their place more and more. That I become, more and more and more, like Jesus. That I live an abundant life in your Family, as we do your will together. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Satan, away! Amen.*

Appendix: The Four Posters

These four posters belong together. The first three show us how to speak and act toward one another: in Jesus' attitudes, with fruit of the Spirit results, and never with manipulate-to-control strategies. The fourth helps us monitor our growth in *becoming* more and more like Jesus. All four are formatted for printing and are available free for viewing and download at OneKingdomWorldwide.org. Keep all four on your phone, so you can review them daily or weekly, alone with God, wherever you are. Like a familiar passage of Scripture, they will keep showing you something new.

1. Jesus' Attitudes: Attitudes That Bless (Matthew 5:2-12)

- Be poor in spirit. Be humble. Don't think so much about yourself.
- When you mourn, be comforted by the big picture: why you are here, that life is short, and that eternity with God awaits.
- Be meek. Gentleness as a way of life.
- Hunger and thirst for righteousness. Pray as Jesus taught us: give us justice against our adversaries, O God, and send your laborers to them that they repent and come into right relationship with you.
- Be merciful, and receive mercy.
- Be pure in heart. Overcome the temptations of anger, and SEE God. See, perceive, hear, and understand with your heart – that we be healed.
- Be a peacemaker, child of God.
- When you are persecuted for righteousness' sake, rejoice and be glad. Jesus said, "Take heart; I have overcome the world." Eternity awaits.

2. The Fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23)

Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness and Perseverance, Gentleness, Self-Control

Monitor yourself for fruit of the Spirit results, in language and in actions.

3. Manipulate-to-Control Relationship Busters

Judgment, Anger, Accusation, Condemnation, Shaming, Demanding, Ultimatums, Intimidation, Threatening, Coercion, Retaliation, Abuse of Power, Going Silent, Pride, Give to Get, Lies, Deception, Self-Focus, Rigid Expectations, Rationalization, Rejection, Trickery, Covetousness, and things like these.

What are your eyes, face, body language, volume and tone saying? Are you trying to threaten and intimidate, or nurture and facilitate?

4. True Talmidim Will Evidence

- Dominion over the earth, but not over people. (Genesis 1:26-30; 1 Samuel 8:4-22; Mark 10:42-45)
- The Ten Commandments. (Exodus 20:3-17)
- Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, your neighbor as yourself, and one another as I have loved you. (Mark 12:30-31; John 13:34-35)
- Love active in service. (John 12:26; Mark 9:35; Mark 10:45; Galatians 5:13)
- Hearts after the Father in attitudes consistent with the Beatitudes: Jesus' attitudes. (Matthew 5:2-12)
- Fruit of the Spirit language and actions. (Galatians 5:22-24)
- The unity, character and attributes of John 17.
- Knowing God's voice and following him. (John 10:27)
- Creative collaboration and participation in accomplishing the will of the Father. (Genesis 2:19-20; 1 Kings 22:19-23; Mark 6:34-44)

- Only saying and doing what the Father gives them to say and do. (John 5:19; John 12:49-50; John 14:10)
- The elimination of anger, judgment, condemnation, hierarchy and manipulate-to-control behaviors from their lives. (Romans 1:28-32; Colossians 3:1-17; Galatians 5:13-26)
- The overcoming of the temptations and desires of the flesh, their sacrifice nothing compared to Jesus' sacrifice on our behalf. (Colossians 3:1-17; Ephesians 5:1-21; 1 John 2:3-6)
- Becoming mature and effective laborers more and more: the twelve, the seventy and the five hundred.

If you have questions, concerns or would like help, please contact One Kingdom Worldwide at OneKingdomWorldwide.org. Everything is free. You'll be glad you did.

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OneKingdomWorldwide.org
October 2026

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Returning the Church to the Way Jesus Left It

Gravitas

Reimagining the Sunday Lecture Model
Restoring Jesus' Conversational Model

Life

Living The Good Life God Offers Us
(Revealing The Deception As Old As Time Itself)

Love

"Lord, teach us how to pray."
Contemplations on the Prayers Jesus Taught Us

Leading

Uniting God's People to More Productive Service

Be a Part of the Solution

How to Start a Community Service and Support Network in Your Town or City

No More Sheep Holding Pens

3 Years and Out!

Satan Away

Your Self, My Self or Our Selves