



Identity Wars

A Journey in Finding True Personal Value

ADRIAN EBENS

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Adrian Ebens, 2021

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This book is dedicated to

My dear father Abel,
who taught me to stand tall,
always be honest,
finish what you start,
and never tolerate injustice

My dear mother Evelyn,
who taught me to keep dreaming,
be creative, love nature,
and be generous

My dear sister Karen,
who shared the journey of
childhood with me and often
used her quick wit to
make me laugh

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SECTION 1
THE TWO
KINGDOMS
—
IDENTITY LOST

CHAPTER 1

The Duracell Tree

The room was dimly lit. On one of the walls there were a number of posters, a picture of a pop musician and another of a sportsman that had often served as windows into a longed-for reality. Along another wall there was a desk with a few school books on it, but the central feature of this desk was the small yet powerful stereo system. Indeed this was the room of a teenager which showed all the signs of ambition, turbulence and yes, dreaming.

An immense battle was raging in my heart, a battle of destiny, a moment of truth. “I never thought I would do something like that,” I muttered as I stared at the floor. My self-concept was being severely tested. So intense was the battle that I sought comfort from the posters which had helped me so many times before to divert my mind from the harvest I was now reaping.

The air was filled with a sense of desperation. My mind was grasping for tokens that would stabilise my disturbed state: academic, athletic, articulate were some of the tokens I grasped for, but they now seemed powerless to help me. A sickening cloud descended upon me and started to squeeze out my sense of ambition. It kicked open the prized places of the heart and stole

their treasures, and then it made for the most sacred chamber of all—hope.

I had spoken to my mother in a way I promised myself I never would. This was the final straw that made me realise that I was not the person I wanted to be. I did not like myself, and I wanted to change, but it seemed hopeless.



Depression. Depression is the single greatest curse afflicting our society today. The World Health Organisation states:

Depression is the leading cause of ill health and disability world-wide. More than 300 million people are now living with depression, an increase of more than 18% between 2005 and 2015.¹

Try to grasp the enormity of this problem in the following statistics from 2011:

- 1 million suicides every year. One death every 40 seconds or 3000 per day.
- For each individual who takes his/her own life, at least 20 attempt to do so. That is 60,000 per day.
- Worldwide, the suicide rate has gone up by 60% over the last five decades—mainly in industrialized nations.
- 60% of all suicides occur in Asia. China, India and Japan account for about 40% of all suicides, according to WHO.²

What on earth is going on? What is so depressing about life that millions of people are choosing to die rather than face another day?

In his book *The Mind Game*, Phillip Day gives this very revealing statement:

In times gone by, caring family members gathered around and gave the depressed relative the assurance and attention to talk things through. ... Today, with the fracturing of the family unit, the denigration of religion, and the separation of many families from each other with the hectic pace of 21st century life,

¹ http://www.who.int/mental_health/management/depression/en/

² <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/234219.php>

psychoanalysis has simply taken over the task of counselling that used to be carried out by caring relatives or the neighbourhood minister. I strongly believe that this has had a deleterious effect on our society.³

Phillip Day lists three factors: The fracturing of the family unit; The denigration of religion; The separation of many families from each other due to the hectic pace of 21st century life. The pivotal factor is the fracturing of the family unit. David Van Biema commenting on this subject said the following:

A generation unlike any other has come of age, one in which millions have been marked by a profound and early sorrow. They are the children of divorce. They are just the front rank of a seemingly endless phalanx.⁴

Jim Conway in his book *Adult Children of Legal and Emotional Divorce* describes in vivid detail the pain and loss suffered by thousands who have suffered the effects of a fractured family either legally or emotionally. One of the key attributes he describes is insecurity and the constant questions of “Who am I?” and “Am I worth being loved?”⁵

These questions drive to the very source of the human dilemma – a sense of significance. Does anyone really care about me? Am I worth anything? How did these questions come to embed themselves in the human psyche? To answer that question we need to go back to the beginning.

Suddenly Eve found herself staring at the forbidden tree. “Why has God forbidden us to eat from this tree?” she wondered. The fruit looked so inviting, beckoning her forward. Suddenly she heard a voice coming from the tree. Satan, seeing his opportunity, tempts her through the medium of a serpent; “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’”⁶ Satan is both enticing Eve to debate and placing doubt in her mind about the literalness of God’s Word. In the realm of debate and logic, Eve is no match

³ Phillip Day, Introduction— <http://www.campaignfortruth.com/Eclub/100702/depressionandsuicide.htm>

⁴ David Van Biema, “Learning to Live with a Past that Failed,” *People*, May 29, 1989, p 79.

⁵ Jim Conway, *Adult Children of Legal or Emotional Divorce*, (Monarch Publications, 1990) p 53.

⁶ Genesis 3:1

for Satan. Add to this the unfamiliar weapons of deceit and darkness, and the contest will be devastatingly short should Eve signal her willingness to engage by opening her mouth.

“We may eat of the fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’”⁷ Eve accepts the challenge by repeating the words that God had spoken, but she is now deeply in trouble. Her own curiosity, combined with the opening challenge of Satan, left her unprepared for his following jaw dropping statement, “You will not surely die.”⁸

The concept that Satan introduced to Eve contained the seed of the curse that now plagues all of the children of Adam—the struggle for significance.

Have you ever been in a conversation with someone in the context of ‘friendly’ debate and you’re feeling relatively in control of the situation until your opponent drops something on you from ‘left field’? Something you had never anticipated, something that throws a spanner into those finely oiled cogs whirring around in your mind and grinds them to a halt? Not that what they said was anything deeply profound or enlightening, but

you never expected it to come from them. The possibility of their uttering such words so boldly and so blatantly had never occurred to you.

Satan, seeing that he has immobilised his prey now with devastating precision drives home his winning blow. “...For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”⁹

These few verses can be like passing through a small country town; blink and you’ll miss them. The concept that Satan introduced to Eve contained the seed of the curse that now plagues all of the children of Adam—the struggle for significance. A concept that sounds so liberating provides the very substance of the chains that enslave the human soul in misery and

⁷ Genesis 3:2,3

⁸ Genesis 3:4

⁹ Genesis 3:5

darkness. Sound like a bit of a stretch? Stay with me as we unpack this concept “You shall not surely die,” and look at its fruit and its role in causing the nagging questions, “Does anyone care about me?” and “Am I worth being loved?”

I remember when I was about eight years of age, my sister had received a doll that would cry and laugh and even drink milk. All you had to do was place a couple of batteries in its back and away it went. It provided hours of entertainment for my sister. I wanted to feed it to the dog because the crying became really annoying after a while, but thought better of it because I didn’t want to hear my sister cry for an hour. This baby had life by simply putting two batteries in its back, and this is precisely the idea that Satan was trying to get across to Eve. Eve, you don’t need to worry about what anyone else says, you have life in yourself. You can do as you please and you will suffer no harm because you have life in yourself. You will not surely die, and as long as you come back here to this tree to recharge your batteries you will be fine.

Could you imagine an 18 month old baby saying to its parents, “I think I can make it on my own now, I was just talking to the garden gnome in the backyard and he says that I have power inside of me that will keep me alive and provide all my needs, so thanks for all your help, and maybe we’ll catch up some day.” This is exactly what happened to Adam and Eve in the garden. This concept *you shall not surely die* had ruptured their sense of total dependence on their heavenly Father. It attacked the very foundations of who they were as individuals. It confused their sense of identity and consequently their value as God’s children. Why couldn’t Adam and Eve simply realise their mistake and return to a position of total dependence on their heavenly Father? I wish it were that simple, but the consequences of embracing the concept that *you shall not surely die* because you have power in yourself, even for a second, has the instantaneous effect of preventing you from ever returning to that original blissful state of communion with God. We will talk more about this later on, but first, let’s go back to that fateful tree.

Notice Satan's suggestion that when they ate this fruit, somehow their eyes would be opened to a higher state of existence. The inference here is not only that you have power within yourself, but that the material universe contains powerful objects, that once you possess, can make you even more powerful. Welcome to the material world.

In Genesis 3:4,5, Satan is in full scale evangelistic mode to win converts to his new utopian kingdom. He offered a kingdom that promised power and satisfaction to all that would embrace it. This kingdom is based on two core principles:

1. You have life in yourself making you totally independent of any external benefactor or authority
2. Our environment contains people, objects and things that, if possessed or associated with, can make us more powerful, more enlightened and more fulfilled in life.

Through this tree of knowledge, Satan was offering a battery powered existence; a life without the need for any external benefactor or authority, hence the title of this chapter—The Duracell Tree. Satan would tell us that the cells of our bodies will remain ever durable if we follow his philosophy on life.

It is important to remember that when Adam and Eve ate the fruit of the tree, there was no inherent poison in it that made them afraid, sinful and rebellious. The Bible tells us that the fruit was good for food.¹⁰ The poison was the words that Satan spoke to Eve. The poison is the principles of his kingdom. Some people raise the question, "Why do I have to suffer when Adam and Eve ate

the fruit? I didn't eat from that tree." The truth is that every time we act independently of God, we eat of that tree in exactly the same way that Adam and Eve did because we have swallowed the poison of Satan's kingdom. In

¹⁰ Genesis 3:6

fact, we will learn that we actually eat from this tree every day and we are suffering horrible indigestion as a result.

The idea that we could live apart from God may not seem that strange to many people, but in the next chapter we will learn that this type of thinking is suicidal.

CHAPTER 2

The Fountain of Life

It had been a long day at work. We were in the final stages of preparing a budget—actually about ninety budgets that had to be merged into one. It was a delicate process, carving up the available income amongst all the ambitious managers; each wanting, hoping, even demanding a bigger slice of the pie to achieve their goals. My mind was trying in vain to push all these figures out of my head when suddenly the phone rang. “Hello... It’s Dad, son.” Dad sounded like he had the Empire State Building on his shoulders. “What’s up Dad?” “Mum’s been in a serious car accident.” Those words hit me like a sledge hammer. I immediately began to shake and my heart rate literally doubled in a flash. My muscles went taut as an adrenaline rush took over my body. “Accident?” I almost whispered into the phone trying to hold it steady. “How serious?” “It’s pretty serious son.”

At that moment I wished I could have jumped through that phone and just held onto my Dad, but he was 12 hours away by road and I would have to wait till morning to catch a plane. When I hung up the phone, my mind was spinning—shock, fear and numbness all hit me at once. Right then I remembered Jesus and I just sunk to my knees and I cried out “Oh Jesus—please don’t let her die.” I opened my Bible and I just prayed and

prayed until a sense of calm came over me and I felt almost peaceful. My mind then wandered to the mundane things of life until it would hit me again; fear, helplessness and shock. Repeatedly I went to my knees and just prayed and held onto Jesus.

Mum had been travelling on her way to teach a music lesson. She was on a double lane highway with a ten meter garden strip between the two roads. She was just passing another car as she went over a crest and that is all she remembers. A car coming the other way had lost control and crossed the ten meter gap between the two roads and hit my Mum head on. The force of the impact pushed the engine of Mum’s car through the firewall, at the same time thrusting the steering wheel straight into her face. For some unknown reason, at that moment the seat broke, and I am so thankful it did otherwise she would have died instantly. When they got her to hospital, she had broken arms, legs and the whole left side of her face had disintegrated.

As my mother was carried into the hospital, there was a doctor who had just about finished his shift. When he saw my mother, he instantly went to work. He fought for eight hours to save her life, and finally after many tense moments she became stable. I really can’t find the words to thank that doctor; even now it brings me to tears. That man worked for 16 hours straight and then had the thoughtfulness to ring my father at 3am to let him know that Mum was critical but stable. I am still immensely grateful to him, a shining example of the skill, strength and kindness of the medical profession.

A few days later my wife and I were in the intensive care ward with Mum. I was just so happy to see her alive. The doctors were amazed at the rate of her recovery. We were told that she would never play the piano again and may not even walk again. It was a hard blow, but she was still with us, and I was thankful. Lorelle was looking at the medical diary entries for Mum and beckoned me to come over. It showed a clear point where they thought they were going to lose Mum, and then all of a sudden all her vital signs rallied and she stabilised. There was no account of how this happened, but I knew that my Father, the source of life, had sent His Son to sustain her.

I am so thankful for the life-giving power of Jesus. Today, Mum is walking and sometimes when she plays the piano, I feel a deep sense of gratitude to

Jesus for saving my mother from certain death.

When it comes to understanding the source of life, the Bible leaves us with no doubts. We read the following about Jesus in Colossians:

For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and

for Him. And He is before all things, **and in Him all things consist.** —Colossians 1:16,17

Everything that we can see or perceive, and even things we can't see, were created and are now sustained by Jesus Christ.¹¹ Notice carefully the wording of the final sentence. And *in Him* all things consist. The text clearly tells us that the life force that comes forth from the Son of God holds the whole universe together. Paul puts it another way in the book of Acts:

He is the God who made the world and everything in it. Since He is Lord of heaven and earth, He doesn't live in man-made temples, and human hands can't serve His needs—for He has no needs. **He Himself gives life and breath to everything, and He satisfies every need.** From one man He created all the nations throughout the whole earth. **He decided beforehand when they should rise and fall, and He determined their boundaries.** His purpose was for the nations to seek after God and perhaps feel their way toward Him and find Him—though **He is not far from any one of us. For in Him we live and move and exist.** As some of your own poets have said, 'We are His offspring.' —Acts 17:24–28 NLT

¹¹ "For all things come from You, and of Your own we have given You." 1 Chronicles 29:14

We see here a God who is intimately involved with our lives. Paul begins with the big picture and then zeros down to the personal and intimate level:

1. He has determined the times and places of every nation.
2. He is not far from *each* one of us.
3. ...and finally Paul goes straight to the heart of the issue and says that *in Him* we live and move and exist.

If we live *in Him* then simple logic tells us we can't live without Him. As God's divine representative, Jesus, the Son of God, said "...apart from me you can do nothing."¹² Please understand that this means we can't do anything physically, mentally or spiritually without Him. We are totally and utterly dependent on God and His Son for everything, just like a little baby depends on its parents.

Let me illustrate this point because its implications are far reaching. Consider the amazing organ of the heart. It works as a pump to circulate blood around our bodies, without a break, for decades. What is amazing about the heart is that the pulsing of the heart does not appear to be aided by anything outside of itself. The muscle of the heart can contract and relax without any direct stimulus from the nervous system. It has what is called an intrinsic regulating system. As an anatomy textbook puts it: "The conduction system is composed of specialized muscle tissue that generates and distributes the electrical impulses which stimulate the cardiac muscle fibres to contract."¹³ These muscle fibres certainly are specialized because they generate electrical impulses that do not come from the nervous system. It is totally amazing that nowhere in the anatomy textbook does it address the question of how these heart muscle fibres produce this electrical charge to contract the heart. It is called specialized and intrinsic, but how does it do it, and where does this energy come from?

Here is where the road divides. The Bible tells us that this energy comes directly from God, "In Him we live." Acts 17:28. But Satan tells us that it is

¹² John 15:5

¹³ Gerard Tortora and Nicholas Anagnostakos, *Principles of Anatomy and Physiology*, (Harper and Row Publishers, New York, 1984) p 463.

inherent within us; it is simply part of the biological process that we possess as our own, “You will not surely die.” Genesis 3:4. This is such a fundamental issue. It is either one or the other. There are many Christians who try to take a middle road on this issue and say “Yes, God made everything, but it is like a wind-up clock. He started it and let it run.” As if somehow God made the Duracell batteries and placed them inside of us. The Bible does not teach this idea. We are intimately connected to Him and totally dependent on Him every millisecond of every second of every minute of every hour of every day. God is actively, knowingly, lovingly supplying us the electrical charge that keeps our hearts beating. There is something about this reality that can make us as human beings really uncomfortable, but we will address that later. The fact is that we need to get this issue clear right now. Either we believe “In Him we live and move and have our being” or we believe “we shall not surely die.” There is no middle ground.

As challenging as this may be for many of us, we have only dealt with the physical part of human existence. We must now consider the mental and spiritual aspects. Consider the following texts:

That their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and *attaining* to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ, **in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.** —Colossians 2:2,3

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: “See, I have called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. And **I have filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship**, to design artistic works, to work in gold, in silver, in bronze, in cutting jewels for setting, in carving wood, and to work in all *manner of workmanship.*” —Exodus 31:1–5

The Bible reveals God as the source of all wisdom and knowledge. Colossians 2:2,3 challenges the concept that we as human beings can

originate wisdom and knowledge. All wisdom and all knowledge come from God through Christ His Son. An example of this is shown in Exodus 31:1–5. Here we see God giving a man wisdom and understanding in craftsmanship. It is interesting that we often refer to people who show great ability and talent as “gifted.” Indeed they are, gifted by God.

Let’s transport ourselves into the middle of a concert. The audience is held spellbound as a talented young lady runs her fingers up and down the grand piano that stands impressively on the stage. She makes the piano literally sing—the touch of the master’s hand. She then builds to the climax, and we sense the end has come. We will her to continue—but the song ends and the crowd erupts into applause, awed by such elegance and grace combined with passion and intensity. The young lady bows and inhales the aroma of praise and then walks from the stage.

Let’s just back up a bit, because there is something interesting about this common scenario. Every time something like this happens the audience should break out into singing “Praise God from whom all blessings flow” or something of a similar nature. The applause should be directed to God who gave the skill and wisdom and ability. The pianist’s heart should overflow with love and gratitude to God for the gift He has given her to use, but this is rarely the case. If we truly did act this way, we would not be elated by success or discouraged by failure because the ability to perform does not originate with us, and if it does not originate with us, then we can’t take credit when we succeed or feel discouraged when we fail.

Here lies the curse of the Duracell tree. Imagine the freedom of motorised paragliding into the open sky.¹⁴ The sense of freedom we experience when we succeed, believing that we have originated that success compares to the exhilaration of climbing thousands of feet above the earth to witness wonderful views from on high. But if we get too high, the lack of oxygen can cause us to lose consciousness or suffer engine failure sending us crashing to the ground. The further we climb into the lie of the power within, the

¹⁴ Powered paragliding, also known as paramotoring or PPG, is a form of ultralight aviation where the pilot wears a motor on his back (a paramotor) which provides enough thrust to take off using a paraglider. It can be launched in still air, and on level ground, by the pilot alone—no assistance is required. Wikipedia.

higher the velocity of impact when we crash to earth. There is no escaping the curse of the Duracell tree. Once you have tasted its fruit that desire to climb is irresistible, and the final consequence is inevitable. It is no accident that “depression is the leading cause of disability globally.”¹⁵

The fruit of the Duracell tree creates this desire to climb to heights not suited to us. The more fruit we eat, the greater the desire to climb and higher the certainty we will crash. How many hits have you received already? How many more can you take? It’s worth thinking about.

Let’s go to the next level. We have looked at the implications of physical and mental dependence, but what about spiritual and moral dependence. This is a challenging issue, so fasten your seatbelt; it could be a rough ride.

The Bible tells us that “God is love.” 1 John 4:8. This tells us that God is the source of love. It also refers to God as the God of hope. Romans 15:13. This idea is greatly expanded in Galatians:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. —Galatians 5:22,23

The implications of this text are breathtaking. Let’s analyse it for a minute. All of these attributes come from having the Spirit of God. This simply means that without the Spirit of God you cannot have love, joy, peace, patience, kindness and so on. I was thinking about this Biblical truth one day while I was walking in a park by a lake. It was calm and peaceful. I suddenly noticed a mother pushing her daughter on a swing. They were both laughing together and obviously enjoying each other’s company. The love that this mother was experiencing for her daughter was inspired by God. The thought to be loving and kind and gentle to her daughter did not originate within the heart of the mother, but in the heart of God, and it was given to that mother who chose to express it, and it became a mother’s love. In this sense it is not really the mother’s love at all, but God’s love expressed through the mother. That love became a part of the mother because she responded to the Spirit of God and expressed it. In the truest sense, there is no such thing

¹⁵ http://www.who.int/mental_health/management/depression/en/

as the love of a mother for her children or love between husband and wife. Does that sound radical? Well this is what the Bible teaches.

I have presented this idea many times when preaching or speaking at seminars and it is interesting to see how the audience responds. Some people’s faces look as if I have just attacked the very foundation of the human race. For all the millions of love songs that have ever been sung and the billions of promises at the marriage altar that “I love you and will love you forever,” not one of those promises can ever be kept without God pouring His love into our receptive souls. Let’s place the attribute of love in a paraglider. Why do so many ‘fall out’ of love and crash to the ground? People who believe that love is originated in our own souls can often wake up in the morning and not ‘feel’ in love with their partners. They begin to doubt whether this relationship is right for them anymore and often begin to look for someone else to bring that feeling back. The Duracell credit card has reached its limit and now it’s time to pay up.

What about the sincere man who really meant his vows to love his wife forever and then suddenly he finds himself attracted to another woman. He may not want to feel this way but he “can’t help it.” Love is confused with lust, and there is doubt as to his integrity. He then begins to withdraw from his partner because the sense of guilt from acting this way prevents him from believing he could still be lovable. He thought he could maintain the flow of love from his heart, but now his paraglider has stalled and comes crashing to the ground from where he launched, and his marriage is over. Is it any wonder that finding joy in marriage is so elusive for most people?

For the sake of those who are feeling like their marriage is not worth it anymore, remember that love originates only in the heart of God and is freely available to those who ask Him for it. If you feel you have lost that love for your partner, ask God to give it back to you. He will, for He has promised.

And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it. —John 14:13–14

CHAPTER 3

Near to the Heart of God

We were racing down the freeway at breakneck speed. Lorelle's contractions had developed into a sustained pattern. We didn't want to be caught out, so we bolted for the hospital. It was all very new and exciting; soon we would have our first child. We glided up to the labour ward and the nurse took one look at us and said, "You're too happy, you need to go for a walk." Well, that dampened our enthusiasm. Forty-five minutes later we came back and now Lorelle wasn't smiling any more. Another thirty minutes and we landed right in the middle of labour. Yes, there is no other word to describe it, labour, hard labour. We tried to remember all the techniques from the prenatal classes but it was hard to stay focused. Those contractions hit like a freight train coming head on. As soon as you had dealt with one the next one was straight on top of you. Finally after eleven hours, we received our first born son, Michael.

There is a really interesting photo of Lorelle and me just after she gave birth. It's absolutely amazing. She is sitting there just beaming, as though it was all in a day's work, and I'm swaying in the breeze looking like I was about to collapse. I developed a profound new respect for womanhood that day. I must tell you ladies that watching your wife give birth is really

hard work.

When you finish laughing, I'll finish my point. The emotional stress of watching the one you love in so much pain is incredible. For us men, we usually have a solution to a problem, but I had no answers this time and it hurt. I just prayed, "God, I know there is a reason for all this pain, but right now I can't see it." I was sure glad when it was over.

When I held my son for the first time, it was an eternal moment. I looked down into his eyes, and he was looking straight back at me, and it was amazing. As I continued to look down in awe and wonder, I was gripped with this deep sense of fear. I knew that my son was stamped with the same nature as mine, a nature that challenges authority, that naturally gravitates to rebellion rather than obedience. I knew that I had the responsibility for guiding that will and training him in the disciplines of real love, kindness, selflessness, and obedience. After all this, I wondered, would he be my friend? Could something come between us and separate us? I just prayed right there, "Oh dear Father in heaven, don't let anything come between my son and me. May we always be close, and I pray that he will come to know who I am and be my friend." The intensity of that prayer remains with me. I feel it often, and I still pray it believing that God will make it a reality.

Four years later I was spending a quiet Sabbath day walking and talking with the Lord, far away from the hustle and bustle of life. I was thinking about my Father in Heaven and His love for me and how precious it is. All of a sudden, my mind drifted back to the birth of my son and I relived that intense desire to never be separated from him and that he would truly know me. The scene passed and in the quietness I heard a still small voice deep in my mind, and it said, "That's the way I feel about you." I didn't know whether to laugh or cry, and I found it incredibly hard to accept. "But Lord," I said, "You know what I am like, You know that I have done and said many wrong things," and so I went on fighting. I was really surprised with myself. I am a man who has accepted Christ as his Saviour and believes his sins are forgiven, but when God came that close to me and told me the way He feels about me, it was hard to accept. Finally I just cried out "Oh thank

you, thank you for loving me and thank you for all that you have done for me. I love you very much.” In a very real sense I felt like I was being held in His arms. I could not have been happier. I realised my Father in heaven loves me so much that He doesn’t want anything to come between us. It hurts Him to think that we could be separated, and He is doing everything He can to keep that from ever happening.

In this experience the wonderful privileges of being a part of God’s kingdom were revealed to me at my heart level. Soon after this event I was led to some passages in the Bible that really opened my eyes and made me praise God even more. I pray that the significance of this text will burn into your heart and never leave you. Here is a very clear window into the kingdom of God:

Are not five sparrows sold for two copper coins? And not one of them is forgotten before God. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows. —Luke 12:6,7

Jesus is explaining the principles of His kingdom. In these verses we have a formula for what makes people significant in that kingdom. What

is it that makes them count, what makes them worth something, what makes them valuable? If these issues are not important to you, then this text won’t mean much, but I have not found anyone yet who is not wrestling with the issues of self-worth.

Jesus states the value of two sparrows in human terms. In an earthly sense these sparrows have little value. Jesus then makes a contrast and says, “Not one of them is forgotten by God.” The contrast here is that because God remembers the sparrows,

they are very valuable in God’s kingdom. Jesus extends this principle by comparing how much God thinks about us as compared to sparrows. “the

very hairs of your head are all numbered.” If that is not ‘up front, close and personal’, then what is? Do you know anyone who wants to know so much about you that they even monitor the number of hairs on your head? Then comes the punch line: “Don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.” Can you see how worth and significance is gained in God’s kingdom? It comes from simply realizing that God lovingly thinks about us continually. We are definitely on His mind. He is giving us life, making our hearts beat, and actively pouring His love into our lives so that we can enjoy life; and He imparts to us rich gifts, talents and abilities for our satisfaction, enjoyment and service for others. Here is the secret of God’s kingdom, the secret of significance. It is the key that unlocks the enslaving kingdom of worthlessness and depression. Do you have the courage to believe it?

While we are on this point, do you know how much God thinks about you? Listen to this...

Many, O LORD my God, *are* Your wonderful works which You have done; and Your thoughts toward us cannot be recounted to You in order; *if* I would declare and speak *of them*, they are more than can be numbered. —Psalm 40:5

If our value is determined by the loving thoughts that God has towards us, then this text tells us that we are priceless, because it says His plans and thoughts for us are greater than can be declared or numbered. How does it feel to be priceless? But it can only be as good as our belief in the truth that God loves us beyond measure, regardless of how good or bad we are. This is wonderful news and I am so thankful for it. So whenever you are tempted to doubt your worth, just look at the sparrows and believe!

In these verses we have a formula for what makes people significant in that kingdom. What is it that makes them count, what makes them worth something, what makes them valuable?

CHAPTER 4

The Family Kingdom

It is a warm humid day. A festive spirit pervades the room. A delicious aroma wafts out of the kitchen promising the taste buds a real treat. Laughter rings out as stories are told of times past. Gifts are exchanged in an atmosphere of excited surprise mixed with love. Children are devouring Grandma's treats while Grandpa tells us how tall we have grown. This was often our experience when we went to visit my grandparents. It was a time for family, a time to reaffirm where you belong, a time to reconnect with those you love, to share gifts; a precious and important time to be together.

There is nothing more critical than the sense of a close family to safeguard us from the ever widening jaws of depression and worthlessness. A family *can* be a place where you are accepted for who you are, where you can be yourself, where you can be forgiven for mistakes and simply enjoy sharing life together.

Jesus opens for us a vital picture of the kingdom of God when He taught us how to pray. Jesus said, "This, then, is how you should pray: 'Our Father in heaven...'" Jesus did not say to pray "Dear God," or "Your hallowed majesty," or "Dear King," as our first reference point, but rather "Our Father."

THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS A FAMILY

This seems very obvious to some, but the implications of a family kingdom are far-reaching. We will look at these implications in the coming chapters.

The first time that the Father speaks to the human race is in Matthew 3:17. From the dawn of time until the baptism of Jesus, God communicated with us through His Son. In all the fullness of His inherited divinity, Jesus was the Jehovah that opened the Red Sea, He was the Jehovah that thundered from Mt. Sinai and He was the Jehovah that led Joshua into the Promised Land. 1 Corinthians 10:1–4. At the time of the baptism of Christ, the Son of God became Emmanuel—God with us—as one of us. So now the Father speaks for the first time and His words are deeply significant (as they always are), for right here God lays out the core nature of His kingdom. "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." There are many ways that God could have introduced His Son, such as, "This is the Creator of heaven and earth; listen to Him," or "This is your King, obey him," but God proclaims the identity of His Son in the terms of a family rather than the terms of a king or ruler. If we analyse this statement, we note the following:

1. This is my Son = **Identity**
2. Whom I love; in Him I am well pleased = **Value**

In God's kingdom, significance and worth are determined by our relationship to Him. This is in total contrast to Satan's kingdom where significance and worth are determined by our successful performance and achievement, as judged by ourselves and others around us. In the kingdom of God, He is our Father and we are His children. That is our identity. We are known by whom we belong to rather than what we do. The fact that God loves us as His children and pours out His blessings upon us continually, is thinking about us constantly, and wants to be close to us, gives us an incredible sense of value. "Do not be afraid, for you are worth more than many sparrows."

In God's kingdom our identity and value are as enduring as God Himself—everlasting and never-changing. Regardless of success or failure, the relationship remains constant and our worth is secure. In Satan's kingdom

our worth is about as secure as the stock market after September 11, 2001—extremely volatile, totally insecure and bound to crash. Can we guarantee that we will always succeed? Can we be sure that the people around us, to

whom we look for encouragement and support, will always applaud our efforts? Hardly! For those who have ears to hear, the wise man built his house upon the rock rather than shifting sand.

To safeguard our individual identity and to save us from entering into a life of despair, discouragement, worthlessness and death, God has enshrined in the heart of His kingdom a law that will safeguard relationships. It deals with two types of relationships: The relationship between us and our heavenly Father, and the relationship between each of us as brothers and sisters in the kingdom of God. This is why Jesus said:

Jesus said to him, “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is *the* first and great commandment. And *the* second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.” —Matthew 22:37–40

These two great commandments are designed to safeguard our identity and value as children of God. These two great commandments are, of course, a summary of the Ten Commandments. Have you ever thought of the Ten Commandments as being vital in preventing you from losing your self-worth? Within the kingdom of God the Ten Commandments are understood in the context of relationships. If you sever those relationships, you are destroying your identity, and when you destroy your identity, death is yearning to embrace you. There is nothing arbitrary in God’s statement that the wages of sin is death. Sin (which the Bible defines as the breaking

of the law in 1 John 3:4) destroys our identity and value. When identity and value are gone, the soul longs for death. This is exactly the reason why depression and suicide are the greatest problems in society today. The answer is simple—sin. Can you see why God hates sin so much? Sin is the robber of our identity and value as children of God, and God is determined to destroy it.

Just to quickly summarize what we have covered:

1. God’s kingdom is a family.
2. God is our Father and we are His children.
3. Our identity and value as individuals is based on our relationship to God.
4. The kingdom of God is a relational kingdom based on the relationships between us and God and between each other.
5. These relationships are safeguarded by the Ten Commandments.
6. The breaking of the Commandments destroys our identity and value.

CHAPTER 5

Family Crisis

I could tell by the look on his face that he had suffered some sort of trauma. The bags under his eyes betrayed his valiant attempt to appear normal. I asked him “Is everything ok?”

“My wife and I are separated,” he said painfully. “I just didn’t see it coming,” he said, immersed in regret. We talked about the challenges he was facing and then he blurted out “I can’t handle not seeing the kids—it just kills me.” I could see he was struggling to hold himself together, and I really felt his pain. I earnestly wished that I could have helped him. His final comment was “I just don’t know which way is up any more or where I am headed.”

Only those who have been to the tortuous land of separation and divorce will understand the emotion behind those words. The shock, anger and grief felt by the unwilling party have often been compared to experiencing the death of a partner.¹⁶ The devastating realities of divorce mean more than simply a division of assets, it means redefining your whole identity.¹⁷

The greatest victims, of course, are the children. The range of destructive emotions that pass through the heart of a child, not simply at the time of the event but for the rest of their lives, can never be fully calculated.

Jim Conway surveyed hundreds of adults who had been children of divorce, and the range of emotions that they felt was described as follows:

Unhappy	72%
Felt Powerless	65%
Felt Lonely	61%
Were Afraid	52%
Were Angry	50%
Felt Abandoned	48%
Felt Personally Rejected	40%
Felt Worthless	30%

Being subject to divorce as children left these adults with the following issues:

Constantly seeking approval	58%
Block out some of their past	54%
Judge themselves too strictly	53%
Take themselves too seriously	47%
Overact to situations over which they have no control	42%
Still having trouble with relationships	40% ¹⁸

Is it any wonder that God says, “I hate divorce!” Malachi 2:16. Regardless of how it occurs, or who walks out on whom, the loss of family relationships is devastating to all parties. There are no winners when family relationships break down. Yet this is exactly what happened in heaven. God’s family was torn apart by a crisis when His beloved first created son turned against Him.

The Bible says in Revelation 12:7, “And there was war in heaven.” When we read this verse we can be tempted to think that this is a war between two kings and their kingdoms, but this war was the tearing apart of God’s

¹⁶ Nelly Zola and Renata Singer, *True Stories from the Land of Divorce*, (Pan Macmillian, Sydney, 1995) p.2.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Conway, p.31.

family. Can you imagine when God first made Lucifer and tenderly held his new son? God had shared his very heart and soul with this angel. He had shown him nothing but love and given him the privilege of serving at the highest levels of his family government. But now this child of His was spitting words of anger and rebellion. Moving in the shadows of deceit and lies, he poisoned the minds of many of God's other children. Can you imagine the sorrow? Lucifer, created so perfectly, was now filled with hate and murder. He was bent on destroying the eternal Son of God, for Jesus revealed that Satan was a murderer from the beginning in John 8:44. The reality of this feeling was displayed on the cross of Calvary, where Satan hoped to eliminate Jesus.

Who can comprehend the loss that God has felt for His son Lucifer. We have an echo from the heart of God in the story of David and Absalom.

Then the king was deeply moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept. And as he went, he said thus: "O my son Absalom—my son, my son Absalom—if only I had died in your place! O Absalom my son, my son!" —2 Samuel 18:33

Absalom, a beautiful and handsome son of David, desired to kill his father and take his kingdom, but David's army defeated his son's forces and Absalom was killed in the battle. Instead of joy at the victory David wept for the loss of his rebellious son. There are no winners when families are ripped apart.

It is crucial to remember that in God's kingdom a person's identity and value are bound up in their relationship to the Creator God, our heavenly Father. When Lucifer stepped out of that relationship, he mentally and emotionally suicided and opened an unexpected floodgate of dark emotions. Prior to Lucifer's rebellion, if you had asked him—"Who are you?" he would have said with calm assurance and confidence, "I am a son of God, and He loves me." Once Lucifer rejected his Father, if you had asked him the same question, "Who are you Lucifer?" what could he say? He no longer had an identity, he had destroyed it. Whatever identity he would seek to create for himself from that point forward, would never, never fill that emptiness and

sense of loss he experienced from breaking his close relationship with his heavenly Father.

Many times he wished he could regain what he had lost, but his pride would never let him. In addition to that, deep down inside he would never believe that he could be forgiven after his brazen ingratitude and open rebellion. Lucifer, now Satan, which means 'opposer', stands alone. There is no one to hold him, no parental figure to turn to, and no place to call home. Now Satan is animated by all the emotions of worthlessness: insecurity, fear, emptiness, jealousy, pride, self-justification, arrogance, rage, anger and a controlling spirit.

Satan did not know which way was up anymore. He had to redefine who he was and somehow smother that emptiness, that worthlessness, that nothingness that he felt inside. Like any child who feels worthless, Satan carries all the marks of insecurity, fear, insanity and a desperate need for approval from whomever he can get it. He craves attention, and to satisfy that emptiness, his perverted nature yearns to be worshipped, adored and loved—anything to take away the pain, the loneliness and the worthlessness—anything. This sad state is amazingly reflected in a song from a movie called the *City of Angels*:

Verse 1

You spend all your time waiting for that second chance
 For the break that would make it okay
 There's always some reason to feel not good enough
 And it's hard at the end of the day
 I need some distraction or a beautiful release
 Memories seep from my veins
 Let me be empty. Oh and weightless and maybe
 I'll find some peace tonight

Verse 2

You're so tired of the straight line, and everywhere you turn
 There's vultures and thieves at your back
 The storm keeps on twisting, you keep on building the lies

That you make up for all that you lack
 It don't make no difference, escaping one last time
 It's easier to believe in this sweet madness
 Oh this glorious sadness that brings me to my knees.¹⁹

Since Satan had rejected relationships as the basis of worth, he could never establish a kingdom based on relationships. There was only one option left to him. Be known by what you do rather than to whom you belong. This kingdom could never work if everyone acknowledged that all

life, wisdom, and love come from God. So Satan invented the principle of 'the power within,' in order to reduce God to a force which is incapable of having a personal relationship. A force that you could use and abuse at will. Satan's kingdom is a kingdom of power and performance and pleasure seeking. Its central theme is to be responsible to no one, and care only for those who will be useful to you.

Since Satan had rejected relationships as the basis of worth, he could never establish a kingdom based on relationships.

This kingdom is doomed, of course, because the life force sustaining it belongs to an animate being and one day the guilt of rejecting Him will crush out the life of those who stubbornly refuse to acknowledge their identity as children of God. It is doomed because nothing can take away the pain and loss that come from rejecting that identity. Here we learn the truth of the proverb, "There is no rest for the wicked."

If we return to the Garden of Eden within this context, we see that on the outside Satan seems cunning and clever as he seeks to overthrow the government of heaven. Yet on the inside there lies a heart full of emptiness and insecurity that is struggling to form a new identity and to escape the ever widening chasm of hopelessness.

¹⁹ *Angel*, written and performed by Sarah McLachlan, Arista Records. Inc.

CHAPTER 6

Hell on Earth

It has to be one of the most heartbreaking experiences in life. It may have taken years, but over time you have developed a really solid friendship with someone. Someone you have come to really enjoy spending time with. Suddenly you notice that your friend is acting a bit strangely. You try to pass it off and tell yourself that you're just imagining things and that it's no real issue. But the evidence keeps mounting as time passes, and at last you feel compelled to ask your friend what is going on. After spending what seems like an age to get past the obvious stone wall, you find that someone else has been influencing your friend against you, which has led them to interpret your actions in a way that leaves you flabbergasted.

Surely reason will prevail and you can quickly resolve this misunderstanding, but not so! As you seek to give a reasonable explanation you are then unashamedly accused of trying to fabricate a cover-up. At this point any one of several emotions may overtake you: hurt, pain, anger or even devastation that your friend could so easily believe someone else without ever having said a word to you, let alone defend you! Your outburst or silence (whichever applies) signals to your 'friend' that they were right and all that was said about you was true. Talk about adding insult to injury!

Maybe as you read those last two paragraphs, a painful memory has surfaced as you confirm the reality of this scenario that has been repeated over and over since almost the dawn of time here on earth. Even as I write and recall such an incident for myself, I stop and ask once again, “Why?”

I am sure most of us have scars from similar forms of rejection, and I guess they can in a small way help us to understand how God felt the moment after Adam and Eve ate the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge. It is one of the greatest mysteries of life that the words of a stranger can separate the best of friends.

I have often imagined God closely watching His daughter Eve as she found herself in the middle of the garden, suddenly engaged in dialogue with the ‘stranger.’ After all the time that God had invested in Eve, showing her unnumbered tokens of His love, would she cling to the security and love of her heavenly Father or embrace the words of Satan via the serpent? Why didn’t God intervene and send an angel to stop the severing of their relationship? I guess there are many “why” questions to answer at this point. While we don’t have the time or space to address them all, and indeed some of them can’t be fully addressed until we see Him face to face, the central answer is love.

Love grants the privilege to choose even when the choice will severely hurt the choice giver. If God had the habit of intervening every time His children were about to head in a wrong direction, then in reality they would have no choice at all. There is time for instruction and correction, but there also comes a time when the silence of the choice giver validates all the expressions of “I love you” He has uttered, because love without choice is not love at all. This is a reality that all parents wrestle with while dealing with their children. If after all our instruction and directions our children still choose against us, do we forbid them to save ourselves the pain of rejection? Or do we remain silent and grieve, allowing them the choice to reject us? It’s a tough choice for any parent.

God, clothed in the strength of love, silently watches Eve, His precious daughter, become the instrument in destroying His beloved son Adam. By now the level of pain in God’s heart must be incredible. Will pain in God’s

heart at the loss of His daughter cause Him to intervene to save Adam? No. Divine love grieves deeply and waits in silence, proving beyond question that He truly is the God of freedom and free choice. He will allow Adam to choose for himself. When we talk about tests, please do not entertain the absurd idea that God is carelessly watching the proceedings of the test from the safety of heaven to see whether Adam and Eve have got what it takes to be part of the heavenly club. God was being tested just as much as Adam and Eve. For God knows that if Adam and Eve fall, the offer which His Son made before the creation of the world²⁰ to give His life for the world would become a reality. Christ would show them what His Father is really like, He would take their guilt upon Himself and let it crush out His life rather than theirs. All this God was fully aware of as He silently watched Eve and then Adam choose against Him. What kind of love was in that silence? This demonstration of love will forever remove the false idea that God was moved by self-interest in dealing with our original parents.

We discussed in Chapter 1 the philosophy that Adam and Eve were embracing when they ate from that tree and we discussed in the previous chapter the tragic mixture of emotions that led Satan to concoct the concept that we can live without God and form an identity of our own by what we achieve. Even while the stomach juices of Adam and Eve were digesting the fruit, a sickening cloud of worthlessness and guilt was slowly enveloping their minds, shutting down that lovely, happy, and joyful relationship between God and man. The curse of the Duracell tree had begun its insidious work, and within a short period of time Adam and Eve were engulfed by guilt and fear. They, along with Satan and his angels, had mentally and emotionally suicided. They had lost their identity and worth, and nothing they could do could bring it back. They couldn’t restore themselves to favour with God. They had broken the relationship and only God could restore it. This fact is self-evident even as we reflect on our own experience. If someone violates a relationship with us, the power to restore that relationship rests with the non-offending party; the offending party has surrendered any authority in the relationship.

²⁰ 1 Peter 1:20; Revelation 13:8

At this point it is important to remember what we looked at in Chapter 2. God is the source of life, wisdom and joy. Adam and Eve have now cut themselves off from that source by believing the lie that they possessed all this in themselves. Their reasoning powers can no longer be used selflessly or objectively. Their minds are totally in harmony with Satan. They have no ability to unmask the lies Satan tells them. Satan begins to fill them full

Satan is still hell-bent on destroying our sense of identity, and he does this by telling us lies about God and lies about ourselves. As long as we believe the lies about God and ourselves, we can never be reconciled to God.

of false theories about God's character. At the same time Satan tells Adam and Eve that they are bad. He tells them they deserve to die and that they are worthless individuals.

Satan is still hell-bent on destroying our sense of identity, and he does this by telling us lies about God and lies about ourselves. As long as we believe the lies about God and ourselves, we can never be reconciled to God. The only way to be restored in our relationship with God is to truly know His

character as revealed in His Son.

The stranger has separated the best of friends. God comes visiting and calls Adam and Eve, but the voice they once regarded as the sweetest in the universe, now sends them into hiding in fear and desperation. Satan's programming has done its work!

Imagine coming home one day from work, joyfully anticipating the happy ritual you have developed with your child. Each afternoon your child comes running out the front door singing, "Daddy, Daddy," and then throws himself into your arms with a tender hug. As you approach home you find that your beloved child has not come to greet you. Puzzled, you enter the front door and you hear this shriek of terror accompanied by little footsteps running quickly into the garden to hide. Something has broken the relationship. Where there was love, there is now fear. No real father enjoys having his

children run away at the beckoning sound of his voice. It hurts. It is a tragedy that sin can make us afraid of the most loving, generous, patient, freedom-loving Person in the universe.

God is faced with a very serious dilemma. How does He approach Adam and Eve now that they are listening to another voice? Every word that God utters is now interpreted in an evil light. They know they are guilty, but they now have no security or worth to accept that they are wrong, having accepted false ideas about God, who is the source of life and wisdom. Controlled by a spirit of guilt and insecurity they have become defiant. They have lost the power to reason honestly.

I marvel at the love of God displayed in His patience. God calls out to Adam, "Where are you?" not because He didn't know but to allow Adam to face the issue. *Where is your mind Adam? What has happened to your identity?* The physical always represents the spiritual, and the physical hiding of Adam and Eve clearly reveals the hiding that is going on in their minds. They have clothed themselves in deception and deceit to avoid having to face the truth which seems so frightening. God is trying to help them diagnose the problem so he can bring the blessed solution to them.

Adam responds to the question by telling God that he was afraid because he was naked. This confession is interesting in the light of Genesis 2:25. "The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame." Adam was naked before he ate the fruit but he was not ashamed. The inference here is that Adam is now ashamed. The Hebrew word (buwsh) also means confused, confounded, and disappointed. Adam was full of confusion, guilt and disappointment. He was confused about who he was and he felt guilt about what he had done. God now seeks to put His finger on the intensity of Adam's pain. "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?" God doesn't ask Adam, "How do you know you are naked?" He asks Adam "Who told you that you were naked?" God is pointing Adam to the instigator of the lies he was told. In other words "Who is causing you to run away from me?" "Who has come between you and me?"

Adam is addressed directly, “Did you eat from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?” This is a simple question that demands a simple yes or no. Now that Adam’s mind pictures God as selfish and revengeful and himself as being stupid and worthless, he puts two and two together in his mind and gets 64. Adam believes that if he says yes, he is going to be harshly punished because he now falsely believes God is vengeful. If he says no, he believes he will be punished twice, once for eating from the tree and once for lying. Believing there is no way out, Adam seeks to defend and justify himself.

“The **woman** whom **You** gave to me, **she** gave to me of the tree and I did eat,” he accused. The man is evidently guilty but he casts the blame on Eve and ultimately on God. Can you imagine Eve’s shock at this man who had only shortly before pledged to face with her whatever would come, but at the first hurdle he falls flat on his face! Sin cannot produce a heroic figure that gives himself selflessly to help and support others. It always results in every man for himself.

We don’t want to miss the process going on here. Adam’s reactions are being driven by his guilt and insecurity, combined with a false conception of the character of God, all stirred together with a large amount of pride. Now that he no longer sees himself as a child of God, he must embrace the

philosophy, “If I don’t stand up for myself, no one else will!” He thinks this because he believes he no longer has a father. Here is the great heartbreak of sin: how does God show Adam that he has a false picture of his Father and that he is not worthless and stupid? How can Adam be given a true as-

God is the only source of true wisdom and Adam has disconnected himself from that source.

assessment of his situation when he has lost the power to reason objectively? God is the only source of true wisdom and Adam has disconnected himself from that source. And even when Adam does reason, how could his reason be freed from the mixture of guilt and pride that fiercely rejects anything resembling truth? Adam can’t handle God telling him he is wrong, even if it is done in love for his own sake, because his insecurity controls his reason.

It is my sincere prayer that you will see that once Adam and Eve had separated themselves from God, they were so hopelessly lost that they were almost beyond being reclaimed. They were totally controlled by the spirit of Satan. In their hearts lay the seeds that would eventually lead their children to join wicked angels in a desperate companionship bent on killing the Son of God in Jerusalem. Though it was not fully manifested, their hearts wanted nothing to do with God or His kingdom; without realizing it they actually hated Him.

At this point you might be tempted to say, “Hang on, you are taking this a bit far. I realize that they had a problem, but to say they totally hated God is exaggerating things.” In response I would say that we must continually remember that all goodness and love and wisdom come from God. It does not originate in the heart of human beings. If we forget this vital point we can’t read this story truthfully and we also don’t understand ourselves truthfully. The Bible is very clear on this point. Look at the following verses:

The sinful mind is at war with God. It does not obey God’s law. It can’t. —Romans 8:7 NIV

There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one. —Romans 3:10–12 NIV

The heart is deceitful above all *things*, and desperately wicked; who can know it? —Jeremiah 17:9

The Bible declares that our minds in their natural state, hate or are at war with God. In their natural state, our minds are rebellious, they do not submit to God’s commands, and it is impossible for our minds to break free from this condition. I have found in my own experience, and in the experience of many people that I have shared this with, that there is an intense spirit of resistance to this truth. This spirit of resistance to the fact that human nature is totally hateful towards God, is a direct echo of the resistance that Adam manifested towards God, when he blamed Eve and God rather than

take responsibility for his failure. Adam's insecurity is our inheritance and we can bear the truth no more than he could. If you find yourself resisting this idea, then ask yourself why you feel that way? If you are secure in yourself then these statements would not concern you at all. Adam's insecurity and emptiness are our inheritance. This is all that he can give us, nothing more.

If you can embrace the reality that human nature is hostile to God, then you are in for a real treat. In the context of God's plan to save us, there is immense freedom in realizing that you can't do anything good. You can stop trying. You can stop beating yourself up when your evil nature jumps out and hits someone emotionally or physically, but I am getting ahead of myself; we'll keep this for the next chapter.

Coming back to Adam and Eve, we can see that breaking down the barrier between them and God would be an immense task. Their recovery, and the recovery of their children, would require a number of things:

1. A means of giving the human race the wisdom to recognise their desperate situation, along with a way for them to be influenced in the right direction without violating their freedom of choice.
2. A way of showing them that they had a wrong perception of God's character and kingdom and to somehow show them that He really loves them.
3. A way to remove their guilt and insecurity and to restore their true identity and value as children of God.
4. A way to reclaim their sense of purpose, their reason for existence or their destiny.
5. All of the above needed time. Adam and Eve had forfeited their own lives, so they needed a life support system to give them time to choose and decide.
6. While doing all this, God must maintain a sense of justice. He can't ignore their rebellion and say it is ok. While God in His mercy does not allow the full consequences of their choice to fall upon them, Adam and Eve must comprehend the result of

their choice in order for them to begin to appreciate the error of what they did.

There is a crucial point we need to make here. God was not caught out by surprise. The Father and His Son had already determined what they would do if they came to this point. The plan was already in place – a plan that was comprehensive enough to meet this desperate situation.

CHAPTER 7

Heaven's Lifeline

In an effort to explain the highest form of love humanly possible, the Greeks developed the story of Admetus and Alcestis.²¹ The Apostle Paul alludes to this story in the book of Romans.

For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. —Romans 5:7

King Admetus was famous for his hospitality and justice, and was loved throughout his kingdom. The god Apollo had been driven from Mount Olympus by his father Jupiter and told he must lay aside his divinity and become a man and serve man as a slave. When he came to earth, King Admetus found him as a poor beggar and took pity on him. He fed him and made him a shepherd of his flocks and treated him as a son. After 12 months Apollo was transformed back into his divine state and thanked Admetus for helping and told him “If you ever need my help in the future just ask me.”

After some time passed Apollo returned to Admetus to inform him that Hades, the god of the underworld, would soon come to claim him. Apollo said that he made a deal with his wife Persephone, the wife of Hades, that if

someone could be found to die in his place then he would not need to die.

Admetus went to his parents and asked them if they would be willing to take his place. They said, “We love you son, you are a good and kind man, but we love our lives more. We can't die for you.” The king went through his entire realm to find someone who was willing to die for him and he found none. Admetus resigned himself to his fate and at that moment his wife, Alcestis, cried out to Apollo, “Oh beloved Apollo, you have blessed my husband and increased his fame and fortune tenfold in our entire kingdom. Admetus is such a good man, and his people need him so much, that he deserves to live! I will die for him, so that he might live.” And she did. All the land wept for the good wife of the good king, who was greatly beloved of her people and who had died so that her King might live. When she appeared before Persephone she took pity on her, and told her she might once again live as a reward for the faithfulness she had shown to her husband. And so it was that as Admetus and Alcestis increased in age, so also did Apollo reward them for their faithfulness, and when death finally came for them in their old age, they were ready for him.

“This,” exclaimed the Greek philosophers, “Is the greatest form of love that there is—that a man should lay down his life for friends!” Many people connect this story to the words of Jesus where He said:

Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. —John 15:13

Yet this is not an expression of the height of God's love, but rather an expression of the limit of the love of man. The apostle contrasts this human story of the limits of the love of man and tells us:

For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the

21 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Admetus>

death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. —Romans 5:7–10

God revealed the depth of His love in allowing His Son to be wounded by our transgressions and be bruised by our iniquities. He gave His Son for His enemies, who hated and despised Him, out of His great love and compassion for them. This is not human but divine love.²²

Before the creation of the human race, the Father and His Son had been in deep dialogue in what the Bible calls the counsel of peace.²³ At that time, the plan was laid for what would happen if the human race chose against Them. Now it was time to act. Who can estimate the suffering of God? Would He allow His Son to be Adam's substitute to pay the consequences of their choice? Would He allow His Son to take upon Himself their worthlessness and hopelessness carrying it to the grave?

As I am writing these words, my son is peacefully sitting just across from me. I turn to look at his beautiful face and feel the sense of joy and love rise up in my heart for him. Then I try to imagine putting myself in God's place, allowing the human race to kill my son to reveal the true nature of mankind as murderers aligned with Satan in hating me and everything I stand for. I confess that my mind just shuts down those thoughts. I will not even allow myself to think them. I am aware that even the thought of it is too painful for me to deal with as it would cause me to collapse! My thoughts return to God and His dilemma and I feel numb. I feel the deepest sense of gratitude to Him for allowing it to happen, knowing that I am one of those people who, while being an enemy of God, and guilty of the murder of His Son through my sinful life, have been offered complete forgiveness through God's unfathomable love. This thought always makes me pause and worship Him in thankfulness for His boundless love and sacrifice.

I am amazed that the Son of God, who later became Jesus the man, was willing to do this for us. The Bible tells us that God knows the end from the beginning, and the Father shared this knowledge with His Son. Once sin

infected the universe, He knew exactly where it would lead. Christ could see what awaited Him when He came to earth: the rejection, the beating, the mocking, the hatred, the cursing and swearing, the nakedness and the blackness upon the cross, the worthlessness of billions of souls weighing upon Him, and the accumulated guilt and sorrow of many generations. . He saw it all and yet the Son of God says, "I desire to do your will Oh God, your law is within my heart."²⁴

The Son of God did not reluctantly agree to come, but rather, He desired to do it. His heart, like the heart of His Father, yearns to restore His children to the fullness of joy that is to be their destiny. What kind of a God is this? Who shall we compare Him to and what words are sufficient to praise Him?

We noted in the last chapter that Adam and Eve needed a life support system and an ability to discern truth from error; they needed help to see the truth about God and detect, expose, and reject the lies that Satan was telling them. They needed a moral compass to help them discern the true spiritual north.

All of these things would be provided through the gift of God's Son to the world. This was told to Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:15. Addressing Satan directly God said the following:

And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel. —Genesis 3:15

This verse is so full of promise and hope. God said He would put enmity between Satan and the woman. When God speaks of the woman, He is speaking of all that will come forth from her, in other words the whole

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²² For more details see *The Word That Turned the World Upside Down* by Robert Wieland. <http://fatheroflove.info/download/view/863>

²³ Zechariah 6:13

²⁴ Psalm 40:8

human family. The word enmity means hatred or enemy.²⁵ God would put something in the heart of the human family that hates evil and desires goodness and truth. There is only one reason why God could do this, and that is because His Son was going to reconcile the human family through His life and death while on earth. This is what is meant by hatred existing between the woman's Seed and Satan's seed or offspring. Paul, in the book of Romans, refers to this hatred of evil as grace or power in the following verse:

But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! —Romans 5:15 NIV

The ability to choose what is right comes directly from this enmity that God has placed in our hearts through the gift of His Son. This same gift also provides the much needed gift of life.²⁶ Paul also refers to this fact in the same chapter of Romans:

Therefore, as through one man's offense *judgment* came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act *the free gift came* to all men, resulting in justification of life. —Romans 5:18

This is an incredible truth that can bring peace and joy beyond measure. The above fact means that every breath you take (whether you believe in God's Son and His sacrifice or not) has come directly from Jesus Christ. It is His life that makes your heart beat and makes you breathe and keeps you alive. All the functions that we refer to as involuntary on our part are in fact voluntary on God's part. He is the heart of the truth that says:

...so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being. —Acts 17:27, 28a

²⁵ *Vines Expository Dictionary*—Enmity

²⁶ When we refer to life here, we are talking about probationary life, not eternal life. God has given to every person a life on this earth to choose or reject the truth about God and His kingdom.

God is not far from every one of us because we are sustained by the life of Jesus Christ by virtue of His mediation for us through His death on the cross. If you feel far away from God the truth is that He is never far away from you. You just have to feel your pulse to know that He has not left you.

Add to this the fact that God puts in our hearts a desire to do right and a desire to resist evil, then truly we have a lot to be thankful for. Think about the times you have been tempted to do something wrong and then thought better of it and did not do it. This was the gift that God has given you, the enmity against evil. It does not matter whether you believe in God or not, you still are given this gift through Jesus when you choose to exercise it. We are told in Scripture that God makes the rain to fall on the good and the bad.²⁷ Think about how many times Satan has placed an evil thought in someone's mind to do something to you or to take your possessions, and the enmity placed in their hearts by God encouraged them not to do it. Of course we still have the choice to reject that prompting and go ahead and commit evil, but if that enmity were not there none of us would be able to stop carrying out the evil thoughts placed in our minds.

What an incredible Father to do all this for us! We as a race of people were totally lost and enslaved to Satan's evil ways. We were totally beyond helping ourselves, doomed to misery and total destruction. But our tender heavenly Father refused to give up on us. He has given to us the most precious thing He has—His Son. Jesus will forever be one of the human family and one of us. It is a sacrifice that will be the central theme for study and meditation for the rest of eternity.

As you think about these things, how do you feel about all that God has done for you? His Spirit is drawing you now to accept Him and believe the truth about Him. He wants you to know that He loves you earnestly and has given everything to get you back. I can't resist this kind of love, it is too wonderfully compelling for me. How about you?

²⁷ Matthew 5:45

CHAPTER 8

Comparing the Two Kingdoms

Before we move on it would be helpful to summarise the two separate and distinct kingdoms that currently exist in the world; God’s eternal kingdom and Satan’s kingdom, that were both presented to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. If we think for a moment what defines a kingdom, there are three attributes that we need to consider:

1. **GOVERNMENT:** A system by which the kingdom is ruled. For example, democracy or dictatorship.
2. **CURRENCY:** A value system by which the citizens of a kingdom can exchange their goods.
3. **CITIZENSHIP:** A way of determining how someone can be a member of that kingdom.

We can contrast the two kingdoms in the following way:

	God’s Kingdom	Satan’s Kingdom
Government	Family	Strongest
Currency	Love/Mercy/Free Choice /Faith in God	Power/Assets/Force /Faith in self
Citizenship	Child of God	Performance and achievement

God’s government is based on the family system. The head of the government is the Father. The relationship between the leader and its citizens is close and intimate. On the other hand Satan’s kingdom is about being the strongest. Those who are the strongest are those who rule. Even in a democracy, those who are the strongest in advertising their message and strongest in persuading voters will ascend to power.

God’s kingdom trades on the strength of its relationships. Love is the currency of heaven. Citizens are secure in the love of their Father and have no need to prove their worth or value. They can enjoy one another’s company innocently without any hidden agendas. Learning to know God is the highest joy and ambition²⁸, and because God’s knowledge and wisdom and character are limitless, this joyful occupation will never end. There will always be something to learn about Him. Its citizens learn about Him directly or through the things that He has made. Therefore observing one another and studying nature and the universe is also a joyful part of being in this kingdom. Since it is clearly acknowledged that everything comes from our Father, all creation worships Him with joyful gratitude and thanksgiving.²⁹

In contrast to this, Satan’s kingdom trades in assets. Worth comes from what we achieve, so accumulation of assets is vital to being valuable. These assets can be material, mental, or relational. The bigger the house, the more things you own, the more worth you have. The higher the level of education, the higher the position of the job you have, the more worth you possess. The people you associate with are very important because a person can be a great asset to your cause. Satan’s kingdom believes that people have power within, so possessing other people can make you more powerful. Relationships with people become tools by which we gain more. This makes the need to control other people very important. There are many ways to control other people. Being nice and friendly is a common one. It is used by sales people all the time. Performing great deeds can impress people to follow you, and when these fail you can use force, blackmail and intimidation to control people and secure their allegiance. This is why so many relationships are

²⁸ Philippians 3:9,10

²⁹ Revelation 14:6,7; Revelation 4:1–9

filled with pain and sorrow today, because often people have joined together to increase their worth and their value.

The other contrast we have noted is that of citizenship. In God's kingdom you are accounted a citizen simply by being a child of God. Regardless of the circumstances or difficulties of life, this fact never changes. Your citizenship is secure in your relationship to God as your Father. In Satan's kingdom you are accounted a citizen by doing or not doing. Both achievement and laziness will grant you citizenship as long as you are focused on performing and doing. In this kingdom you wake every morning and think about what must be achieved that day for you to feel good about yourself. If people hinder your efforts to achieve, you get frustrated and angry. If you reach the end of the day and feel that you have not achieved much, you feel empty and either become depressed or more determined. Life is a cycle revolving around pride and worthlessness. When you achieve you become proud and when you fail you feel worthless. Life between success and failure is either agitated determination to achieve, or conversely fear that what you have attained will be lost. It is a never ending cycle until you die or change kingdoms.

Emotional Cycle in Satan's Kingdom



This cycle is the simple result of believing we have power in ourselves. If we are self-powered then we are dependent on no one and obtain value from no one. We must cultivate and produce our own value. Every success validates us and every failure drives us closer to nothingness.

I remember the conflict in my heart when I first began to do presentations.

I felt so blessed when I pointed people to Bible truths, but when I stood at the door to greet people as they filed out I would find myself wanting them to tell me I did well, and to validate what I had done. The better I preached the more approval my heart wanted. I knew it was wrong to think this way, so for a while when people told me I spoke well, I would say "Thank God, don't thank me," but it often seemed awkward and sometimes people felt I was pushing them away. When we recognize that all good things come from God and we are valued by Him apart from anything we do, then we are free to succeed and fail without any concern about feeling worthless and feeling the need for validation from others.

Emotional Cycle in God's Kingdom



It is important to remember that while members of God's kingdom do not obtain their value from their achievements, they do still achieve. In fact they have the capacity to achieve much more because if they fail they do not have to face the fear of worthlessness. They are still loved, still children of God regardless of whether they succeed or fail. The kingdom of God offers you the best way to achieve your full potential without leaving your relationships in tatters and your value destroyed.

We have briefly outlined the nature of these two kingdoms. In the rest of the book we will trace how these kingdoms have developed within the scope of human history and the struggles that we often face living between the two. Both kingdoms offer freedom, both kingdoms promise much, but which kingdom will leave you with a deep sense of significance and worth that is unshakable?

CHAPTER 9

The Heart of Babylon

"Where did we go wrong?" The heartbroken cry of a father who was struggling to understand the reality he now faced. "We have had a good family situation and he knows that we love him" continues the father as he desperately seeks for some explanation for why his son has just been convicted of drug trafficking, theft, and murder.

That heartbroken cry has been uttered more times than we dare to imagine; parents living with the shame and agony of a child that has fallen into a life of rebellion and wickedness. The source of this heartbroken cry can be traced to our first parents and the tragedy of their first son Cain. Parents will know the joy Adam and Eve felt when they first held little Cain in their arms. The fruit of their love was now theirs to hold and enjoy. As Eve cuddled her new precious bundle, she cried, "I have gotten a man, the Lord!"³⁰ Eve believed that Cain would be the promised Seed mentioned in Genesis 3:15 that would bring healing and blessing to all nations. Oh if only that were true, for the bitter irony for Eve was that Cain's legacy would bring misery, destruction and death to millions. Cain became the head of a class of worshippers that conduct their spiritual experience on their own

30 Literal reading of Genesis 4:1

terms. This group of people makes up the greater portion of the world's population, a group of people that the Bible would later code name *Babylon*. In this chapter we will trace the driving spirit behind this group of people and how it affects you and me.

"Daddy, why do we have to kill that poor innocent lamb?" The slaying of a lamb was designed to keep before the human family the reality of their natural human feelings towards Christ and thus the need for repentance. It therefore reveals the price that God was willing to pay in order for us to see our condition, and through the drawing of the Spirit, ask forgiveness. What an incredible gift has been offered for our salvation. It was a ritual that pointed directly to the sufferings of Christ at the moment of the offering. It also pointed forward in hope to when Christ would come to the earth to reveal the Father. It also pointed backward to the shame of what humanity has done to Christ since the fall in Eden. It was both a comforting reminder of the amazing love of God while at the same time a painful reminder of human ingratitude and selfishness. Participating in this service would always generate mixed feelings. Staring into the face of the innocent lamb and beholding its silent agony would forcefully drive home the cost of selfishness and self-will. For all who look into the face of the true Lamb of God, hope will always be mingled with the soul agony that comes with comprehending what human nature does to Christ. The natural human response to the cross is either to rewrite human origins by denying that any such fall occurred in the first place, or place the demand for the death upon God as something He requires to satisfy His anger against sin. In the majority of cases the cross is transformed from light to darkness, or worse portrayed as a symbol of hope while in reality presenting a symbol of manipulation which causes revulsion.

After many years of watching his parents slay the lamb and seeing their tears and grief coupled with hope, patience and confidence in the coming Seed, Cain decided he could no longer endure the need for humility and repentance. By focusing on the human failure that the slain lamb exposes, Cain chose not to remember the great love of God in such a gift. To Cain, the lamb only stirred up his insecurity, part of the birthright he had received from his father who had received it from Satan. To Cain the lamb only told

him that he was unacceptable to God in his own right and that his behaviour was disapproved of by God. Obviously Satan encouraged Cain to take the bold step of removing the slaying of the lamb from his worship, and

thus redefine his relationship to God by removing the need for repentance with his own works.

The Bible tells us that Cain brought an offering of fruit to the Lord.³¹ We are also told that Cain was a farmer who produced food as part of his work. Cain's offering was a symbol of his efforts to earn God's respect by the works of his hands. He transformed his worship experience from one of humble faith to one of prideful display, from intimate trusting relationship to contractual appeasement. Such a reli-

gion ignores the fact that we have no bargaining power with God; we have no life of our own to rest upon and meet God on our own terms. Sadly Cain forgot this. Satan promised him freedom in releasing himself from the conviction of sin by the lamb, but by removing the lamb Cain's religion changed from a faith relationship with the true God to a performance based set of rituals made to a god of his own devising. In this shift Cain embraced the poison of the Duracell tree, he took a flight in the paraglider of works and while he initially experienced the exhilarating sense of freedom it was only a matter of time before the paraglider reached its limit and came crashing down.

In Chapter 5 we looked at some of the emotional scars that come from the breakdown of family relationships. Here is a summary:

- Constantly seeking approval
- Judge themselves too strictly

31 Genesis 4:3

- Overact to situations over which they have no control—i.e. they are often very controlling
- Have trouble with relationships.³²

When Cain moved away from God's appointed plan to save him, he became distant from God; his family relationship had completely broken down. This distance fuelled the flames of his insecurity; the Spirit of God could no longer calm his fears or help refute Satan's lies. The emptiness only increased, and the sense of shame multiplied. Like Satan, Cain would struggle in vain to replace that sense of his broken relationship with God. No matter how hard he tried he could never remove that deep sense of emptiness until he emotionally came back to God, His kingdom, and His plan.

Cain's turbulent emotions would soon erupt. It happened at the appointed time of sacrifice, when Cain and his brother Abel came to worship God. God accepted Abel's offering of a lamb by consuming it with fire, but he left Cain's offering untouched. That was all that was needed to send Cain into a rage. Sin is extremely illogical. Cain doesn't follow the instructions and then is horribly upset when it does not work out for him.

Imagine going to the store and getting all the ingredients to bake a loaf of bread. You ask the store keeper how it is done, and he gives you the list to take home. Everything is going well until you take one smell of the yeast and you decide the bread would be better without it. You place it into the oven and a little while later you have a very sad flat loaf of bread. Now, would it make sense to fly into a rage and race up to the shop keeper and abuse him for your failure in bread making? Hardly! Yet this is exactly what Cain did with God.

Cain is nearing the point of no return. Having embraced the kingdom of Satan where his worth is determined by his efforts and performance, his ability to be guided and corrected diminishes rapidly. Cain knows that he has done the wrong thing, but the human mind can easily deceive itself, and rather than humbly submit to God he becomes angry. Gently God seeks to help and correct him and point him back to the promised gift of

32 Conway, 31

His Son, but Cain does not heed the warning. His feelings of rebellion grow and the kingdom of darkness has almost completed its most successful human experiment.

By now Cain's heart is totally dominated by the emotional forces that Satan released in heaven. He wants God's approval but on his own terms. The sense of his worthlessness increased to the point where he was ready to explode. He is caught in the horrible situation of craving approval from higher powers to satisfy his yearning for acceptance and worth, while at the same time wanting to ignore the fact that he owes everything to God and should be humbly grateful for his loving provision through the lamb. Still smouldering about being 'publicly humiliated' in front of Abel, he started arguing with him. Abel appeals to Cain about his method of worship and encourages him to come back to God's plan. This was all that Cain needed. Something snapped inside of him. His sense of worthlessness drove him to a point where he just didn't care anymore, and when that moment comes, Satan is given a completely free entry to take control. Satan fills Cain with intense hatred for his brother, family relationships are forgotten, and the kingdom of Satan now fully manifests itself. All heaven was watching as the first murder took place, the first annihilation of a sacred and precious relationship. So this is what happens when God's laws are violated! Heaven gasps, and even Satan and his angels must have experienced a momentary numbness as the lifeless form of Abel turned the ground red with its blood.

Satan shakes off the horror of this event, and to make sure of his slave he pressed the sense of guilt so deep into Cain that he could never believe that God could forgive him. This is the madness of Satan, he promises us freedom and happiness in following his course of rebellion and when we transgress, it is his voice that loudly demands from God our destruction. At the same time it is his voice that whispers to our soul that we are too evil and wicked to ever be accepted by God again; it is his voice that increases our sense of guilt to the point where we want to die. How sad that such a beautiful angel should be transformed into such a wretched destroyer. Now that Cain has stepped over the line completely, he has no defence for his soul

and Satan drives him to cry, "My iniquity is greater than can be forgiven."³³ These are the saddest words imaginable. God came to Cain, not to cut him off, but to seek to reclaim him. He asked Cain where his brother was, not to accuse him, but to give Cain an opportunity to repent and turn back to God. Sadly Cain uttered those mournful words, "My iniquity is greater than can be forgiven." He believed the lies of Satan rather than the word of God. He had sown and now he has reaped.

In verse 11 of Genesis chapter 4, God pronounces a curse. In the latter part of the curse, God tells Cain that he will be a fugitive and a vagabond. These words speak of one who shakes and staggers; it gives the sense of a man with no hope and no future. This curse was not applied by God by the waving of some celestial wand, but the curse was inherent in the rejection of God's family kingdom, inherent in the rejection of intimate relationships. His soul was tortured because he was created for intimacy, but his heart had chosen a different path—ever longing for love yet always repelling those who got close to him, wanting closeness yet never able to let people come to the secret chamber of his heart where his worthlessness abode, wanting to have friends but ever wary of a rival to his prowess. Here lies the truth of the proverb: "There is no rest for the wicked."³⁴

The Bible tells us that Cain went out from the presence of the Lord.³⁵ He now lived without the sense that God was near him. In believing that his sin had shut him out from God, he actually shut God out from himself. Now with a greater need than ever for approval and worth, he began to build a city. He would gather people around himself and be their leader. He would build great buildings and derive his worth from what he had achieved. He would surround himself with the works of his own hands and block from consciousness, as much as he could, the evidence of God's works. He would busy himself to the point where he had no time to ask himself about the state of his soul.

And so Cain became the channel for the establishment of the kingdom

³³ Genesis 4:13 – Marginal reading.

³⁴ Isaiah 57:20

³⁵ Genesis 4:16

of Satan on earth. Through him a race of men developed who showed all the signs of insecurity and worthlessness. They were seekers of power and position, developing a controlling spirit that was jealous of any rival, in an endless chase for an identity apart from the God who made the heavens and the earth. As long as Satan could keep human beings seeking for value inside themselves rather than in the arms of the great relational and personal God, he could control them. And so he has done. Down through the ages of time Satan has held a class of people under his sway, binding their worthless, insecure souls to his own and seeking to rule the world.

We have studied the heart of Babylon, a tortured heart seeking identity and worth by what it does, seeking approval for its feats, and attempting to manipulate circumstances so that it cannot be threatened. In the next chapter we will follow the development of this heart as it fleshes out through human history.

SECTION 2
ONE DESTINY
—
IDENTITY
RECLAIMED

CHAPTER 10

Breaking the Chains of the Duracell

There was a long pause as they held each other. The intensity of emotion runs deep, but they both knew the time had come. From the days of eternity Father and Son had always had close communion with each other, and now that communion was soon to be stressed and finally broken. The Son of God is now to embark on the mission to reclaim His human sons and daughters. Both Father and Son understand the risks and the cost involved, but love drives them on.

For a brief moment, the Father and Son look into the future and with prophetic eyes watch the mission unfold. The scorn, the rejection, the hatred, the spitting, the kicking, the lash, and the nails all pale into nothingness compared to that one horrid moment in time when heaven and earth stand still and behold the separation of Father and Son. The Son observes the millennia of guilt, suffering, rebellion and worthlessness weighing upon Him and watches to see Himself shaken like a leaf, ripped and torn by the sense of the Father's hidden face caused by sin. The Father is with His Son in the darkness but it's the Son who carries our sense of abandonment into the horrors of *the* death.³⁶

36 Hebrews 2:9

The embrace tightens—how can the Father give Him up to this destiny? At a deeper level they both wrestle with the possibility of failure and eternal loss to the power of sin. The Son of God would take human nature upon Himself providing a window of opportunity for His arch rival, Satan, to overpower Him. There were no guarantees of success. How could they embark upon such a dangerous risk? How could they even entertain such a breathtaking plan? Yet agape love drives them on.

That long pause which seems like an eternity finally ends; they both resolve to carry out the plan. The Son steps to the edge of heaven, one final look into the loving face of His Father and then He is gone.

In Chapter 6 we looked at the long and challenging list with which God would need to deal if He was to save His sons and daughters on earth. In Chapter 9 we saw the development of Satan's kingdom in the heart of man and how Satan rules us through our sense of worthlessness. If Jesus was to break that power, He must remove that sense of worthlessness. He must reconnect our sense of identity as children of God and overcome the false identity conceived in the Duracell tree.

A deep sense of foreboding must have gripped the heart of Satan as he watched the angels sing the anthem of joy to the shepherds that the Messiah had come. The shining star that guided the wise men to the lowly stable would have added no comfort. You can imagine as he gazed upon this noble infant that he knew he was in for a fight. He was unable to break the peaceful calm that rested over the child, which he had always been able to do with every previous child. It was a puzzle; the child was made of flesh and blood but a deep peace rested upon the child that he was completely unable to disturb. Satan knew he was in trouble.

This troubled spirit rested upon the heart of Herod and we are given a window into the turmoil that stirs the dark spirit world. The deep sense of insecurity that ruled Herod made him easy bait for Satan's 'shock and awe' campaign against the kingdom of heaven. He would take Him out before the real contest would begin. But the peaceful confidence of the infant King was not misplaced. Providence provided a way of escape for Him so that

He may reveal the truth about His Father, exposing the ruler of darkness, and in human flesh break the chains of insecurity that enslaved the doomed human race.

The life of Jesus can be summed up in the following words:

And He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him. —John 8:29

It did not matter what Satan did, he could not break that sense of dignity and confidence. Christ clung to His Sonship with a tenacity that even awed the prince of darkness. Satan must have been enraged at his futile efforts to move Christ to sin. At last, someone who could resist Satan. After four thousand years of success with every single person, Satan slams into the rock-solid wall of a human soul that is confident in His Sonship to God. Sonship was the key to victory; Sonship was the surest fortification against that torrent of worthlessness that was drowning the human race, and therefore Sonship must be the focal point of the conflict between Christ and His assailant.

What benefit is the most beautiful revelation of love if no man, woman or child has the power to embrace that gift—none!

The town of Nazareth is pulsed with excitement. News of the Baptiser spreads rapidly. The forerunner to the Messiah had come, and as the message reaches the lowly carpenter's shop, Jesus knew that the time to glorify His Father had come. He lays down his chisel and saw, embraces his mother and heads towards the Jordan.

Jesus is confident in His Sonship, but the coming conflict in the wilderness will test Him like no man has been tested before. The gates of human woe will be released upon Him like a bursting dam. Jesus must face the full force of human worthlessness and remain steadfast. If He can stand firm, then for the first time someone will have broken the chains of the Duracell. The spoils of this victory would become the inheritance of those who believe on Him.

The battle in the wilderness was foundational to the work of the cross. Of

what use is the offer of pardon if the human soul cannot break the chains of his nothingness? What benefit is the most beautiful revelation of love if no man, woman or child has the power to embrace that gift—none! The worthlessness and nothingness of the Duracell must first be overcome and the spoils of victory placed in the hands of the human race so that all can be empowered to embrace the matchless gift of the cross and truly believe that God loves and forgives them.

The Father knows what is coming and He will strengthen the hand of His Son for the battle, not by a powerful display, not by the use of an army with weapons. None of these would meet the coming foe. God offers His best weapon—the empowerment that comes from Their relationship to one another. As Jesus comes up out of the water, and the dove descends, the heavens open and Jesus hears audibly the voice of His Father, **“This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased.”** These words are the sharpest sword that the Father could have handed to His Son to do battle. Safe in the WORD of His father, He will battle the wily foe and break the shackles of sin on our behalf that we could never break.

The significance of this statement goes far deeper than most would imagine. The fact that God is accepting a member of the human race offers incredible hope to the rest of us. Through Jesus, God reaches out to each one of us and tells us that we are His beloved children. If we ever hope to accept the gift of the cross we must first hear those precious words, “You are my beloved child in whom I am well pleased.” It is impossible to accept a gift from an enemy without wondering if it is laced with poison or has strings attached, but a gift from a loving family member can be accepted for what it is—a gift, pure and simple. There is no way to approach the cross other than across the bridge of a solid belief in our sonship or daughtership to God. Any other path will lead to legalism or license to sin.

Those words from heaven must have enraged Satan. A reminder of something that he was but now is not—a son! It was a reminder of his nothingness and futility. Yet pride does not die easily, and so Satan prepares to unleash his barrage of temptations upon Jesus in the wilderness.

The Bible record says that Jesus “was in the desert forty days, being tempted by Satan.”³⁷ I think most people would find ten minutes of constant temptation overpowering let alone forty days! Satan had had four thousand years of testing practise to get it right and you can be assured that Jesus was made the mark of every weapon of hell. Who can comprehend the depth of this conflict? The whole universe held their collective breath as Satan laid blow after blow upon the Son of God. As for us, we were fast asleep, oblivious to the heroic stand made by Jesus to set us free. If Jesus failed here we would have all been crushed by the chains of our nothingness. Jesus was our one and only hope to pierce the darkness.

I get to a point like this and I just have to stop and think about Him. What can I say? My heart just brims with grateful joy at the determined unrelenting efforts of this mighty Prince to help us in our dire situation. It is just like a father or mother who would run through a burning house to save their child. He was almost mentally crushed by Satan, but he would not let go His Sonship. This man causes something deep inside me to cry out—“I must be worth something. Nobody would do this unless they really cared!” I tell you this love draws me in a way I find irresistible. I do resist Him, but thank God He is more determined than I am!

When Jesus is at His most vulnerable point—tired, hungry and lonely, all the things that drive humanity into compromise—Satan comes to the crux of the issue. “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.”³⁸ What else would the test be except about Sonship? Jesus wasn’t told how long He was going to be in the desert; the record does not say that He was told in forty days it would all be over. Jesus was still out there, and no ravens had come to feed Him, no manna had fallen from heaven. Maybe He had been mistaken about the voice from heaven? “Your Father would not want you to remain in this condition. Do something about it,” Satan whispers.

Satan was using the medium of appetite to try to break the faith of Jesus in His Father’s word. Forty days earlier, God had said “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.” If Jesus turns stones into bread then He

37 Mark 1:13

38 Matthew 4:3 NIV

would be doubting the word of God, and that doubt would be enough to confuse His identity. Beyond this Jesus is being asked to perform something to prove His identity. Asking Jesus to turn stones into bread to prove who He is was a direct door into the kingdom of Satan—identity by performance and achievement.

How many of us have not fallen for this trap of proving our worth by what we achieve? Driven to show that you have what it takes to reach the top, ignoring sleep and relaxation and most of all prayer time and Bible study, staying late at the office and missing vital family time—just to get that promotion or bonus. Why do we push ourselves so hard? In many cases I believe we are responding to the challenge: “If you are a son or daughter of God, perform some great act to prove it.”

Do you find that when you awake in the morning and you want to spend some time to meditate and be with God that your head just begins to fill up with all the things that need to be done that day, until you can’t take it anymore and you just compromise with a 5 minute prayer and then you are off into the day. Does this happen to you? Why? If you get to the end of the day and find that you have not achieved very much, are you still content and happy, or do you feel disappointed and a bit depressed? Do you get agitated at “wasting time” lying in a sick bed, when you could be crossing things off your ‘to do’ list? All of these things point to the fact that without exception all of us fall for Satan’s temptations to prove our identity and worth by what we do. Due to the fact that deep down inside we carry that insecurity factor passed down to us by Adam and Eve, we are easy targets for needing to create spiritual and mental fig leaves to cover ourselves. The insecure person will always respond to a challenge to their identity, whereas a secure person will not even bother. It reminds me of a time when I was walking with my friend who had a Rottweiler. We walked past a neighbour’s place

If you get to the end of the day and find that you have not achieved very much, are you still content and happy, or do you feel disappointed and a bit depressed?

that had a much smaller dog. The small dog was barking and yapping and running around trying to get the attention of the Rottweiler. The Rottweiler did not even turn its head to look at the smaller dog. I felt like the smaller dog was saying, “Come on Mr Rottweiler, I’ll take you on and prove to my owner that I can beat a big dog like you,” but the Rottweiler was confident in who he was and didn’t even respond to the challenge. What would it add to his worth?

It is for this very reason that Jesus had to enter the wilderness of temptation. The human family needed a person who could demonstrate that he believed he was a child of God simply because God said it, rather than through proving it by what he did. The world needed a David to take on the seemingly invincible Goliath of worthlessness that binds us to our sins and makes us slaves of the devil. Indeed the story of Christ’s temptation in the wilderness has many similarities to the story of David and Goliath:

1. Satan, as a spirit being, had many advantages over Jesus who was cumbered with human nature. —1 Samuel 17:33
2. Jesus represented the entire human race and a victory for Christ meant freedom for us, just as Satan represented all of the forces of evil and a victory for him meant we would forever remain the slaves of the powers of darkness. —1 Samuel 17:9
3. Jesus was 40 days in the wilderness facing the taunts and temptations of Satan just as Goliath taunted Israel for 40 days. —1 Samuel 17:16
4. Satan/Goliath came in his own power but Jesus/David came in the name of the Lord to reveal His Father and expose him who had defied the army of the living God. —1 Samuel 17:45
5. The weapons that Jesus used seemed weak by worldly standards —He trusted in the words of God and He used those words with precision to expose the mind of Satan.—1 Samuel 17:43

The parallels are remarkable. I can’t help but place myself as one of those Israelite soldiers standing on the hillside, listening to Goliath insulting my

God, my religion, and me personally. “Where is your God? Why won’t you fight me if He is so strong? You are weak and useless and a shame to your God?” Listening to this type of abuse for forty days would really get depressing. Just look at the size of him! His armour glistens in the sunlight as his monstrous voice bellows insults across the valley. The situation seems hopeless, and there is a sinking feeling of resignation to slavery. Is it any different today? We have the taunts of Satan about our inabilities and weaknesses. His temptations seem so strong and overwhelming, and we fall to them again and again, and there is that sinking feeling of resignation to slavery. There are even those who preach that our slavery can never be vanquished and that sin will always get the better of us; such a sad surrender to the slavery of sin. The Son of David is in our camp, and He has emancipated us from the chains of the devil. His victory in the wilderness of temptation is a victory for the entire human family. You can choose to think that you must still face your Goliath, or you can watch in awe on the hillside as Jesus severs the head of your temptation. If you believe *you already have the victory* because of Jesus, rather than hoping He will deliver you, then you have found the very crux of faith.

I am so immensely glad that the Son of David has set me free from the power of worthlessness. He has removed the heart of my rebellion and pride. He has set my feet upon the solid rock of being identified as a child of God. He personally has faced the doubts for me and conquered them by faith in our Father’s Word. Sing and rejoice with me you sons and daughters of God. Jesus has smashed the chains of the Duracell and made us accepted in the Beloved.

CHAPTER 11

Opening the Gates of Heaven

A splinter of light rips through the darkness to signal that the dawn has come. It also signals the time for the task to be commenced. The pulse quickens, the breath shortens, as preparations are made for the journey. As they head out into the dawn, Abraham's mind is flooded with memories. He remembers holding Isaac for the first time and the immense sense of joy that was released after such a long wait. Memories of little Isaac jumping into Daddy's bed and snuggling up close as he listened carefully to stories of Adam and Eve, Noah and many others, hang like huge lead weights upon his shoulders as he contemplates the task before him, as God had said:

“Take now your son, your only *son* Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.” —Genesis 22:2

God had spoken and Abraham now summons all his strength to obey the command. There is no explanation, no reason given, just the command. Over the years that Abraham had walked with God, he had learned not to resist His commands. He had come to trust that God knew best and His was the only safe path to follow. But the path was hard, unthinkably hard!

Who can comprehend the struggle raging in the mind of Abraham? Gladly would he choose to be the offering instead of his son. There was nothing he would not do to save his son from his fate. Abraham breathes hard as he struggles to hide his pain from Isaac. This must be a nightmare that will soon go away. Reality strikes home when Isaac questions, “Father, we have the wood and the fire, but where is the sacrifice?” An arrow strikes the heart of Abraham. How will he answer? A quick prayer ascends to God for wisdom and then Abraham answers, “God will provide a sacrifice my son.”³⁹

On the top of the mountain, Abraham painfully reveals to Isaac his understanding of God's command. Isaac is a young man and could easily overpower his father and run for it, but Isaac has learned the discipline of obedience and yields his own desires to the wisdom of his father. All heaven watches as Abraham prepares his son, his precious son for that final moment. Human reason now unleashes a battery of arguments against faith, but Abraham standing like a tall cedar in cyclonic winds, bends but does not yield his resolve to carry out his understanding of the request made of him.⁴⁰

Everything is ready and Abraham looks down at his son. The pain rips through his heart and his strength begins to fail, but he holds fast. Offering a prayer he sets his mind to plunge the knife which will end the life of his most precious son.

At that moment a voice is heard. “Abraham! Do not lay your hand on the child, for now I know that you fear God.”⁴¹

As I ponder this story, I can't help but try placing myself in the shoes of Abraham and my son in Isaac's shoes. I grasp at understanding the strain that he felt, but the picture is immediately halted. Something deep inside reaches up and forbids the image to be completed. Emotionally my mind cannot cope with such a scene.

To grasp the horror and sacrifice of Jesus on the cross we need to glimpse the depth of the relationship between the Father and the Son. The very

³⁹ Genesis 22:7–8

⁴⁰ See the book *Agape* Chapter 24—Abraham and the abomination that desolates at fatheroflove.info

⁴¹ Genesis 22:12

essence of Their kingdom is modelled between them; the kernel of Their approach to life is revealed in the love that They have for each other. If we do not add this relational dimension to the cross then we really have missed the point.

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes on Him, should not perish but have everlasting life. —John 3:16

The severing of a precious relationship is the most devastating thing a person can experience. The thought of being separated from the ones we love is a fear that lurks deep in the heart of every human soul. I find that after being away from my family for just a week on a speaking engagement, my heart yearns to be home with the ones I love. There is nothing in this world for which I would trade my relationship with my family. Even the thought of it is sickening, and yet when we look into the heart of God, as revealed in the Bible, we find that God our Father was willing to risk losing His Son forever, just so you and I can walk through the gates of heaven and be reunited with our Creator and His Son.

God did not forsake His Son, but the weight of our sins upon Jesus caused him to feel what sinners feel because of guilt.

Someone may respond, “Yes, but Jesus knew He would rise again and be reunited with His Father, so it was not that bad.” Jesus believed this by faith, as He could not see through the portals of the tomb. There was an element of risk that He might have failed in His mission. When the guilt of a rebellious world weighed upon Him and His Father’s love was enshrouded by our human disbelief in God’s

forgiveness of our sins, Jesus searched into the blackness to find the loving face that had always been His joy throughout eternity, but sin hid His Father’s face so that He felt completely separated from Him. His hope was swallowed up, death was all that awaited him; He was tempted to believe that He would be forever cut off from the One He loved but faith cried

out “into Your hands I commit My Spirit.”⁴² The faith of Jesus triumphed through such overwhelming circumstances.

God did not forsake His Son, but the weight of our sins upon Jesus caused him to feel what sinners feel because of guilt. In Chapter 9 we read about Cain who cried out, “My iniquity is greater than can be forgiven.” Christ carried this on the cross for us. Our sins cause us to feel that God is against us and actually desires to kill us for our sins, but God commended His love towards us and allowed His Son to pass through this experience for us that we might believe we can be forgiven.

All of this begs the question, how serious is God about breaking down the barriers between Himself and us? In the story of Abraham and Isaac we see a picture of God and His Son. It is natural for us, along with Abraham, to think that God wanted Abraham to kill his son. God told Abraham to offer up his son, and Abraham understood this to mean to kill him because this reflects our human perception of justice for sin. The fact that God stopped Abraham shows that this was not His desire, yet in the process Abraham revealed a faith that was willing to surrender all his cherished hopes to God. When God provided the ram to Abraham as a substitute, we see that God provided a substitute for man’s perception of justice. God allowed His Son to be separated from Him in order that we might believe that we are forgiven of our sins.

In the earthquake and darkness of that terrible day when the greatest love that has ever been was crushed and severed because of our sins, I hear the cry of the Father, “My Son, My Son, how can I give you up? How can I let you go?” This is Hell right here. Both Father and Son have experienced Hell in the sense of the severing of their relationship on our behalf. They paid the price that we understood had to be paid. What else can the essence of Hell be but the very opposite of what God’s kingdom stands for – loving, intimate relationship?

So what does this mean for us? It means that the Son of God has tasted the horror of separation from divine love on our behalf, so that we don’t

⁴² Psalm 31:5

have to experience it. “Death, where is your sting, and grave, where is your victory?”⁴³ Now nothing can separate us from the love of God because of what Jesus and His Father have done for us. Sacrifice and offering was not required by God, but in order for us to know we could be forgiven God paid the ultimate price.

Heaven’s gate swings open for us because the Son of God experienced the crushing weight of Hell to shut its gate. We need not ever enter there and experience the weeping and gnashing of teeth, as will happen to those who reject what Jesus has done for us and permanently sever themselves from divine love.

The challenge that remains for us now is to make that journey in our minds from a state where we feel worthless, defiant and determined (carving an identity by what we do), back to the source of life, where love waits for us and we know that we are His beloved children. Even though Jesus has opened the gates of heaven for us, we must make the journey from the kingdom of the Duracell to the kingdom of God, from identity by achievement to identity by sonship and daughtership, or in other words, from salvation by works to salvation by faith. The rest of this book will be devoted to the challenges and privileges of this journey.

SECTION 3

THE JOURNEY BACK TO SONSHIP

43 1 Corinthians 15:55

CHAPTER 12

Life Powered by the Duracell

An air of expectancy pervades the room. I am seated with my fellow students in the auditorium and longing to hear a familiar name. I had worked hard that year in my studies and while I told myself it did not really matter, deep inside the desire grew.

The school was handing out awards to various students for their achievements through the year. During this event, I play a very interesting little mind game. “You have worked hard this year, you could get this next award... no, somebody else will win it...but you have a chance.” As the moment arrives when the name is to be read out, my heart begins to beat faster in anticipation and then I hear the name; it is not mine but one of my friends. This is where it gets interesting. On the outside, I am clapping for my friend and their success, but on the inside a very different scenario is going on: “Why did he get it? I worked harder than he did, I can’t believe they would give it to him. Ah, I think I know why. He is related to one of the teachers, and that’s why they picked him. The result was manipulated! *It’s not what you know, it’s who you know.*” All the while I am clapping and smiling and trying to appear composed. The clouds begin to gather and for the next few hours I am feeling a bit depressed and a little bit angry. It’s just

another day of life powered by the Duracell.

It does not take a child very long to work out that if they want to be valued and accepted, they must be first among equals. Welcome to the world of comparison. Have you ever fallen into the trap of buying one of your children something for their birthday and nothing for their sibling? Usually all hell seems to break loose and your deprived child is parroting the words, “It’s not fair,” amidst tears and screams and sometimes even a tantrum. Then there is the “watch me” competition at the park. You are watching one of your children on the slide and you smile as they slide down. Behind you a voice calls out, “Watch me,” and you turn to see your other child swinging on the swing. You turn your attention to something else and your child notices and cries out, “Watch me” and then you get hit with a whole string of “watch me’s” like machine gun fire, each “watch me” increasing in volume and intensity. Then you sit down for lunch and just as you are about to indulge, you hear this lovely little tune, “He’s got more than me, not fair, I want more.” This is the essence of life powered by the Duracell. As we get older we try to be a bit more refined, but comparison and attention seeking form the hub of human existence.

Most school curriculums seem to understand this need for comparison and attention seeking. Being herded together with a group of your peers away from the affections of the home environment provides the perfect culture to embed Duracell principles. The next 12 years will be a race to comparatively excel in one or more of a number of areas and thus secure a bright and happy future. Most cultures seem to favour the more intelligent. Comparative intelligence is an asset that will take you far. Have you ever wondered why children who have the ability to retain and regurgitate knowledge tend to be awarded more highly than the child who tends to be more gifted with their hands?⁴⁴ Could you imagine gaining university entrance because you really knew how to look after a garden or fix a car engine? There are places for people with those skills, but fortune tends to

⁴⁴ Western culture is based very much on Greek culture which tended to be more academic than practical. It is no accident that the beast in Revelation 13 described as leading the whole world was primarily a leopard which represents the kingdom of Greece.

place the academic at the top of the pile.

Year after year children bring home their report cards, and they develop a perception of themselves based on that report card. I have experienced a number of situations where a person was gifted with their hands but struggled academically. As a result you often find them to be very self-limiting with comments like, “That’s beyond me,” or “I could never do that,” or the blatant “I’m too dumb for that.”

But never fear there are other ways to succeed. Every school system has a sports program that allows children to develop an athletic comparative guide. Children will spend thousands of hours developing an athletic skill that will hopefully one day bring them the power and glory for which they yearn. We all know that sport is just a game right? Tell that to all the English soccer fans that rampage through the streets of Europe during the World

Cup. How about the man who was watching his beloved cricket team losing the World Cup? As a result he had a heart seizure and died before the end of the game. And why is it that various sportsmen can be paid millions of dollars a year for kicking a piece of leather around, trying to get it between two sticks? Sport is serious business as it provides one of the simplest means of gaining worth by achievement and getting all the attention a person could wish for. It is one of the best systems for feeding the Duracell and killing the

Sport is serious business as it provides one of the simplest means of gaining worth by achievement and getting all the attention a person could wish for. It is one of the best systems for feeding the Duracell and killing the belief that we can be valued by relationship rather than achievement.

belief that we can be valued by relationship rather than achievement.

One of the most interesting things about sport is that even though you can perform at the highest level, if you come second, no one will remember your name. The emotional trauma of losing can be devastating. I remember

watching a soccer player just crumpled on the ground sobbing like a baby because of his failed goal attempt in a penalty shootout that lost his team the prized trophy. I remember watching his coach assisting him off the field and wondering how much he felt he was worth at that moment. But of course it’s only a game. Yes, but it’s a game that is a life and death struggle for value and acceptance.

We could list a number of other gods that we hope would show us favour and give us the success and happiness we desire. There is the realm of physical beauty. The cut throat world where fame can be won or lost based on the structure of your cheek bones or the size of your chest. How many young women do you know who have cried themselves to sleep night after night because they felt they didn’t make the grade? We have recently seen a rapid rise in a problem called anorexia that drives mainly women to starve themselves, so they can get down to an impossibly small figure.

What about the realm of wealth creation, job status or even suburb status. I have worked in the white collar corporate world for some years and it is quite interesting to observe the pecking order. You can tell a person’s position by the type and quality of their office furniture. The top boss has a separate room for his office with a window view to the streets below. He has the leather high backed chair with the arm rests. He has the big stained wood desk with the latest computer sitting on it. The next guy down also has his own office, but his window view is not quite as good and his chair not quite as fancy and his computer not quite as fast. The next guy down just has his office partitioned and his chair has no arm rests, and he can’t even see out the window. It’s laughable when you think about it, but it is very serious business in the corporate world. Office furniture is an important part of effective comparison with your peers.

The list of comparative opportunities is endless in the world of the Duracell, but usually they tend to fall into one of a few basic categories:

1. Education Level
2. Athletic Ability
3. Music/Artistic Ability

4. Job Status/Income Level
5. Physical Appearance
6. Possessions/Assets
7. Nationality

These are the gods that the world worships and hopes will favour them. They are exacting task masters and usually demand full submission if you hope to be favoured by them. They will usually demand the sacrifice of family and friends and if you are lucky, you may have your moment of glory before you fade into nothingness. All of us become slaves to these gods through the power of the Duracell, and it is these gods that the God who made the heavens and the earth seeks to save us from.

CHAPTER 13

Stairway to Heaven

The days were getting shorter and cooler; winter was on its way. It was time to build up the wood pile to supply the fire place through the biting cold that was soon to descend upon the happy little valley. The man of the house was busily cutting wood when he spied from the corner of his eye a small pair of shoes. He looked up and there was a young boy watching his every move. “My Daddy can chop wood faster than that.” “Is that so?” replied the man rather amused at the lad’s boldness. “He sure can! My Daddy can do anything. He’s the best there is.” “Well you are privileged to have such a Daddy.”

Such was the simplicity of my childhood. These were the days when Mummy and Daddy could do no wrong and were the most awesome people imaginable. In some ways it would have been nice to remain in that simple state, but it was not to be. After a short time in school I began to adjust to the constant round of comparisons, seeking to find my place in the little community of children I shared my education experience with. The level of comparison was not so intense during primary school days, and so much of my early school experience I recall with fond memories. There were lots of crafts and games and activities, generally it was a lot of fun. But there

were times when the future was brought forward and I would experience the bittersweet taste of the Duracell kingdom.

When I was seven my family moved to a new place and I was soon feeling my way into a new group of children. I made friends quickly but also encountered some nasty fellows. I was a fairly solid build as a child and a couple of skinny kids decided they would get some mileage out of the fact that I was slightly better padded than they were.

“Fatso,” “Fat Albert” and “Slob” are some of the names I remember. It was a horrid experience which many of us have encountered in childhood. This happened day after day. The enemy of souls was using these boys to destroy my sense of worth. On the way to school one morning I decided I had had enough. “Mum, I am not getting out of the car. I am not going to school.” “Of course you are my boy.” “No I’m not!” As we drove in, I saw that menacing pair watching like vultures to attack their prey. Mum opened the door and tried to dislodge me. The next few minutes were quite intense. I kicked, protested, yelled, and clung to my chair. Was this just a case of a typical, badly behaved boy? Maybe, but when my sense of identity as a person was being flattened, I was going to take some desperate measures to save myself. I don’t actually remember what happened next but I remember that the bullying stopped. Here was a real taste of what lay ahead.

The cruelty manifested in children is the raw, unbridled result of the principles of Satan’s comparative kingdom in action. We can often stand dazed by the brazen selfishness and ingratitude that children exhibit. Do we naturally grow out of these traits? No. As we have learned no one leaves this kingdom without the assistance of the Son of David. As we grow older we simply become more cunning and refined.

By the time I had reached the middle of high school I was well programmed. I was learning to worship the god of education, the god of sport and the god of physical appearance. I wanted to worship the god of money but I didn’t have a job! Everything around me was telling me that I had to strive to be first; strive to achieve. I learned that only winners are accepted, and losers are worth nothing. Many times my incentive to do well at school

was motivated more by the possibility of achieving first place than simply enjoying the content of what I was learning. I would watch films on television that would reinforce this belief. Leading male actors were portrayed as having to achieve some great feat which would melt the heart of some young lady. This taught me that a relationship was something that you achieved and that the young lady was more like a prize than a friend. Not that you would state it that way, this was all happening at the sub-conscious level.

This was the time for dreaming. I often would lie on my bed and dream about hitting the winning runs for Australia in a cricket match, or scoring the final goal, or risking life and limb to save some young damsel in distress. These dreams formed the fabric of my value system.

The more I dreamed, the more determined I became to achieve those goals. The hard part is that I couldn’t achieve these goals in a vacuum. I had to beat other people. I wanted my friends but I wanted my dreams first. I could be civil when my dreams were not threatened, but when I sensed that my dreams were being challenged, it was war!

I worked hard at achieving my goals. I excelled in sport and in my education; well two out of three is not bad. Then I began to enter another phase. Once I had reached the top, I had to try and stay there. There was a constant looking over my shoulder and guarding my precious position. Then there is the expectation of reputation. Once I had carved out a reputation, what if I did badly? That would be horrible, so I became even more determined not to slip.

This battle raged on for a while until I began to realise that reaching all my goals would be nearly impossible. This led to bursts of rage! I think I must have felt betrayed. I had served my masters well, and now they were mocking me. I was trained in a system that could never give me a lasting sense of worth and so I was angry.

Many people struggle to discern the volatility and destructiveness often displayed by young people and why many of them commit suicide or resort to binge drinking and drugs. I believe it is often because they realise that they will never achieve their dreams through the methods they have

been taught. They will never be great in the eyes of others, and so they self-destruct.

I remember one day playing in a basketball game. The game was close and the pressure was on. The guy I was marking suddenly made a drive for the hoop, and as he lifted the ball I reached in and flicked it cleanly out of his hand. To my disbelief I heard the referee's whistle and the word "foul!" I knew I hadn't touched him, and all of a sudden this rage just welled up inside me; anger that this wretched system which promised me the world gave me nothing. I stormed over to the referee and stood two inches from his face and just turned the volume up to an obscene decibel level. Something snapped inside me and I was not holding back. I was promptly removed from the court and banned from the competition. As I walked off, I believe God spoke to me. I asked myself, "What is wrong with you man? You really lost it out there; you are losing control!" It was the first time I really had a look at myself and questioned the direction I was heading. God was drawing me to search for something better. I began to feel that there had to be a better way.

The enemy of my soul also realised this and tried to drive me deeper into trying to prove myself, like a smoker who senses that his time to quit has come and begins smoking twice as many cigarettes. I began to withdraw as my dreams faded, and I became quite moody. One day my mother came into my room and began to complain about its sad condition. Let's just say it was less than optimal as most teenage boys' rooms are. I became incensed that she had come into my space and was ordering me around. I let fly a series of choice words under my breath and told her to leave me alone.

It is interesting to see the different ways that God can reach a person. Many of my friends referred to their mothers with very demeaning language. Somehow my father managed to teach me some sense of respect for my parents, and I vowed I would never speak about my mother the way some of my friends did. When I uttered those words about my mother it was like the last piece of dignity that I had was stripped away. I was shocked that I would say such things, and my depression deepened. I was getting to the

point of not caring any more, and that is a very dangerous place to be. I had this real sense that I had come to a crossroads. The broad path beckoned me with its yawning jaws full of its wine, women and song. On the other side was the narrow path as laid out by the Bible. Would I follow the religion my parents had taught me or would I go like a blazing comet into the broad path? I could see no point in pretending to be a Christian any more. It was now plain to me that I was not a Christian and never really had been, even though I was brought up in a Christian environment. It was either Christ or the devil. Thankfully, I chose to try and find the real Jesus of the Bible.

I decided I would read a book that had been in our home for many years. It was called *Steps to Christ*. Now that title seemed perfect for my needs. I began to read with a hunger and desperation to find Him. I had to find the stairway to heaven, because I could not handle the kingdom of Satan any more.

I was trained in a system that could never give me a lasting sense of worth and so I was angry.

Early in the book the author explained that Jesus came to dispel the lies that the human race had embraced about God, and how He came to show that God really loved us. I drank in the words like the parched earth under the summer rain. The author invited me to think about Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane and follow Him to the cross.

As I was imagining these scenes, suddenly I felt like I was actually standing and watching Him. The figure on the cross seemed very real, and I received this strong impression that He was hanging there because He loved me and understood my desperate need to escape the kingdom of Satan. I received the thought that I could trust Him as my best friend and that He would guide me to the heavenly kingdom. As I beheld Him there, I felt this immense sense of gratitude that He was willing to save me and I felt the weight of guilt, anxiety, depression and fear that I had carried for years just roll off my back. A peace entered my heart that I had never felt before, and then I cried and cried for joy. The Son of David had broken through my darkness and pierced it with the light of day.

CHAPTER 14

Same Gods, Different Names

The room was alive with activity, laughter, music, and youthful excitement. Towards the front of the room were two large speakers pounding out the music from the latest rock bands. I had organised a party to celebrate with a group of my friends—well at least I had tried to. I went and sat in one corner of the room where an animated teen was describing a scene out of one of the latest movies. I settled down and tried to soak in the atmosphere, but something just wasn't right. I got up and went to the patio out the back and joined in with some young 'Romeos' who were discussing their latest exploits in capturing the women of their dreams. No, I just didn't enjoy that either. Boy, what is wrong with me? The music was starting to get on my nerves, and I glanced across the room and saw a scene in the video which was playing that I found very offensive. The thought struck me like a freight train, I hate this stuff!

My mind accelerated with possible scenarios. Up till now this had been my definition of fun, and now I didn't want it anymore. Something had taken hold of my heart and made it impossible to enjoy. Somewhere out of the abyss came the hideous thought that my life of fun was over and that I would never be able to enjoy myself any more. I raced out the front of the

house and onto the front lawn and shook my fist in the air and cried out, "You've wrecked my life!"

It was a few weeks after my 'Damascus road experience' with Jesus. My life was turned on its head. I had never felt so much peace in my life, and the Bible just started to come alive. I was drinking it all in and experiencing a freedom I had never known before. When Jesus came into my life, the changes were immediate. Suddenly, I became aware that some of my language was inappropriate, that some of my jokes were quite vulgar, and that certain aspects of my lifestyle were incompatible with the new direction I was now headed. I was on a journey to the new kingdom. It was like going to a totally foreign country and learning the language and customs from scratch. I wanted to learn because I loved the Lord of that kingdom, but I had been schooled in a different kingdom, and it was going to take some time to adjust.

It was not until the night of that party that I realised how radical a transformation was taking place. Since Jesus had captured my heart by His love, I could not resist Him when He called. So on the night of the party when I was doing what I thought was ok; I could sense that He was calling me away from that type of life. Since I didn't know anything else, I became afraid that what would replace it would not be as good. It is so easy to be afraid of the unknown even when we know it is right. Thankfully I chose to trust that Jesus would take care of me, and it was better to trust Him than my feelings.

When I accepted Jesus as my Saviour, I just floated for weeks. I sensed a special closeness to Him that has remained with me till this day. Jesus had opened for me the gates of heaven, but now He would help me to remove the seeds of the Duracell. He began to help me root out that philosophy of life that made my performance and achievement the centre of my value system. It is a journey that every child of Adam must take. The only way we can make it is to keep our eyes fixed on the light of the cross and humbly follow the steps of our Saviour into the principles of the new kingdom.

I started attending a prayer meeting with my friends. On that first night as we knelt together I felt the sweet Spirit of God around us, but there was

another spirit from my old life that was harassing me. As we prayed around the circle, a thought struck me: “I can’t pray like these people can pray, they are so eloquent.” My mind seemed locked into this thought and as the prayer circle moved closer to me my heart began to race faster. Soon I would be in the spotlight and everyone would be listening to me. But wait a minute; this was a prayer meeting about Jesus, not me!

Here is the curse of the Duracell. Even though I had given my heart to Jesus and was seeking to follow Him, the principles of my old life were still ready and willing to drag me back to making myself the centre of everything, to make my performance in prayer the issue, as opposed to my relationship with God in prayer.

When I first began to study the Bible, I often felt inadequate because, even though I was raised in a Christian environment, I realised that in Biblical terms I had not graduated from kindergarten. I loved listening to what I was taught but in the back of my mind something kept niggling me and saying, “How can they just look up those verses so easily, I could never do that.” I was fumbling around trying to find the right book and verse, and I just prayed I would not be last so everyone would be waiting for me. How embarrassing! The years of training I had received in comparing myself with others began to surface in my new Christian journey. It was fairly easy for the Spirit of Christ to convict me about my language and lifestyle, but it would take time for me to realise how deeply rooted the tentacles of the Duracell run.

As I continued on my journey I developed a deep love for the Bible. It was one of the best ways to learn about my hero who gave His life for me. I just loved studying about Jesus and it was such a blessing, but my old life was lurking, ready to snare me. I began to notice that people around me had far less knowledge than I did about Biblical things. My growing Biblical knowledge gave me more confidence to speak and soon I was taking small groups and then larger groups in Bible study. Again, this was such a blessing to me and those around me, but I was slowly, steadily moving back onto a platform of value by performance rather than value by relationship. It

happens slowly and imperceptibly, but it happens. In hindsight I see that for many of us, we have the same gods but with different names.

If you look at the table below, you can see how easy it is to believe in the Bible but live like the world. I don’t mean living a wild lifestyle, I mean gaining value by what you do.

IN THE WORLD	IN THE CHURCH
Education	Bible Knowledge
Athletic Ability	Public Speaking Ability
Artistic Ability	Music Ministry
Job Status	Church Office
Possessions	Spiritual Gifts
Physical Appearance	Church Fashion Parade
Nationality	Conservative/Liberal

For many of us our walk with Jesus is hijacked by the insidious power of the Duracell. As I look around the church today I can see that the gods we sought to escape in the world have found us in the church. They have clothed themselves in garments of light and we have embraced them as good friends. The inevitable result is anger, bitterness and fighting in the church. It’s so easy to look pious in church, but what about the person sitting on the other side of the church who won’t talk to you because you said something about them behind their back and it got back to them? What about the pianist who went to another church because she was told her playing was sub-standard? What about the doctrinal police who roam to and fro through the church seeking out those who don’t subscribe to their definition of orthodoxy, so that they might expel them from the church? What about those ‘progressives’ who seek to hijack the worship committee and force their new worship style on everyone, and too bad for those who don’t like it? The list is endless and the great enemy of our souls knows that as long as he can keep us dancing to this tune, then we are essentially still

subjects of his kingdom.

The strongest evidence that we are still crippled by the principles of Satan's kingdom is the high level of disunity and lack of Christian love in the church. If we regarded our relationships the way God regards His, there would be a lot more love in the church and a lot more care about how we deal with each other.

It is one thing to attack the corporate church for its apostasy from apostolic truth. It is another thing to see the same principles at work in our own lives. Let us make sure that we deal with the log in our own eye before we seek to remove the speck from our brother's eye.

It is very interesting that this subtle transfer of gods from the world to the church in our personal experience has also occurred in the church's corporate experience. In the fourth century, when the emperor Constantine 'embraced' Christianity, there was a whole range of changes that took place in the Christian church. One point that is particularly interesting is that many of the statues of the pagan gods that were in the Pantheon were transferred to the Christian church and the names were changed to Biblical characters like Moses, David, and Peter. Same gods, different names! It doesn't matter how

you dress it up, it is still pagan, and what can we say today? It is one thing to attack the corporate church for its apostasy from apostolic truth. It is another thing to see the same principles at work in our own lives. Let us make sure that we deal with the log in our own eye before we seek to remove the speck from our brother's eye.

It is interesting to study the journey of the most ardent followers of Christ—His disciples. The issue of power and position was often raising its head. Let's notice a few passages of Scripture:

At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" —Matthew 18:1

There is one reason and one reason only why the disciples were asking that question—self-interest. The disciples believed Jesus to be the Messiah, the Christ. They were excited and passionate about their belief in Him; some were even willing to die for Him, but just like when I was preparing to pray and my mind shifted from my relationship to my performance in prayer, the disciples moved from their relationship with the Messiah to their position in His new kingdom.

Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Him, saying, "Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask." And He said to them, "What do you want Me to do for you?" They said to Him, "Grant us that we may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on Your left, in Your glory." —Mark 10:35–37

The god of position and status had so overtaken the new kingdom principles that James and John were learning, that they asked Jesus if they could sit at His left and right hand in His kingdom. Thankfully Jesus never wearied with their continual failure to let go of the old kingdom principles. He understood that it takes time for us to see how deeply rooted the principles of Satan's kingdom really are. The problem we face is that when we allow old principles to take over the following happens:

And when the ten heard *it*, they began to be greatly displeased with James and John. —Mark 10:41

When we allow the old kingdom principles to rule us, contention will always be the result. What James and John did made the other disciples angry. Why? Because they were sending a message, "We are better than you." They may not have meant to do that but that is nearly always the result. Jesus took this opportunity to try and expand their understanding of how God's kingdom is different than the one they had grown up in. They would have to learn to think differently.

But Jesus called them to *Himself* and said to them, "You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Yet it

shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” —Mark 10:42–45

Let these words forever ring in our ears! If you wish to be great in God’s kingdom then learn to enjoy serving others rather than manipulating and controlling them. Jesus tells us that the pagans (Gentiles) lord it over others and enjoy exercising their authority and showing who’s boss. Strangely enough, this same spirit often rules the church with various members seeking to impose their will and authority on the church. Two thousand years since the cross and many of us still don’t understand the basics.

Why is it that the enemy of our souls finds it so easy to drag us back into our old way of thinking? As we have stated earlier, it is our deep sense of insecurity that makes it easy for Satan to tempt us to prove ourselves. Unless we remember how we obtain our value we will find it impossible to resist trying to turn stones into bread to prove that we are significant.

There is something I find very alarming about this Duracell principle that tenaciously clings to us. Jesus was the best teacher this world has ever seen. He spent over three years with the disciples, teaching them as much as He could about the kingdom of heaven, and even after all this we find that on the very night of His crucifixion the disciples were still being controlled by the principles of the old life.

Likewise He also *took* the cup after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you. But behold, the hand of My betrayer is with Me on the table. And truly the Son of Man goes as it has been determined, but woe to that man by whom He is betrayed!” Then they began to question among themselves, which of them it was who would do this thing. Now there was also a dispute among them, as to which of them should be considered the greatest. —Luke 22:20–24

On the very eve of the greatest demonstration of love the universe has

ever seen, those closest to Jesus, who knew more of His kingdom than anyone else, were arguing about which of them was the greatest. The sorrow Jesus experienced at that point must have been immense! Could those of us who claim to be followers of Jesus be repeating the same mistakes as the disciples—fervent followers of Jesus, yet jostling amongst ourselves as to who is the greatest?

There is only one thing worse than being controlled by the principles of the Duracell in the world; it is being controlled by them in the church. May God help us to be set free from these self-seeking principles so that we can experience the full joy of His kingdom!

CHAPTER 15

How Do You Read?

Today is going to be a special day. You are full of anticipation and excitement at the potential prospects that lie ahead. The head of a large manufacturing company is interested in a special design you have worked on and is seriously contemplating manufacturing it and exporting it around the world. You decide to meet for lunch at a nice little local restaurant. Having never met before, you nervously look around trying to identify this person who is going to transform your dream into reality. At last he arrives and you shake his hand vigorously, and then you both move into the restaurant and find your place. To get acquainted, your dining partner asks you a bit about your family and where you live and how your children are doing in school. Everything is going along nicely except for the fact that just behind you there is a guy who has developed a real art of slurping his soup. At first you brush it off, but after a while it gets a little annoying. “Some people need to learn a few manners” you think to yourself, but brush it off so you don’t get distracted. The conversation with your potential business partner is going well, and you are right in the middle of discussing some of the extra benefits of your design when all of a sudden the guy behind you let’s go a horrendous burp that nearly rattles the cutlery on your table. All eyes

are suddenly transfixed on this unusual individual that seems to have no manners at all. The room fills with sounds of snickers and muffled laughter combined with horror and disgust. Finally the owner of the restaurant comes out and asks the man to leave, saying that his types aren’t welcome in the restaurant.

The thing that is really amazing is that if this same man was sitting in a restaurant that reflected Chinese culture, no one would blink an eyelid. In fact the host and hostess might be disappointed if you did not make these gestures. Also in Chinese culture if you sought to shake the hand of someone you had not met before or talked about family issues over dinner you would be considered quite rude.⁴⁵

It is amazing how the same actions can be interpreted in completely different ways depending on which culture or world-view you come from. This fact is no different when we look at the two different cultures of the kingdom of God versus the kingdom of Satan.

The Christian faith has one foundation, Jesus Christ, and yet as we examine the plethora of groups that take the name of Jesus we are puzzled to find that so many contradictions can exist on one foundation. The journey into the kingdom of God involves a transfer of culture and a transfer of world view. In our last chapter we described the difficulty that we often face in learning to think in the ways of heaven.

The greatest difficulties of the Christian walk revolve around how we approach the Word of God, the Bible. We come out of the world where we have been schooled in achievement and position, but as we move into the kingdom of God it is absolutely vital that we surrender our opinions and let the Spirit of God teach us how to read God’s Word. Sadly this has not often been the case, and the many contradictions, heresies and contentions found in Christian faith and history come directly from reading the Bible with a Duracell framework rather than in the framework of heaven, which focuses on legitimate and intimate relationships.

Jesus raises this point in His discussion with a lawyer in Luke 10. The

⁴⁵ <http://www.chinawestexchange.com/Chinese/Culture/customs.htm>

lawyer asks Jesus, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus answers, “What is written in the law?” To get to the deeper issue He asks, “How do you read it?”⁴⁶ Jesus does not ask *what* do you read; He asks *how* do you read, or how do you interpret what you read? This is the key question for anyone wishing to take the journey from the earthly Duracell to heavenly relationships—How do you read?

The question concerning eternal life that the lawyer asked Jesus is one of the most critical questions of the Christian walk. The position you occupy and the people you mix with are a strong indicator of your value in this world. By contrast, in the kingdom of heaven every person is a child of God and is worthy of respect and dignity. As we follow the discussion we

In the kingdom of heaven every person is a child of God and is worthy of respect and dignity.

notice that the lawyer wants to interpret Scripture by the former rather than the latter. He gives Jesus the right answer by saying, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your strength and with all your mind, and love your neighbour as yourself.”⁴⁷ Jesus says in effect, “Exactly, do this and live,” but the lawyer realising the full implications of what was involved seeks to twist the meaning by asking, “Who is my neighbour?”⁴⁸

The meaning of the Scripture is simple but the human heart under the influence of the Duracell acts like it is hard to understand, because it is unwilling to release the old and fully embrace the new. Here lies the reason for so many lifeless Christians, they believe in Christ’s kingdom but live according to Satan’s kingdom and the result is confusion, frustration, and evil.

The entire Christian faith is confused on the issue of salvation because the Bible clearly teaches that a Christian empowered by grace will live in harmony with the Ten Commandments. However, many of us approach the Ten Commandments in the context of the Duracell; we seek to perform them in order to obtain the goal of salvation, rather than seeing the Ten

⁴⁶ Luke 10:25,26

⁴⁷ Luke 10:27

⁴⁸ Luke 10:28,29

Commandments as a description of the promised relationship that *will* occur between God and His children.

Conversely, and more commonly, we have a whole multitude that sees the impossibility of performing the requirements of the law, but rather than entering in by a faith relationship, they pronounce the keeping of God’s commandments impossible and therefore never enjoy the freedom of victory in Christ. Whether you seek to perform or seek not to perform, the issue is still performance rather than relationship. Neither of these groups will enter the kingdom of heaven unless they embrace the Ten Commandments in the context of a faith based relationship with Him who died for us.

For the group of Christians who adopt the anti-performance stance and the impossibility of victory in the Christian walk, it soon follows that the god they serve is also unable to perform. Combine this trend with the worldly desire for recognition and it is no surprise to find Christian scholars, teachers, and believers who reject the ability of God to create the world in six literal days. Just as the lawyer gives the answer that he is to love his neighbour but then questions, “Who is my neighbour?” so many scholars today say, “Yes we believe in a six day creation, but what sort of days are they?” Wickedness always seeks to find a way to twist the Scriptures to suit itself; to believe in Christ and yet live according to the world. The demons also believe in Christ and live according to this world.

Once a person has lost the belief in a God who can create a new heart and has learned to ask cunning questions about the plain statements of Scripture, then it is very easy to embrace and accept homosexuality as a Christian norm along with the rejection of male and female roles, in the home and the church, that the Bible clearly lays out before us. This concept is foreign to the kingdom of heaven. Value is always by relationship not by position.

We could list teaching after teaching in the Bible that has been twisted and turned to suit the principles of power, position, and performance, but I think the point has been clearly made that if we claim to be followers of Jesus then we will seek to interpret the Scripture according to the principles of His kingdom rather than the kingdom from which we have all come.

CHAPTER 16

No Longer a Servant

It was one of those special times. My six year old son and I were travelling together in the car. We were having a deep and meaningful conversation, well, as deep as the experience of my precious son would allow. I could see the wheels methodically turning in his head. I sensed he was on the verge of something quite profound, and then out it came. “You know Dad, I think things would work a lot better if you were the boss sometimes, and I was the boss sometimes.” “Well son, that certainly is an interesting suggestion,” I said clearing my throat. There was a moment of silence because I was trying to think of a good reason why his suggestion was flawed, and if I couldn’t think of one we might both end up in trouble. “Well, that is not quite how the Bible tells us how to do it, son.” “But why do you have to tell me what to do all the time?” “Well son, Jesus has asked me to teach you how to be a strong young man for Him, and because He is my boss I think I had better do what He tells me to do.”

Parenting is a real learning curve. “Son, please sit down while you are eating.” “Augh, not fair!” “Sweetie, please pick up your toys and put them away.” “Augh Mum, I want to go outside and play.” “Son it’s time to go to bed.” Cry, whinge, howl, “But you are not going to bed now. Why do I

have to?”

All these rules and regulations! You would think that parents are ogres all the time. Why can’t children understand that you want them to sit still and eat slowly at the table so they don’t upset their digestion? Or that you want them to learn to be neat and tidy so they learn to be organised and more efficient when they get older? And why don’t children appreciate that you want to prevent them from becoming sick by their getting plenty of sleep? Why? Because they just don’t know the pitfalls and dangers of life.

The apostle Paul picks up this analogy to illustrate our journey in the Christian life.

Now I say *that* the heir, as long as he is a child, does not differ at all from a slave (servant in KJV), though he is master of all.

—Galatians 4:1

Paul describes the relationship of a child to his parent as no different to that of a servant to his master. The father must train his son into the principles of the kingdom of God, but the son with his Duracell nature does not understand the reason for all this training. Many of the lessons his father will teach him are contrary to his nature and are often hard work that seems no different to being a servant. The boy may easily wonder, “Why does my father prevent me from doing many of the things I want? I feel like a slave. ‘Son, do this, son, don’t do that,’ It doesn’t seem fair!”

This situation perfectly describes God’s dealings with us as He seeks to prepare us for the kingdom of God. Many look upon God’s requirements as hard and exacting and often question, “Why did God let this happen to me or why does the Christian life seem so restrictive?” There are also many who join churches who seem content to remain as children and just be servants, performing the duties of the Christian life and hoping that they will be rewarded for their efforts, such people are in danger of being engulfed by the feelings of the elder brother in the story of the prodigal son.

Paul explains to us how we can be released from many of the perplexities of life and questions about God’s dealings with us. When we truly

comprehend that God is our Father and that He is preparing us to enter His kingdom and that He loves us intensely, then our relationship with God starts to make sense. The rules and regulations are no longer seen as restrictions and boundaries to stop us from having fun; instead they become doors of freedom that reveal God's tender regard for us and His yearning desire for us to receive our full inheritance as children of God. Paul explains it this way:

And that's the way it was with us before Christ came. We were like children; we were slaves to the basic spiritual principles of this world. But when the right time came, God sent His Son, born of a woman, subject to the law. God sent Him to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law, so that He could adopt us as His very own children. And because we are His children, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, prompting us to call out, "Abba, Father." Now you are no longer a slave but God's own child. And since you are His child, God has made you His heir. —Galatians 4:3–7 NLT

These are some of the most beautiful words in Scripture. As we recognise the sacrifice of Jesus in securing our adoption as God's children, we are released from the slavery of Satan's kingdom. We break free from the tyranny

of the Duracell and we stand strong and noble as sons and daughters of God, knowing that because of Jesus we will always be His beloved children. Has the Spirit of God cried out in your heart "Abba Father;" "Daddy, Daddy?" Do you feel so secure in His love that you can run into His arms and know you are not only welcome but deeply desired by Him? Have you returned to the childish adoration of your Father that

beams when He is near? Until you experience this freedom, you will always remain a servant that lives with the uncertainty that tomorrow you will be issued your severance pay.

As God's children, our inheritance is sure. We can boldly come to Him and make our requests; we can confidently trust that He knows what is best for us. Everything that happens to us in life is to help us grow into a deeper understanding of the values of God's kingdom and to break the slavery of the Duracell.

You will remember in Chapter 6 that we discussed the incredible task that God faced in seeking to bring the human race back into His loving embrace. Here are the points again:

1. A means of giving the human race the wisdom to truly recognise their desperate situation correctly, along with a way for them to be influenced in the right direction without violating their freedom of choice.
2. A way of showing them that they had a wrong perception of His character and kingdom and to somehow show them that He really loved them.
3. A way to remove their guilt and insecurity, restoring their true identity and value as children of God.
4. A way to reclaim their sense of purpose, their reason for existence, or their destiny.
5. All of the above needed time. Adam and Eve had forfeited their own life, so they needed a life support system to give them time to choose and decide.
6. While doing all this, God must maintain a sense of justice. He can't ignore their rebellion and say it is ok. While God in His mercy does not allow the full consequences of their choice to fall upon them, Adam and Eve must comprehend the result of their choice in order for them to begin to appreciate the error of what they did.

The work of Jesus in His ministry, death and resurrection has provided the solution to all six challenges. Who can comprehend the power of the cross of Christ? It is so much deeper than simply removing our wrong deeds; it

As we recognise the sacrifice of Jesus in securing our adoption as God's children, we are released from the slavery of Satan's kingdom.

is much, much deeper.

Won't you kneel and look at the cross right now and see your emancipation from the Duracell? Can you hear the voice from heaven saying that you are His beloved child whom He adores? Won't you unburden all your guilt, resentment, pride and bitterness on Him? Just allow the fullness of His joy to flood your soul right now. You can if you have not already. The secret to escaping the Duracell is to no longer be a servant, but a son or daughter.

CHAPTER 17

The Fall of Babylon

It struck like lightning. German Panzer divisions raced across the fields of Holland and France, and in one night these countries were held tight in the iron fist of the Nazi war machine. Living in an occupied country is a withering experience. My father lived through this time in the town of Assen in the north of Holland.

The men were pressed into the service of the German war machine. Informers were ever ready to report them to the dreaded secret police, and at any hour they might receive a knock at the door and have loved ones dragged away, never to be seen again. The Nazi regime showed all the hallmarks of the Duracell, a controlling spirit that would eliminate all rivals, ruling through fear and displaying its power with fiendish satisfaction.

Stripped and depleted of its resources, weary from the oppressive chains that bound it, Holland was unprepared for the winter of 1944. They could not leave their house for fear that when they came back it would no longer be there, having been stripped for fire wood. Thousands in the cities perished from hunger and cold. How long would this nightmare endure?

Finally the Germans retreated, blowing bridges, destroying munitions

and leaving as much destruction as possible. My father remembers everyone dancing in the streets and the allied soldiers handing out food rations. It was almost too hard to believe it was over, freedom at last!

The spirit of Cain still lives on, and the book of Revelation reveals that just before Christ returns this controlling, insecure, jealous and worthless spirit will have one final display of power before its demise. John describes it as a beast with seven heads and ten horns that emerges from the sea.

Then I stood on the sand of the sea. And I saw a beast rising up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and on his horns ten crowns, and on his heads a blasphemous name.
—Revelation 13:1

This beast is given great power and authority over all the nations of the earth, and all the world worships and submits themselves to the power of the beast.⁴⁹ This beastly power stands against our relationship with the God who made the heavens and the earth. It seeks to draw worship to itself.

The reason why this beast can so easily convince the whole world to follow it is because it runs on Duracell batteries. It speaks the language that we all naturally speak. It encourages us to seek our identity by what we achieve and perform, and it encourages us to meet God on our own terms, bringing our own bloodless sacrifice and expecting God to comply and accept our worship. Most of the world is already under the power of this beast but doesn't realise it. When the world rejects the principles of freedom and returns to global control through fear and force, it will simply be an outward manifestation of what lurks deep in the heart of every one of us.

God is not sitting idly by and doing nothing. He sends a desperate final message to warn the world not to surrender to this beastly power. It comes in the form of three messages. The first message calls the human race to attention and reminds us that we should worship the God who made the heavens and the earth. It points us to the sacrifice of Jesus and reminds us that Cain's offering can never be accepted by God. We can never earn favour with God, for our salvation was purchased for us through the blood

⁴⁹ Revelation 13:2,7,8

of the Lamb.⁵⁰

God then reminds us of a very important truth. He frames it in this language:

And another angel followed, saying, “Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.” —Revelation 14:8

Why does God use the term Babylon? As we look through the Bible we find that it was Nimrod who built the city of Babylon. Nimrod was an interesting character. The Bible tells us, “The first centres of his kingdom were Babylon, Erech, Akkad and Kalneh, in Shinar.”⁵¹ Nimrod is the first recorded human being to establish his own kingdom. It is also interesting to note that Nimrod at some point married his mother—a dysfunctional family indeed! There is also some suggestion that Nimrod killed his father to marry his mother. Whatever the case, Nimrod's home was not founded on the principles of the kingdom of God, where family relationships are sacred.

So great was Nimrod's lack of security in his home life that he began to become known by what he did, rather than by whom he belonged to. In Genesis chapter ten, the Bible lists the genealogies of the human race. Each man was identified by who his father was. Their identity was established by their family relationships. This is the way God's kingdom operates. Nimrod, however, became known for being a mighty hunter and a mighty ruler.

He was a mighty hunter before (against)⁵² the LORD; that is why it is said, “Like Nimrod, a mighty hunter before (against) the LORD.” The first centres of his kingdom were Babylon, Erech,

⁵⁰ Revelation 14:6,7

⁵¹ Genesis 10:10 NIV

⁵² The word *before* also can be read *against*.

So great was Nimrod's lack of security in his home life that he began to become known by what he did, rather than by whom he belonged to.

Akkad and Calneh, in Shinar. From that land he went to Assyria, where he built Nineveh, Rehoboth Ir, Calah and Resen, which is between Nineveh and Calah; that is the great city. —Genesis 10:9–12 NIV

Nimrod, driven by his insecurities, felt the need to prove himself. So he began to build cities and then he began to build armies to conquer the neighbouring family tribes. A discerning historian notes the following:

The authority of former rulers has rested upon the feeling of kindred, and the ascendancy of the chief was an image of parental control. Nimrod on the contrary, was a sovereign of territory, and men just so far as they were its inhabitants and irrespective of personal ties. Hitherto there had been enlarged tribes—families—Society; now there was a nation, a political community—the State.⁵³

Nearly the whole world today has followed in Nimrod's footsteps. Governments today are political and territorial, not tribal and nomadic.

It is interesting to note the steps Nimrod followed in order to build this political state based system. God has labelled this system by the first city he built, which was called Babylon. Notice the essence of how Babylon develops in human hearts:

1. It starts in children who have been estranged from their fathers.
2. Then, because of the resulting insecurity, they are constantly seeking approval.
3. This craving for approval often drives these people to desperate measures to offset their emptiness and worthlessness.

This is the secret ingredient that makes the wine of Babylon so addictive. How many of us have not been plagued by feelings of uselessness, or determination to prove to others that we have what it takes? How many of us have felt that our efforts to please God have just been a total failure, and there is no point trying anymore? How many of us have been caught up

in a power struggle at work, school, or church and heard or spoken angry or cutting words as a means of self-defence or in an attempt to enlarge our own little kingdoms? Does not the whole world drink from this cup? If we act in such a way then are we not truly slaves of Babylon?

So what does the fall of Babylon mean? The phrase, "Babylon is fallen," comes directly from Jeremiah 51:8 and finds its context in Jeremiah 50 and 51.

In Jeremiah 50, God describes His people as lost sheep who have been led astray and who have forgotten their resting place. God's people are being literally held captive by Babylon and many of them have forgotten their true home, their resting place.

But God has not forgotten His children. He makes the following beautiful promise:

Thus says the LORD of hosts: "The children of Israel *were* oppressed, along with the children of Judah; all who took them captive have held them fast; they have refused to let them go. Their Redeemer is strong; the LORD of hosts is His name. He will thoroughly plead their case, that He may give rest to the land, and disquiet the inhabitants of Babylon." —Jeremiah 50:33,34

Then in Chapter 51 we read the following:

Flee from the midst of Babylon, and every one save his life! Do not be cut off in her iniquity, for this is the time of the LORD'S vengeance; He shall recompense her. Babylon was a golden cup in the LORD'S hand, that made all the earth drunk. The nations drank her wine; therefore the nations are deranged. Babylon has suddenly fallen and been destroyed. Wail for her! Take balm for her pain; perhaps she may be healed. We would have healed Babylon, but she is not healed. Forsake her, and let us go everyone to his own country; for her judgment reaches to heaven and is lifted up to the skies. The LORD has revealed our righteousness.

53 A.T Jones, *Empires of the Bible*, (Review and Herald Publishing, 1904) p 51.

Come and let us declare in Zion the work of the LORD our God.
—Jeremiah 51:6–10

In the context of this chapter, God’s people are being held captive by Babylon. They have been led astray, but God is going to deliver them, not because they are worthy, but because they are His children.

While the term, “Babylon is fallen,” is a statement of judgment and condemnation, it is simultaneously a promise of freedom to Israel, because Babylon had held Israel captive.

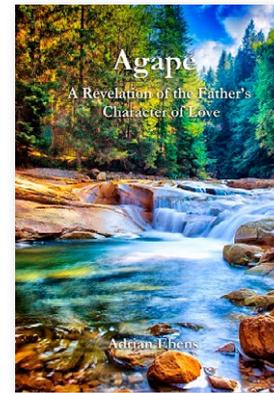
The fall of Babylon contained in the Second Angel’s Message releases spiritual Israel from insecurity, worthlessness and the controlling spirit that compels us to sin. When we recognise that we are accepted in the Beloved, that we are indeed God’s children through the sacrifice of Jesus, all our insecurity and worthlessness is swept away, and we stand free as the children of God.

The Three Angels Messages are also called the Elijah Message, and it is no accident that the final part of this message in Malachi 4:6 says that God will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the children to the fathers. In other words, the power of this message will be released when we truly believe that we are children of God, not by anything we have done, but by what Jesus alone has done for us.

Forsake Babylon and her Duracell principles. No longer remain a servant, but cry “Abba Father” and know that you are His beloved child. Through Christ, we are free.



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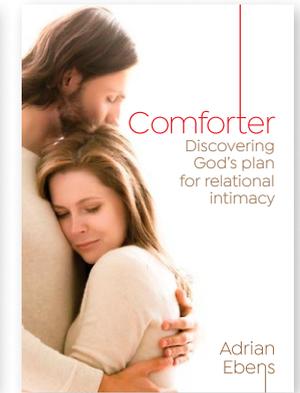
Agape

Take a deeper look at the Bible evidence that the God of the Old Testament is the same as what Jesus revealed in the New Testament. The book is a detailed and systematic examination of the facts that provide a direct way to look at several of the stories of the Bible that have not been previously considered. Just on 300 pages, this is a serious read for those really looking for answers. A great sequel to this booklet you have in your hands.



Original Love

Marriage as an institution is under serious threat. Why do so many people have a bad experience with marriage and relationships in general? *Original Love* looks at the original relationship described in the Bible to see what things we might learn that our own relationships might be enhanced and enriched. 44 pages packed with vital principles for a vibrant marriage.



Comforter

Adam was faced with a decision when his wife brought the forbidden fruit to him. In choosing to follow her and eating the fruit he rejected his Maker. Who now would be his source of comfort? How did the fall change the marriage relationship and affect the gift of sexuality. Discover God’s plan for relational intimacy. 174 pages.

Millions upon millions of people struggle with depression every day. The motivation to keep going gets harder and harder and many are looking for a way out.

The toxic effects of worthlessness come from an evaluation of ourselves that we are not good at something, not well-liked and not much use. Most self-help books try to address this by encouraging people to love and pamper themselves and tell themselves that they are special.

This method completely bypasses the essential human need for blessing. A parental figure or mentor who speaks words of blessing into your life. There is nothing that can replace this powerful experience of being told you are loved by someone you respect and admire.

Our Father in heaven wants to tell us this every day but Satan has blinded many in the world to look for value in other places and become deaf to that wonderful blessing of the Father—that you are His beloved child.

