

R.O.W. AGAINST THE FLOW

A PRAYERFUL GUIDE TO
WINNING THE BATTLE OF
EVERYDAY SPIRITUAL WARFARE

AARON BAUER

Row Against The Flow

A Prayerful Guide To Winning The
Battle Of Everyday Spiritual Warfare

Aaron Bauer

Copyright © 2025 by Aaron Bauer

All rights reserved. No portion of this book may be reproduced in any form without written permission from the publisher or author, except as permitted by U.S. copyright law.

Dedication: To those on the dusty road of following Jesus

Acknowledgments: Thanks to those who have been walking with me and having these conversations over the decades.

Scripture Attribution:

Scripture quotations are taken from the NET Bible® (New English Translation), copyright ©1996, 2019 by Biblical Studies Press, L.L.C. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Author's Note: This short book helps clarify the journey some don't even know they are on. My hope is that you and a few will use it joyfully, share it freely, and trust Jesus faithfully. See www.aaronbauer.co for other resources including free printable versions of my books.

Contents

Preface	1
Prologue	5
Introduction	7
1. The R.O.W. Principle	9
2. Recognizing the Battle	19
3. Disaster in Paradise	28
4. Christ's Liberation	38
5. Our Authority in Christ	52
6. Building on the Rock	64
7. Navigating Daily Storms	73
8. Finding Yourself at the Altar	82
9. Instruments of Righteousness	94
10. Healing the Wounded Places	104
11. Standing Shoulder to Shoulder	118
12. Warrior for Others	130
Conclusion: Becoming Unstoppable in Faith	145

Preface

Welcome, fellow traveler.

Thank you for picking up *ROW Against the Flow*. This Revised and Expanded Edition includes three new chapters added since the book's initial release in January 2025. Whether you're embarking on this journey alone, with a friend, or as part of a group, I'm grateful you're here. My hope is that this guide will serve as a faithful companion as you navigate the unseen battles of everyday life, discover the reality of spiritual warfare, and learn to walk in the freedom and authority that Jesus offers.

This book was born out of decades of conversations, struggles, and victories—my own and those of countless others walking the dusty road of following Jesus. I've seen firsthand that spiritual warfare isn't just for the “super spiritual” or the “especially troubled.” It's the reality for every person seeking to live in the light of Christ in a world that often pushes against Him.

My motivation for writing this guide is simple: to equip you with practical tools and biblical truth for the battles you face. The R.O.W. principle—Repent, Obey, Worship—has been a lifeline for me and many others. It's not a formula, but a way of returning again and again to the heart of Jesus, especially when the current of culture or personal struggle threatens to pull us away.

Who is this book for?

- The seasoned believer who needs fresh courage.
- The curious seeker wondering if there's more to life than meets the eye.
- The newly baptized believer who is just realizing that she declared war on the enemy.
- The weary soul who feels stuck in cycles of defeat.
- Anyone longing to experience victory, freedom, and deeper intimacy with God.

How to use this guide:

- Each chapter stands on its own, but together they form a journey through the realities of spiritual warfare and the hope of living in Christ's victory. This book is now Revised & Expanded including three extra chapters since it's original publishing.
- You'll find NET Bible scripture throughout, reflection questions to prompt honest self-examination, practical action steps, and prayers to help you respond to what God is doing.
- Use this book personally, with a trusted friend, or in a group setting. Share your insights, pray for one another, and walk this path together.

What to expect:

- Honest stories, biblical teaching, and practical frameworks for resisting the enemy's schemes.

- A focus on both personal transformation and community—because no one wins this battle alone.
- Encouragement to keep “rowing against the flow,” trusting that Christ’s victory is already yours, even on the hardest days.
- Space to capture insights, prayers, and responses to the prompts throughout this book. Journaling in this book or a separate journal will help you process what God is teaching you and track your growth over time.

As you begin, know that you are not alone. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, walks with you. May this book help you recognize the battle, stand firm in faith, and live as an unstoppable force for God’s Kingdom.

With gratitude and hope,

Aaron Bauer

Prologue

If you don't know you're in a battle, you're already losing it. This stark truth may sound like the plot of a conspiracy thriller, but it's as real as the air you breathe and as relevant as your most recent struggle with temptation. From the streets of ancient Babylon to the digital landscapes of our modern world, the battlefield has evolved, but the war remains the same.

In many cultures today, you can still see physical idols and temples where demons lurk, seeking to ensnare people through direct offers of power, wealth, or pleasure in exchange for costly worship. These spiritual forces over-promise and under-deliver, leaving their followers in bondage. But make no mistake - the battle isn't confined to far-off lands or ancient practices.

The apostle Paul reminds us that "our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Ephesians 6:12). This unseen war rages in our homes, workplaces, and even in our own hearts and minds.

From the Garden of Eden to the streets of your city, the enemy's tactics remain the same: deception, temptation, and the twisting of good desires into destructive idolatry. Whether it's the blatant worship of false gods or the subtle elevation of career, relationships, or personal

autonomy above God, the result is the same - separation from our Creator and enslavement to forces that seek our destruction.

But there's hope. Christ has won the ultimate victory, breaking the power of sin and death. Through Him, we have the authority and the tools to stand firm against the enemy's schemes. This book will equip you to recognize the battle, understand the enemy's tactics, and apply the powerful truths of the gospel to resist and overcome.

Introduction

In the hustle and bustle of our daily lives, it's easy to overlook the unseen forces at work around us. We navigate through our routines, face our challenges, and celebrate our victories, often unaware that we're participants in a cosmic struggle that has been raging since the dawn of creation. This book, "ROW Against the Flow," is your wake-up call to the reality of spiritual warfare and your guide to navigating its treacherous waters.

You might be wondering, "What does this have to do with me?" Everything. Whether you're a seasoned believer, a curious seeker, or someone who's never given much thought to spiritual matters, this battle affects every aspect of your life. Your relationships, your personal growth, your identity, your sense of purpose – all are contested ground in this unseen war.

But don't despair. This book isn't meant to frighten you; it's meant to equip you. In the pages that follow, we'll explore the nature of this spiritual conflict, unmask the tactics of our adversary, and – most importantly – discover the incredible power and authority we have in Christ to stand firm and advance God's Kingdom.

We'll start by learning to recognize the battle around us and within us. Then, we'll delve into the roots of this conflict, examine the liberating power of Christ's work on the cross, and explore practical

strategies for daily victory. Along the way, I will introduce a simple yet powerful concept I have developed: R.O.W. (Repent, Obey, Worship) – a practical tool to help you navigate the currents of spiritual warfare in your everyday life.

Remember, you're not called to win this war – Christ has already secured the ultimate victory. Your call is to stand firm, resist the enemy, and live out your loyalty to Jesus with courage and conviction. As we embark on this journey together, prepare to have your eyes opened, your mind renewed, and your spirit strengthened for the battles ahead. As you move through these pages, you'll not only learn to recognize and resist spiritual battles in your own life, but also discover the power of healing, the strength found in community, and the call to become a warrior for others.

Are you ready to recognize the battle and learn to ROW against the flow? Let's begin.

Chapter One

The R.O.W. Principle

H ave you ever been to a Brazilian steakhouse where they serve you all the meat you can eat? If not, let me describe it for you and those who have been to one can cheer me on. My friend, Fuego treated me to a night at one of these restaurants and I quickly found it was hard to keep up with the servers. They walk around with sword-like skewers of all kinds of beautiful aromatic meat and offer it to guests. At this restaurant, they had a small paper sign that they put on your table, and with it you could indicate whether or not you wanted them to stop by and offer you meat. When your sign was flipped to the red side up, that meant you did not want to be offered any meat. When you turned it over to green, you were asking them to come and present their wares. Now, listen here, I am 6'4" tall and weigh about 220 pounds and I do not back down from any challenge. My goal was to keep that green side up and eat as fast as possible. I did not eat everything offered but I made a huge effort to get Fuego's money worth.

I want you to consider with me the way Jesus offers His life and freedom to you. Do you have your green sign on display? Is your YES on the table?

My goal since Christ got hold of me at age 18 has been to keep my YES on the table. “Jesus, you have the green light, I am yours, and I want the freedom that you offer. You are the way the truth and the life.” In a world, where the Spirit of God is searching the world for those who would worship Him in spirit and in truth, imagine Jesus walking around looking for those who would respond to Him. I want to be the place He stops and serves me. Is that your desire? Maybe, you are hoping that He stops at somebody else’s table?

Now the analogy certainly breaks down. It might not take uncommon imagination to guess that I did not feel well after that steakhouse experience. I won’t go into too much detail about meat sweats or the sounds my body made to attempt to digest all that meat. And of course, gluttony is not close to godliness so there’s another strike against me.

But Jesus is a proper feast isn’t He? Isn’t He?

Have you believed anything different? I know you have heard the whispers that He is holding out on you; that He doesn’t have your best interests at heart. Keep exploring with me as I show you a way to stay current with Jesus when everything is pulling against it. This is everyday spiritual warfare.

I want to offer you a practical framework I created for living out our faith daily: the R.O.W. principle. This simple yet powerful concept

will help you navigate the currents of spiritual warfare and maintain the freedom King Jesus won for you.

He deserves our worship but we often get distracted and end up worshipping at the wrong altar.

Understanding R.O.W.

R - Repent: Turning away from sin and idolatry

Therefore repent and turn back so that your sins may be wiped out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and so that he may send the Messiah appointed for you—that is, Jesus. — Acts 3:19-20

Repentance is more than feeling sorry for offending God. It's a decisive turn away from sin and toward God. It involves recognizing our wrongdoing, confessing it to God, and making a conscious decision to change our direction. To confess a sin means you agree that it was indeed rebellion.

O - Obey: Obey the Gospel - Jesus the resurrected Messiah of Israel is true Lord of the world.

"If you love me, you will obey my commandments. Then I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot accept, because it does not see him or

know him. But you know him, because he resides with you and will be in you." — John 14:15-17

Obedience is the natural outflow of our love for Christ. It's not about following rules to earn God's favor, but rather aligning our will with His out of trust and devotion.

W - Worship: Turn your eyes upon Jesus

Therefore I exhort you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a sacrifice—alive, holy, and pleasing to God—which is your reasonable service. — Romans 12:1

Worship is more than singing songs on Sunday. It's a lifestyle of honoring God in everything we do, recognizing His worth and responding with our whole lives.

So how do we keep worshiping Jesus in the midst of everything going on in life. How do we keep our eyes on Jesus and believe the truth of the gospel that Jesus the Christ is the true Lord of the world?

Often times when I meet somebody new, I tried to describe my work without using the word, Pastor. "I lead a group of people in my city who are trying to take seriously the claims of Jesus because if he is who he says he is, we have a lot of explaining to do." If they give me a half second, I'll say "because through his life, death, resurrection and ascension to the throne of the universe he has been declared Lord of ALL"

Now, do I live every moment recognizing and confessing that Jesus is Lord? Is my YES always on the table? Green Light always on for Jesus? Absolutely not, and so I've got to develop a life of repentance. I

find myself at the wrong altar multiple times a day. I find that “successism” (the need to succeed to feel worthy) is a very compelling religion and I organize my mood by how others think I’m doing. My emotional life can be very telling about what altar I’ve been worshiping at. So I turn from “successism” and I obey the gospel looking to Christ and the way he was victorious and then worship Jesus. He gives me my identity. He alone tells me if I’m good enough, and because of his sacrifice by his blood, I am made pure and holy, and acceptable to Him.

Applying R.O.W. in Daily Life

The R.O.W. principle is more than just a concept; it’s a dynamic framework for engaging in the spiritual battle. It is how we actively navigate the currents of life and spiritual warfare, ensuring we stay aligned with King Jesus.

Recognizing the Need to R.O.W.

Have you ever found yourself drifting? It’s subtle at first. We often find ourselves pulled off course by the strong currents of our culture, the pressures of daily life, or the pull of our own disordered desires. The R.O.W. principle provides a vital corrective. It helps us recognize when we are off course and offers a clear path to realign ourselves with God’s will and truth. Just as a rower must constantly assess their direction and pull against the stream to reach their destination, R.O.W. helps us counteract the forces that seek to pull us away from Jesus.

The Cycle of R.O.W.

R.O.W. is not a one-time event or a checklist to complete. It is a continuous cycle—a rhythm of repetitive reliance on Jesus. We may need to engage in this process minute-by-minute, as we encounter various temptations and challenges throughout the day. This consistent practice of repentance, obedience, and worship is essential to

maintaining our "green light" for Jesus and ensuring we don't fall back into old patterns.

R.O.W. in Spiritual Warfare

When we face spiritual attacks, R.O.W. becomes our essential battle strategy, equipping us to stand firm against the enemy's schemes:

- **Repentance (R):** This is our first line of defense. We must immediately and specifically **Repent** of any footholds we have given the enemy through sin or agreement with lies. Repentance closes the door to spiritual darkness and restores our alignment with God.
- **Obedience (O):** We **Obey** God's word and stand firm in the authority Christ has given us. Obedience isn't just about doing the right thing; it's about actively submitting to the Lordship of Jesus and resisting the enemy's attempts to undermine our allegiance.
- **Worship (W):** **Worship** is a powerful weapon against the enemy's lies. By turning our eyes upon Jesus and acknowledging His ultimate worth and victory, we declare our loyalty to Him and defeat the enemy's attempts to distract us with false gods.

Practical Application

Repent:

- Practice daily self-examination, asking the Holy Spirit to reveal areas of offense. Don't let sin linger unconfessed
- Confess specific sins to God, not just general wrongdoing

- Make concrete plans to increase alignment with the Creator.

Obey:

- Study Scripture regularly to align with God's heart.
- Start with small acts of obedience to build your "obedience muscles"
- Seek accountability from trusted Christian friends

Worship:

- Develop a daily habit of praising God, even in difficult circumstances
- Look for ways to honor God in your everyday activities
- Cultivate an attitude of gratitude, recognizing all good things come from God

As a pastor, I've spoken with hundreds of people who fear that God is tired of their repentance. They seem to think that they should be embarrassed to come once again about the same offense they were confessing before. Do you find this troubling as well?

You might think that the occasion for repentance is the worst day of your life. "I'm so ashamed" you say "I am struggling so much with this" you say.

Hear me out! Could it be that it's not your worst day but in fact your best day? Could it be that Jesus loves you and knows your weakness and is not ashamed of you? Could it be that He is not tired of your repentance, in fact, the repetition of your repentance emphasizes your reliance on Him. This is just reality. This is truth. We ARE reliant on Him!

So again, could it be that this is the best day of your life where you cry out to Jesus thank Him for forgiving you and restoring the relationship? We need repentance repetition- “Rep Reps” - Developing repetitive reliance on Jesus is an honest path forward even when the enemy whispers that God must be tired of you. Life is Repentance and in Repentance we have Life. Put your YES on the table!

Conclusion

The R.O.W. principle is a powerful tool in our spiritual arsenal. With practice we align ourselves with God's will and resist the enemy's attempts to pull us off course. Remember, just as a rower must continually pull against the current to make progress, we too must consistently apply R.O.W. to grow in our faith and stand firm against spiritual attacks.

This might be a morning exercise or a minute by minute one as the current rages.

Reflection Questions

- Drawing on the steakhouse analogy, are you actively keeping your "YES" on the table and your "green light" on for Jesus, or are you hoping He stops at someone else's table? Explain.

- The chapter highlights how easily we can worship at the

"wrong altar," such as "successism." What specific "altar" (idol) do you find yourself turning to, and how can applying the R.O.W. principle help you recenter your worship on Jesus?

- The chapter emphasizes "Rep Reps," or repetitive reliance on Jesus through repentance. How can embracing the truth that God is not tired of your repentance change your approach to confessing recurring sins?

- How can you incorporate the R.O.W. principle into your daily routine?

- Think of a recent spiritual struggle. How might applying R.O.W. have helped in that situation?

- Which aspect of R.O.W. do you find most challenging? Why?

Prayer Focus

Heavenly Father, As we begin this journey of understanding spiritual warfare, we come before You with humble hearts. We acknowledge our fallen nature and how our sin offends You.

Holy Spirit, examine our relationship with You—are we holding back, or truly worshipping in spirit and in truth? Reveal the Father's love to us. Jesus, open our eyes to the truth of our condition apart from You. Forgive us for doubting Your goodness and listening to the enemy's lies.

Thank You, Father, for not abandoning us in our brokenness. Thank You for Your plan of redemption from the very beginning. Holy Spirit, give us discernment to recognize brokenness in ourselves and the world.

Lord Jesus, thank You for breaking the power of sin and death. Help us grasp the freedom You won for us on the cross. Give us strength to resist temptation and stand firm in Your truth. Protect us from spiritual forces that seek to exploit our weaknesses. As we learn about spiritual warfare, give us courage and hope in Your presence and power. Teach us to apply the R.O.W. principle daily. Help us to repent, obey, and worship You alone.

We pray all this in the mighty name of Jesus, who has overcome sin and death. Amen.

Chapter Two

Recognizing the Battle

It was May 2024 and my friend Weston and I had planned a hike starting at significant altitude, but going even higher to Mason Lake in the Cascade Mountains of the Pacific Northwest. The forecast that week called for 85° in the lowlands. As we started hiking up the trail it began to snow on us. Thankfully, I was warm from exertion, but the further we went up the more we encountered snow on the ground. By the time we got to the lake, we might as well have been in the dead of winter with a frozen lake. When we stopped to eat our lunch, the layers I brought could barely keep up with the cold.

How might we have prepared if we were expecting to go into the snow? In Finland, they say there is no bad weather; there is only bad gear. But don't you need to know what you're facing in order to gear up? We need to be much more like prepared wilderness trekkers than day hikers. We've got to realize we are in a storm, a spiritual battle.

In the hustle and bustle of our daily lives, it's easy to overlook the unseen forces at work around us. We navigate through our routines,

face our challenges, and celebrate our victories, often unaware that we're participants in a cosmic struggle that has been raging since the dawn of creation. This chapter aims to open your eyes to the reality of spiritual warfare and equip you with the knowledge to recognize the battle in your everyday life.

The Reality of Unseen Forces

The Apostle Paul says something that has often intrigued me.

But if anyone has caused sadness, he has not saddened me alone, but to some extent (not to exaggerate) he has saddened all of you as well. This punishment on such an individual by the majority is enough for him, so that now instead you should rather forgive and comfort him. This will keep him from being overwhelmed by excessive grief to the point of despair. Therefore I urge you to reaffirm your love for him. For this reason also I wrote you: to test you to see if you are obedient in everything. If you forgive anyone for anything, I also forgive him—for indeed what I have forgiven (if I have forgiven anything) I did so for you in the presence of Christ, so that we may not be exploited by Satan (for we are not ignorant of his schemes). — 2 Corinthians

2:5–11

In the last verse he suggests that we are not unaware of the devil's schemes. How many of us could say that? I find that we are often

completely unaware that the enemy has schemes against us and he's plotting the destruction of those that God loves.

In this passage Paul encourages the church to offer forgiveness to a person so they do not go into excessive sorrow and spiral down into the trap that the enemy has set. How often has that been your situation? It starts out as repetitive or major offense and then you start to spiral down and think that you have to beat yourself up in order to show that you are taking your sin seriously.

When we are beating ourselves up, we are not treating sin the way God sees it. King David would challenge you that if you don't confess your rebellion you will indeed break apart from the inside out, but that when you confess you find freedom. Listen in on his confession:

*Have mercy on me, O God, because of your loyal love!
Because of your great compassion, wipe away my rebellious acts! Wash away my wrongdoing! Cleanse me of my sin! For I am aware of my rebellious acts; I am forever conscious of my sin. Against you—you above all—I have sinned; I have done what is evil in your sight. So you are just when you confront me; you are right when you condemn me. — Psalm 51:1-4*

One of the main schemes of the devil is unforgiveness. Demons are unforgiven and unforgiving. This is one of their trickiest weapons against us.

King David rightly understands his major sin (adultery with Bathsheba and murder of her husband after trying to cover it up) as against God. How many times have you said, "I know God has forgiven me but I cannot forgive myself?" Do you see the subtle scheme of the

enemy here? God Almighty has offered to cleanse you from your sin and unrighteousness but you maintain the right to beat yourself up over it. It's like we are saying that God's level of purity is, of course, 10 out of 10 and so he can forgive us but ours is more like 20 out of 10. We elevate ourselves above God. This is subtle but it goes right back to the garden of Eden where we decide what is right and what is wrong.

Paul also reminds us that while it looks like we have human enemies we are not to engage battle with them.

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavens. — Ephesians 6:12

This verse unveils a profound truth: there's more to our world than what meets the eye.

These unseen forces are not mere abstractions or metaphors. They are real spiritual entities that actively work to influence our thoughts, decisions, and actions. Just as we can't see the wind but can observe its effects, we can discern the presence of these spiritual forces by their impact on our lives and the world around us.

Identifying Spiritual Battles in Everyday Life

One way to begin to identify the battles is through journaling and confession to others. This exposes our hidden beliefs and shows us where we consistently struggle. So how do we recognize these spiritual battles in our daily lives? Here are some signs to watch for:

- Persistent temptations: When you find yourself continually

drawn to things you know are wrong, it's often a sign of spiritual attack.

- Doubt and confusion: If you're suddenly questioning truths about God that you once held firmly, the enemy may be at work.
- Discouragement and despair: Feelings of hopelessness, especially about your faith, can be a tactic of the enemy.
- Distractions from spiritual disciplines: When you find it unusually difficult to pray, read the Bible, or fellowship with other believers, it could be spiritual opposition.
- Conflict in relationships: While not all conflict is spiritual in nature, persistent strife, especially among believers, can be a sign of the enemy's work.

The Importance of Awareness

One day in my senior year of high school, I was walking down the hallway from the locker room in the gym. An enraged classmate confronted me with a highly flexible kick to my face. To this day, I have no idea why he was upset with me, but it could have been something I said or did in PE class. Again, if you don't know you're in a fight it's really hard to prepare for it.

Recognizing that we're in a battle is the first step toward victory. When we're aware of the spiritual nature of our struggles, we can respond appropriately. Instead of relying on our own strength or worldly solutions, we can turn to God, utilize the spiritual weapons He's given us, and stand firm in the faith.

Learning to R.O.W.

Repent: What lies have you been believing about God or yourself?

Obey: Obey the Gospel - What is true about Jesus? What is true about you because He has your allegiance?

Worship: Give God the honor and praise He deserves

As we learn to recognize the battle and implement the R.O.W. principle, we'll be better equipped to stand firm against the enemy's schemes and live out our faith with courage and conviction.

Conclusion

As we close this chapter, I want to offer you another metaphor. The demonic temptations and pestering is a lot like mosquitoes. When we're hiking on the trail sometimes we come across areas where they just swarm. Just keep hiking. This is probably not the place to set up camp is it? There are swamps we can avoid to stay away from the pestering, right?

To close, here's another metaphor: demonic temptations are like mosquitoes. Sometimes you hit a swarm—just keep hiking. Don't set up camp in the swamps where they gather. The spiritual battle is real, and it's happening all around us. But remember,

You are from God, little children, and have conquered them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. — 1 John 4:4

As we move forward, we'll explore deeper aspects of this battle and learn practical strategies for victory. The journey ahead may be challenging, but with awareness, faith, and the tools God has given us, we can navigate these waters successfully.

Have you started to understand the battle, the current, and to ROW against the flow?

Reflection

- Can you recall a time when you were caught unprepared for a challenging situation, similar to the hiking story? How might this relate to spiritual preparedness?

- In what areas of your life do you find it most difficult to recognize spiritual battles? Why do you think this is?

- Of the five signs of spiritual battles mentioned (persistent temptations, doubt and confusion, discouragement and despair, distractions from spiritual disciplines, and conflict in relationships), which do you encounter most often? How can you be more aware of these in your daily life?

- How might journaling and confession to others help you identify hidden beliefs and consistent struggles in your spir-

itual life?

- Think about a recent struggle you've faced. Looking back, can you see any signs that it may have been a spiritual battle? How might you approach a similar situation differently in the future?

- Are there certain swamps you can avoid easily to stay away from the mosquitoes?

Prayer Focus

Heavenly Father, we thank You for the truth of Your Word that reminds us of the unseen spiritual realities around us. We ask for Your wisdom and discernment to recognize the spiritual battles in our daily lives. Open our eyes to see beyond the physical realm and grant us the courage to face these challenges with faith.

Lord, help us to be vigilant and aware of the enemy's tactics. Strengthen us to resist temptation, doubt, and discouragement. Guide us in maintaining strong spiritual disciplines and healthy relationships.

We pray for the discipline to journal and the courage to confess to others, that we might expose hidden beliefs and consistent struggles. Help

us to apply the R.O.W. principle - to Repent of the lies we've believed, to Obey the truth of the Gospel, and to Worship You in all circumstances.

Thank You for the assurance that greater is He that is in us than he that is in the world. May we walk in this truth daily. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Chapter Three

Disaster in Paradise

In 2015, I led a group of middle schoolers on a white water rafting trip. We were on the Deschutes river, in Eastern Oregon, enjoying our paddle when the rafts went over a waterfall. Most rafts did fine but one raft circled back toward the waterfall. The rest of us caught the current to go down stream and had all the paddling power our raft guide needed to keep us safe. This group of particularly small middle school girls struggled mightily against the circular vortex and one by one the waterfall would unseat the girls and sweep them down the river. Only now does it seem at all humorous and I was certainly glad the company required that every participant wore a helmet. In chapter one, we talked about our life choices that keeps circling us around and picking us off. We just don't have the power we think to be able to get out of the whirlpool.

This adventure isn't just a fun story – it's a perfect picture of our struggle with sin. Just like those girls caught in the whirlpool, we often

find ourselves trapped in cycles of bad choices, unable to break free on our own.

We think we have the power to paddle out, but the current of sin is stronger than we realize.

Have you ever watched a friend get sucked into this whirlpool of sin? Maybe they're a Christian, maybe not, but you can see them spiraling deeper into captivity. It reminds me of something my pastor used to say: "Sin takes you further than you want to go, keeps you longer than you want to stay, and costs you far more than you want to pay." I've seen this play out countless times in people's lives, including my own.

In this chapter, we'll explore the origins of our spiritual battle, tracing it back to the Garden of Eden. We'll examine how the fall of humanity has affected our relationship with God and our susceptibility to sin, setting the stage for the ongoing spiritual warfare we face today.

The Garden of Eden Story and Its Implications

In the beginning, God created a perfect world and placed humans in a garden paradise. Adam and Eve enjoyed unbroken fellowship with God and had the freedom to choose within the boundaries He set. However, this idyllic situation didn't last.

Now the serpent was more shrewd than any of the wild animals that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Is it really true that God said, 'You must not

eat from any tree of the orchard?’” The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit from the trees of the orchard; but concerning the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the orchard God said, ‘You must not eat from it, and you must not touch it, or else you will die.’” The serpent said to the woman, “Surely you will not die, for God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will open and you will be like divine beings who know good and evil.” When the woman saw that the tree produced fruit that was good for food, was attractive to the eye, and was desirable for making one wise, she took some of its fruit and ate it. She also gave some of it to her husband who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them opened, and they knew they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

— Genesis 3:1-7

The serpent, representing Satan, approached Eve with a cunning question: “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree of the orchard?’” This simple question planted seeds of doubt about God’s goodness and His intentions.

The enemy’s tactic hasn’t changed much since then – he still tries to make us question God’s character and commands. As if to say, “God is holding out on you and He doesn’t have your best interests in mind. If you want something you have to reach out and take it.”

Eve's response revealed that she knew God's instruction, but the serpent twisted the truth, promising that eating the forbidden fruit would make them "like God." This appeal to their desire for autonomy – to be their own gods – proved too tempting to resist.

When Adam and Eve ate the fruit, their eyes were opened, but not in the way they expected. They became aware of their nakedness, symbolizing their new vulnerability and separation from God. This act of disobedience introduced death to humanity and sin into the world, with far-reaching consequences for all of creation.

The Progression of Sin

The disaster in Eden set in motion a progression of sin that affects us all. James describes this process:

But each one is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desires. Then when desire conceives, it gives birth to sin, and when sin is full grown, it gives birth to death. Do not be led astray, my dear brothers and sisters. —

James 1:14-16

This progression often follows a pattern:

1. Temptation: We encounter an opportunity to disobey God.
2. Desire: Our internal longing for something contrary to God's will grows.
3. Action: We give in to the temptation and commit sin.
4. Death: Sin leads to spiritual death and separation from God.

Understanding this progression can help us identify and interrupt the cycle before it leads to sin and its consequences.

The Eternal Trajectory

Everyone has a trajectory and we're learning to let Jesus interrupt that trajectory every day. If it's not interrupted we'll continue along with **our culture that tells us to look inward for meaning and purpose and fulfillment.**

Those who turn inward also turn downward and that trajectory is eternal. Those who through allegiance to Jesus turn upward to our Creator for identity, purpose, satisfaction also turn outward toward others. That trajectory is also eternal.

Those who love God, love others. Those who trust themselves more than God, worship themselves as a god. Self-worship leads to all kinds of sin attaching us to the enemy of our soul.

- The Vortex of Idolatry: Just as the raft was caught in a circular vortex, our disordered desires can trap us in a degenerative cycle of idolatry. We keep circling back to the same false gods, unable to break free on our own.
- Powerlessness Against the Current: We've been like the small middle school girls struggling against the vortex in our inability to overcome sin and idolatry through our own strength. We must have Christ's power to break free from vicious cycles and interrupt our trajectory.

- The Danger of Being Unseated: As the waterfall unseated the girls one by one, idolatry can gradually erode our spiritual foundation, eventually causing us to lose our footing in our allegiance to Jesus.
- The Importance of Protection: The helmets that protected the rafters can represent the spiritual armor we need to guard against the dangers of idolatry and spiritual warfare.

Practical Application: R.O.W. in Action

Repent:

- Acknowledge areas where you've sought autonomy from God or turned to modern idols.
- Confess your tendency to doubt God's goodness or question His commands.

Obey:

- Identify one area where you can actively submit to God's authority today. Write it down.
- Choose a modern idol in your life and take a concrete step to dethrone it.

Worship:

- Thank God for His perfect design and the freedom He gives within His boundaries.
- Praise God for His patience and love, even when we fall short.

Conclusion

The disaster in Eden may have occurred long ago, but its effects continue to shape our spiritual reality today. By understanding the progression of sin and recognizing modern forms of idolatry, we can better equip ourselves for the spiritual battles we face. Remember, while the consequences of human rebellion are severe, they are not the end of the story. God's redemptive plan, which we will explore in the next chapter, offers hope and restoration.

Reflection

- How do you see the pattern of temptation described in James 1:14-16 playing out in your own life?

- What are some subtle forms of idolatry you've noticed in your own heart or in the culture around you?

- How can understanding the fall and its consequences help you in your daily spiritual battles?

- The chapter uses the rafting analogy to emphasize our powerlessness against the current of sin. What specific cycles of bad choices or idolatry do you feel caught in, and how does

recognizing your inability to "paddle out" motivate you to rely on Christ's power?

- The enemy's tactic in Eden was to make humans question God's intentions, saying, "God is holding out on you." Where in your life are you currently tempted to believe that God is holding out on you, and how can you counter this deception with truth?

- The chapter discusses an "eternal trajectory." How can you ensure your daily choices reflect a trajectory that is "upward" (toward God) and "outward" (toward others), rather than an "inward" or "downward" trajectory of self-worship?

- What is one thing you'll do this week to stop the Trajectory of Sin in your life?

Prayer Focus

Heavenly Father, we come before You humbled by the reality of our fallen nature and the consequences of sin in our world. We acknowledge our tendency to doubt Your goodness and seek autonomy from Your perfect will.

Lord, give us discernment to recognize the progression of sin in our lives. Help us to identify temptation early and turn to You for strength to resist. Open our eyes to see the subtle idols we've allowed to take root in our hearts.

We confess our disordered desires and ask for Your help in reordering our loves and our lives. Teach us to worship You alone, dethroning any false gods we've elevated in our lives.

Grant us the courage to submit to Your authority in every area of our lives. When the current of culture pulls us away from You, give us the strength to ROW against the flow.

Thank You for Your patience with us and for Your redemptive plan that offers hope even in the face of our failures. Help us to live in light of this hope, fighting our daily spiritual battles with the confidence that You are with us and for us.

We pray for wisdom to recognize the world, the flesh, and the devil at work in our lives. Give us discernment to see beyond surface-level temptations to the deeper idolatries of our hearts.

Father, we ask for Your protection against the spiritual forces that seek to exploit our weaknesses. Strengthen our resolve to resist the enemy's schemes and to cling to Your truth.

Help us to be honest with ourselves and with trusted brothers and sisters in Christ about our struggles. Give us the humility to confess our sins and the faith to believe in Your forgiveness and cleansing power.

Lord, we pray for a renewed mind that sees the world as You see it. Transform our desires so that we long for You above all else. May our hearts be satisfied in You alone.

Finally, we ask that You would use our understanding of the fall and its consequences to make us more compassionate towards others who are caught in sin's grip. Let our lives be a testimony to Your redeeming grace.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Chapter Four

Christ's Liberation

As I was growing up, I was one stuck kid. My early years were uneventful enough and church life defined my weekly schedule. My parents loved Jesus and served in the church every time the doors were open. This gave me great exposure to a wonderful community. Of course that wasn't the only exposure I would receive and when I was about 10 years old a fellow classmate showed me pornography for the first time. It happened in the backseat as we carpooled to Christian school, of all places. That plus other types of abuse set me off down the pathway of disordered desires. Only in the last decade have I started to see how what had been done to me set me off down that pathway.

All I knew as a boy and a teenager was that I was stuck. It seemed that no secret behavior was off-limits. I would shoplift so that I could seem generous to my friends. Only the restraining power of God kept me from being an abuser as I worked through all of these patterns of behavior. I would memorize all the verses and could repeat all of the important doctrine based on my years of Christian school and church attendance. The old ladies at church would pat my head and say "what a good little boy" but in my mind I was thinking "as far as you know." Back in the 80s our Christian school used corporal punishment for

people like me. Also I was forced to write the definition of tact so many times on chalkboards and notepads. I swore I would never remember it as I tried to avoid memorizing it while I wrote it over the years. Alas, I do indeed recall that “tact is skillfully saying and doing what is suitable and proper under the existing circumstances.” This actually made me more secretive and more slippery with the truth.

In my senior year of High School, 1992, I was sitting in an English class and my teacher was disparaging the Bible. He classified it as fairytales and was discouraging us from taking it seriously as literature or history. I was a talker and because of my upbringing I knew better than to let this pass without confronting the errors. I had learned plenty over the years about the reliability of scripture. When I looked around the room I noticed Jeff, the friend who I had spent last class with making up all sorts of rude ways to speak to girls in the Spanish Language. Then I saw Joanna, the girl I had basically propositioned for sex in PE class. Maybe that’s why that guy kicked me in the face. Then I saw my basketball team with whom I was prone to misbehave. After surveying the room, I realized I was not the person to represent Jesus in the classroom. This was another kick in the teeth. I felt God telling me to sit down. Another friend, Jason, shared with the teacher what I wanted to say but he had the right to share. He represented Christ in his daily life not just in this moment.

That night I lay in my bed and wept about the wreck my life had become. I felt so stuck and despaired that I could ever make good on my Sunday morning promises to God. Those promises would fall flat every Monday morning.

I cried out to God and said "I don't have what it takes to be the Christian you want me to be" and I heard back as clear as any other conversation "I never said

you had what it takes, this is something I am going to do through you.”

At that point I just gave my life to Jesus. “You can have it all.” Yes, my life was a mess but he accepted it.

That summer, I saw the captivity I had been in more clearly than ever and experienced the liberation of Christ more powerfully than ever. There were days that I was witnessing to a coworker using my Spanish language skills and days where I was in a fight with another coworker. God squeezed it all out of my heart and revealed my need for reliance on Him. Does Jesus have the power to liberate you?

In the previous chapters, we explored the reality of spiritual warfare and the devastating consequences of humanity’s fall into sin. Now, we turn our attention to the heart of the gospel message: Christ’s liberating work on the cross. This chapter will delve into God’s plan of redemption, the power of Christ’s sacrifice, and what it means to live in the freedom He provides.

God’s Plan of Redemption

From the moment of humanity’s fall in the Garden of Eden, God had a plan to restore us to relationship with Him. This plan wasn’t an afterthought or a reaction to our failure. It was a demonstration of His infinite love and mercy.

For this is the way God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that

the world should be saved through him. The one who believes in him is not condemned. The one who does not believe has been condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the one and only Son of God. — John 3:16-18

This familiar verse encapsulates the heart of God's redemptive plan. It reveals that:

- God's motivation is love: At the heart of God's redemptive plan is His boundless love for humanity. Despite our rebellion and sin, God's love remains constant and unwavering. This love drove Him to pursue us even when we were at our worst, demonstrating a depth of affection that surpasses human understanding.
- His plan involved personal sacrifice: God's plan for our redemption came at an immense cost - the life of His own Son. Jesus willingly left the glory of heaven to take on human flesh, enduring suffering, rejection, and ultimately death on the cross. This supreme act of sacrifice reveals the lengths to which God would go to restore our relationship with Him.
- The goal is our salvation and eternal life: God's redemptive plan aims not just at forgiveness, but at complete restoration and eternal life with Him. Through Christ's work, we are not only saved from the penalty of sin but are also given the promise of eternal fellowship with God, starting now and extending into eternity.
- It's available to everyone who believes: The beauty of God's plan is its universal availability. Regardless of our past, our

social status, or our perceived worthiness, salvation is offered freely to all who put their faith in Christ. This inclusivity reflects God's desire for all people to experience His liberating grace.

- God's intention is to save, not condemn: Despite our deserved condemnation, God's heart is set on our salvation. His approach is not one of harsh judgment, but of merciful redemption. Through Christ, God offers a way out of condemnation and into the freedom of His love and acceptance.

The Power of Christ's Sacrifice

The cross of Christ is the pivotal moment in history where God's plan of redemption was fulfilled. On the cross, Jesus did more than just die for our sins. He broke the power of sin and death itself.

Having been buried with him in baptism, you also have been raised with him through your faith in the power of God who raised him from the dead. And even though you were dead in your transgressions and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, he nevertheless made you alive with him, having forgiven all your transgressions. He has destroyed what was against us, a certificate of indebtedness expressed in decrees opposed to us. He has taken it away by nailing it to the cross. Disarming the rulers and authorities, he has made a public disgrace of them, triumphing over them by the cross. — Colossians 2:12-15

Let's expand on what Christ accomplished:

- He brought us from death to life: Through His sacrifice, Jesus restored our spiritual vitality. We were once spiritually dead due to sin, but Christ's work on the cross breathed new life into us, enabling us to have a living relationship with God.
- He forgave ALL our sins: Christ's atonement covers every sin - past, present, and future. This complete forgiveness frees us from the burden of guilt and shame, allowing us to approach God with confidence.
- He canceled the record of charges against us: Jesus erased the debt of sin that stood against us. Like a legal document listing our transgressions, this record was nailed to the cross, symbolically demonstrating that our sins have been fully paid for.
- He disarmed the spiritual powers and authorities: Christ's victory on the cross stripped the enemy of their power over believers. While these forces still exist, they no longer have authority over those who are in Christ.
- He triumphed over them publicly: Jesus' resurrection was a public declaration of His victory over sin, death, and the forces of darkness. This triumph was not hidden but displayed openly, demonstrating God's power and the effectiveness of Christ's sacrifice.

Let's Pause.

Is Christ's sacrifice effective for you? Does King Jesus have your allegiance?

If so, this total and complete victory means that the enemy has been defeated, disarmed, and publicly humiliated. If Jesus has your believing loyalty, you can now live in the freedom and authority that Christ has won for you.

The enemy has no power over you that you do not give back to him.

Read that again. How does that happen? In a word, sin. He gets power back when you give it to him.

We often wander back to the foot of the Cross where all the broken chains are. **We've been set free but we are back again fitting ourselves for the most comfortable shackles.** After all, they fit right over the scars that were there from before. In chapter 8, we will look at breaking agreements with the enemy of our souls that keep us slipping back into these shackles.

Asymmetrical Warfare

It seems that the enemy of our souls had his teeth knocked out at the cross and resurrection event, but just like in modern warfare it's not always a frontal assault that takes us down. I believe there is a whisper campaign that continues to derail God's people. Even Christian leaders, or should I say especially Christian leaders, are at risk.

In 30 years of ministry, I've had this idea that the enemy doesn't care how influential a Christian leader gets as long as the devil has a hook

in them to take as many people down as possible. It's not like I want to spend a lot of time in the devil's way of thinking but if he has the key to take me down whenever he wants to, then I shouldn't trust the lack of frontal assault as terms of peace. Just because I experience success even in ministry does not mean that I'm living right. In these same 30 years I've watched the fall of hundreds of "successful" ministry leaders and I want to get all the hooks out of me I can. That's why we're ROWing.

If I am in Christ, I am safe, I am saved. That being said, I've got to process the whispers and capture the thoughts running through my head and make them obedient to Christ and the gospel. **Keep the broken chains broken.**

*for the weapons of our warfare are not human weapons,
but are made powerful by God for tearing down strong-
holds. We tear down arguments and every arrogant
obstacle that is raised up against the knowledge of God,
and we take every thought captive to make it obey Christ.*

– 2 Corinthians 10:4-5

Living in the Freedom Christ Provides

So what does this mean for us in our daily lives? How do we live in the freedom Christ has won for us? I've wandered to the foot of the cross plenty over the years. It's been 32 years of walking with Jesus but I still fit myself for old chains every once in a while. I don't do the shame spiral or slap myself on the wrist. You say, "What no shame spiral, no whirlpool, well, maybe Aaron you're not even sorry." I just confess,

agree that it was sin, and thank Jesus for forgiveness. I don't want the enemy to have access to me. Do you?

Here's a test on whether you know 1 John 1:9. See if I get this right. "If we confess our sins and grovel and beat ourselves up and shame ourselves for doing this again and isolate ourselves from the Christian community for a good long while then Jesus will forgive me." Not right you say? Oh yeah, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" That's it. Unrighteousness is all the stuff we don't know we're doing that isn't rightly related to God and others and ourselves and creation. Just imagine with me how patient God is to know our deeds before we do them and still offer us a way to agree and align with Him and cleanse us! Righteousness means to be rightly related to God through allegiance to Jesus.

We know that our old man was crucified with him so that the body of sin would no longer dominate us, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. (For someone who has died has been freed from sin.) Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.

– Romans 6:6-8

Living in freedom means:

1. Recognizing our old sinful nature has been crucified with Christ: Through Jesus' sacrifice, our former self, bound by sin, has been put to death. We are new creations in Christ, no longer defined by our past failures or sinful tendencies.
2. Understanding we are no longer slaves to sin: Sin's power over us has been broken. We are no longer compelled to obey

its demands or trapped in cycles of guilt and shame. Christ's victory has liberated us from sin's dominion.

3. Actively choosing to live as free people: Freedom in Christ requires our participation. We must daily decide to walk in the liberty Christ has provided, resisting the temptation to return to old patterns or pick up the chains that have been broken.
4. Using our freedom to serve God and others: Our liberation isn't just for our own benefit. We are set free so that we can love and serve God wholeheartedly, and extend His grace to those around us. Our freedom becomes a powerful testimony of God's transforming work.

Practical Application: R.O.W. in Action

Repent: Acknowledge where you've been living as if you're still a slave to sin. Turn away from this mindset and towards the truth of your freedom in Christ.

Obey: Choose to live as a free person. What does obedience look like now that you're no longer bound by sin? How can you use your freedom to serve God and others?

Worship: Praise God for His incredible plan of redemption. Thank Jesus for His sacrifice that has set you free. Let your life be a living act of worship in response to this freedom.

The Challenge of Freedom

While we've been set free, we often struggle to live in that freedom. We may find ourselves returning to old patterns of sin, picking up the chains that have been broken. This is why Paul urges us in Galatians 5:1, "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery."

Living in freedom requires vigilance and a continual turning towards Christ. It's not a one-time decision, but a daily choice to embrace our identity as free children of God.

Conclusion

King Jesus's work on the cross has provided our ultimate liberation. We are no longer slaves to sin or under the power of the enemy. We have been set free to live in relationship with God and to fulfill our purpose in His Kingdom. As we continue to repent, obey, and worship, we grow in our ability to live out this freedom and resist the enemy's attempts to re-enslave us. **Remember, the chains are broken. You are free. Now live like it.**

Reflection

- How has your understanding of Christ's sacrifice changed after reading this chapter?

- The chapter discusses the enemy's "whisper campaign" and

"asymmetrical warfare." What specific "whispers" is the enemy using in your life to discourage or derail you, and how can you use 2 Corinthians 10:4-5 to "tear down arguments" and "take every thought captive"?

- The author emphasizes confessing sins without the "shame spiral." How can you apply 1 John 1:9 to approach God in confession and thank Him for forgiveness, rather than returning to "broken chains"?

- In what areas of your life do you still struggle to live in the freedom Christ provides?

- How can you practically apply the R.O.W. principle to maintain your freedom in Christ?

Prayer Focus

Heavenly Father, we come before You in awe of the authority You've given us through Christ. We thank You for the victory Jesus won on the cross, disarming the spiritual rulers and authorities.

Lord, help us to fully grasp the reality of our position in Christ. Remind us daily that we are Your children, more than conquerors, ambassadors for Christ, and Your workmanship. Let these truths sink deep into our hearts and transform the way we live.

We confess the times we've lived as if we were still slaves to sin and fear. Forgive us for the moments we've given ground back to the enemy through our choices and beliefs. Help us to stand firm in the freedom Christ has won for us.

Holy Spirit, give us discernment to recognize the enemy's schemes and the courage to resist them. Teach us how to effectively use the spiritual armor You've provided. May we be diligent in putting on the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the shoes of the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit.

Father, we ask for wisdom to exercise our authority in Christ with humility. Keep us from pride or misusing this authority. Help us to always remember that our power comes from You alone.

Lord Jesus, we thank You for the authority You've given us to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy. Give us boldness to walk in this authority, especially in areas where we've felt powerless before.

We pray for strength to resist the enemy's intimidation tactics. When he roars like a lion, remind us that he's already defeated. Help us to stand firm in our faith, knowing that our brothers and sisters around the world are facing similar battles.

Father, we ask that You would use us as instruments of Your Kingdom. As we exercise our authority in Christ, may we bring light to dark places, hope to the hopeless, and freedom to those in bondage.

Finally, Lord, we pray for a deeper understanding of what it means to be seated with Christ in the heavenly realms. May this heavenly perspective shape our earthly lives, giving us confidence and peace as we face each day's challenges.

*We pray all this in the mighty name of Jesus, our victorious King.
Amen.*

Chapter Five

Our Authority in Christ

Who do you think you are? That can be a very intimidating question. Depending on the context that could make us tuck our proverbial tail and slink away. It's true that many people have an over inflated sense of self, but I find that among Christians we often think to little about the work God is doing in our lives and how we can participate with Him under his authority. God has through Christ reconciled us to Himself and his Spirit is the down payment of that. We are participating with Him as we train to rule and reign with Him.

As a student at Puget Sound Christian College in the 90s, I was able to play on the basketball team and we experienced amazing success at our level. There are many fond memories of traveling and even a national championship. Early on, I struggled to understand my value on the team. It was so much fun, but I was not careful with fouling my opponent. I would "foul out" and be sitting on the bench for the last part of the game. One day, Coach Troy pulled me aside and said, "Aaron, I put you in the game because I need you in the game."

When I was taking myself out of the game I was hurting the team. I was a valuable part of the whole enterprise. That really inspired me to understand my role on the team and made my participation so much more meaningful. I'm sure I fouled out of another game at some point in those two years but everything was different after that.

Who do you think you are? Better yet, who does Jesus think you are?

This should probably be mentioned. If you were baptized you did declare war on the Enemy. You made the transition from the kingdom of darkness to the Kingdom of light. Like Israel escaping Pharaoh you went through the sea (pictured in baptism) and came out the other side. You are liberated as we explored last chapter but the enemy doesn't like it. He is shaking his fist and wants to get back at you. One way is this battle for identity. Who do you think you are abandoning the kingdom of darkness?

If we lose this battle for our identity the enemy can keep us stuck living inconsequential lives pursuing other idols and staying trapped in sin. This is why the church remains sleepy and ineffective. We don't know who we are. It's almost like the enemy of our souls is petting the church while it sleeps on the couch. "Just stay sleepy. Do the things you normally do and you will be of no danger to my dark kingdom." If this is the case, the enemy doesn't have much work to do to keep us sleepy. He does not have to be intricately involved in the whisper, temptation campaign when the culture has been set and people are running the course. Like a crockpot where he can set it and forget it, the church is "cooked" (done, finished) when she forgets who she is.

In the previous chapters, we've explored the reality of spiritual warfare, the nature of sin, and the liberating power of Christ's work on the cross. Now, we turn our attention to a crucial aspect of our spiritual journey: understanding and exercising our authority in Christ.

Understanding Our Position in Christ

But God, being rich in mercy, because of his great love with which he loved us, even though we were dead in transgressions, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you are saved!—and he raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, to demonstrate in the coming ages the surpassing wealth of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

— Ephesians 2:4-7

Our position in Christ is the foundation of our spiritual authority. This isn't just a nice metaphor; it's a spiritual reality that has profound implications for our daily lives. Consider these powerful truths about our position in Christ:

- We are children of God (John 1:12): Through faith in Jesus Christ, we have been adopted into God's family. This isn't just a metaphor; it's a spiritual reality that grants us incredible privileges and responsibilities. As God's children, we have direct access to our Heavenly Father, can approach Him with confidence, and are heirs to His promises.
- We are more than conquerors (Romans 8:37): In Christ, we don't just barely survive life's challenges; we overwhelmingly

conquer them. This doesn't mean we won't face difficulties, but it does mean that through Christ's power, we can triumph over any obstacle, temptation, or spiritual attack. Our victory is assured because of Christ's ultimate victory on the cross.

- We have the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16): As believers, we have been given spiritual discernment and the ability to understand God's thoughts and ways. This doesn't mean we're omniscient, but it does mean we can approach life's decisions and challenges with godly wisdom and insight, aligning our thoughts with Christ's perspective.

In any given situation, we may not know what to do
but we know the One who does!

- We are ambassadors for Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20): We represent Christ in this world, carrying His message of reconciliation. Just as ambassadors speak on behalf of their countries, we are called to speak and act on behalf of God's Kingdom, sharing His love and truth with those around us. This role gives purpose and significance to our daily interactions.
- We are God's workmanship (Ephesians 2:10): We are God's masterpiece, created anew in Christ Jesus for good works. This means our lives have divine purpose and design. God has uniquely crafted us and prepared specific good works for us to do. Our identity isn't based on our own achievements, but on God's creative work in us.

Understanding and embracing these truths is crucial in exercising our authority in Christ. Through allegiance to King Jesus we are seated with Christ in the Father's Divine Council as his beloved children. We have access through prayer to the throne of grace. We have one foot in heaven and one on the ground. We are heaven-earth people because we are found in the God-Man, Jesus the Messiah.

With access to the Sovereign of the universe can you see how we can engage in spiritual warfare even as we pray for those who do not yet believe? We can pray that God would unveil the eyes of the blind so they could see the light. We can launch an air war of prayer even while we have boots on the ground to share the gospel. Maybe you found your gospel witness ineffective, falling on deaf ears. Let's keep the air war and ground war working together.

The Enemy's Limited Power

While King Jesus has decisively defeated the enemy through His death and resurrection, we must recognize that our adversary is still active. As the Apostle Peter warns us,

Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. — 1 Peter 5:8

This imagery of a roaring lion is powerful, but it's essential to understand its context. A roaring lion is often not the one that catches its prey; instead, it's usually trying to intimidate. Our enemy, though defeated, still attempts to intimidate and deceive us.

The Nature of Our Authority

Our authority in Christ isn't about having power over other people or manipulating circumstances to our advantage. Instead, it's about standing firm in the victory Christ has already won and resisting the enemy's schemes. This authority is given to us by Christ Himself, and it's our responsibility to exercise it.

"I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you." — Luke 10:19

Putting on the Full Armor of God

At the end of an amazing letter to the churches in what is now Western Turkey, the Apostle Paul wrote:

Finally, be strengthened in the Lord and in the strength of his power. Clothe yourselves with the full armor of God so that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavens. For this reason, take up the full armor of God so that you may be able to stand your ground on the evil day, and having done everything, to stand. Stand firm therefore, by fastening the belt of truth around your waist, by putting on the breastplate

of righteousness, by fitting your feet with the preparation that comes from the good news of peace, and in all of this, by taking up the shield of faith with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. With every prayer and petition, pray at all times in the Spirit, and to this end be alert, with all perseverance and requests for all the saints. Pray for me also, that I may be given the message when I begin to speak—that I may confidently make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may be able to speak boldly as I ought to speak. — Ephesians 6:10-20

Paul's description of the armor of God provides a practical framework for exercising our authority in Christ:

- Belt of Truth: Embracing God's truth as the foundation of our lives
- Breastplate of Righteousness: Living in the righteousness Christ has given us
- Shoes of the Gospel of Peace: Being ready to share the good news
- Shield of Faith: Trusting God's promises to deflect the enemy's attacks
- Helmet of Salvation: Protecting our minds with the assurance of our salvation
- Sword of the Spirit: Using God's Word to counter lies and

temptations

Practical Application: R.O.W. in Action

Repent: Acknowledge any areas where you've given ground to the enemy through sin or unbelief. Turn away from these and towards God's truth about your identity in Christ.

Obey: Choose to act on your authority in Christ. This might mean speaking truth over lies, resisting temptation, or actively engaging in spiritual warfare through prayer.

Worship: Praise God for the authority He's given you in Christ. Use worship as a weapon against the enemy's attacks, declaring God's truth over your life and circumstances.

The Importance of Humility

While understanding our authority in Christ is crucial, it's equally important to approach this authority with humility. Our power doesn't come from ourselves, but from Christ. As James 4:7 reminds us: "Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."

Notice the order: first, we submit to God, *then* we resist the devil.

Conclusion

Understanding and exercising our authority in Christ is a vital aspect of our spiritual walk. It's not about becoming puffed up with pride, but about humbly yet confidently standing in the victory Christ has won for us. As we daily submit to God and resist the enemy, we'll

find ourselves growing stronger in our faith and more effective in our spiritual battles.

Remember, the enemy has no power over you that you do not give back to him.

Stand firm in your authority in Christ, and continue to ROW against the flow of this world's current. In doing so, you'll not only maintain your own spiritual freedom, but also become a powerful force for God's Kingdom in this world.

Reflection

- How does understanding your position in Christ change your perspective on daily challenges?

- Drawing on the basketball analogy, how does understanding your value to the team (God's Kingdom) inspire you to stay in the game and fight against the spiritual forces of evil?

- The text suggests the enemy seeks to keep us "sleepy" by attacking our identity. In what areas of your life are you currently "sleepy," and how can understanding your authority in Christ help you wake up and engage in the spiritual battle?

- The chapter discusses the "air war of prayer" and the "ground war" of sharing the gospel. How can you integrate your position in Christ—being "heaven-earth people"—to make your prayers and witness more effective?

- How can the R.O.W. Principle (Repent, Obey, Worship) be applied specifically to your battle for identity when the enemy tries to challenge "Who do you think you are?"

- In what areas of your life do you need to exercise your spiritual authority more actively?

- How can you practically put on the full armor of God in your daily routine?

Prayer Focus

Heavenly Father, we come before You in awe of the authority You've given us through Christ. We thank You for the victory Jesus won on the cross, disarming the spiritual rulers and authorities.

Lord, help us to fully grasp the reality of our position in Christ. Remind us daily that we are Your children, more than conquerors, ambassadors for Christ, and Your workmanship. Let these truths sink deep into our hearts and transform the way we live.

We confess the times we've lived as if we were still slaves to sin and fear. Forgive us for the moments we've given ground back to the enemy through our choices and beliefs. Help us to stand firm in the freedom Christ has won for us.

Holy Spirit, give us discernment to recognize the enemy's schemes and the courage to resist them. Teach us how to effectively use the spiritual armor You've provided. May we be diligent in putting on the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the shoes of the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit.

Father, we ask for wisdom to exercise our authority in Christ with humility. Keep us from pride or misusing this authority. Help us to always remember that our power comes from You alone.

Lord Jesus, we thank You for the authority You've given us to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy. Give us boldness to walk in this authority, especially in areas where we've felt powerless before.

We pray for strength to resist the enemy's intimidation tactics. When he roars like a lion, remind us that he's already defeated. Help us to stand firm in our faith, knowing that our brothers and sisters around the world are facing similar battles.

Father, we ask that You would use us as instruments of Your Kingdom. As we exercise our authority in Christ, may we bring light to dark places, hope to the hopeless, and freedom to those in bondage.

We pray for our unbelieving friends and family. Give us wisdom and courage to engage in spiritual warfare on their behalf, praying for their eyes to be opened to the truth of the gospel.

Help us to maintain a balance between the "air war" of prayer and the "ground war" of active witness. May our prayers and our actions work together to advance Your Kingdom.

Finally, Lord, we pray for a deeper understanding of what it means to be seated with Christ in the heavenly realms. May this heavenly perspective shape our earthly lives, giving us confidence and peace as we face each day's challenges.

*We pray all this in the mighty name of Jesus, our victorious King.
Amen.*

Chapter Six

Building on the Rock

One of the beautiful consequences of keeping my “Yes” on the table, the green light for Jesus, was the adoption journey my wife Heather and I went on. That story is a whole book in itself, but we ended up adopting six kids, three girls and three boys. Our house was full of life and love and a fascinating blend of superior organization and chaos.

My youngest daughter Ella had some deep emotional problems in her late teens and took her own life at age 18. That story is longer and more intricate, as you can imagine, but that is the short of it. On an otherwise wonderful evening where she was watercolor painting, helping us in the kitchen, singing and laughing, she got a phone call that her relationship with a certain boy was over. She couldn’t manage the mental pain and took a bunch of meds she had on her desk. Ella told Heather about it and they were on the way to the hospital to reverse the decision when she died in my arms as they were leaving.

You've probably been wondering if I really know about life's storms personally, and whispers from the enemy, and if I have experienced any deeply troubling events to speak so confidently about spiritual warfare. I will "play that card" now. Ella was my baby girl, my princess. Even at 18 years old, I could look at her, cock my head, and say "Oh Ella" and she would come running to give me a hug. We danced, made up songs, laughed plenty and to say she broke my heart by taking her own life is a huge understatement. She did try to reverse her fatal decision, but there was no way to turn it around. There is no way to write this without blurry eyes and it has been two and a half years.

If I had not been practicing saying "Yes" to Jesus and learning to trust Him in the previous 30 years I do not expect I could have made it through the depressive whispers, the storm surge that threatened to take me into the whirlpool.

You may not trust Jesus very much yet. That's okay for now, but you've got to practice trusting Him. He says something, you do it. He offers wisdom, you take it. He opens His heart to you, you open your heart to Him. He says trust Him and you do. This is very relational and it doesn't happen all of a sudden. In fact, your relationship with Jesus is the only one that makes sense to ask Him to help you trust Him more, love Him more, to become more intimate with Him. Imagine asking your spouse or friend to help you love them more. That gets awkward doesn't it? Jesus, however, is God Almighty and doesn't mind that at all.

He wants to help you trust Him and He is completely worthy of your trust. He wants you to weather the storm with Him by your side.

In our journey through spiritual warfare, we've explored the reality of the battle, the consequences of the fall, Christ's liberating work, and our authority in Him. Now, we turn our attention to a crucial aspect of our faith: building a life that can withstand the storms of life. Jesus provides us with a powerful metaphor for this in the parable of the wise and foolish builders.

The Parable of the Wise and Foolish Builders

At the end of Jesus' manifesto about the Kingdom of God he gives a story that should wake us up. This parable provides a stark contrast between two types of people: those who hear Jesus' words and put them into practice, and those who hear, but do not act. The difference in outcomes is dramatic - one house stands firm, while the other is completely destroyed. When we build our lives on obedience to Jesus, the devil may shake our house but it won't fall.

“Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and don’t do what I tell you? “Everyone who comes to me and listens to my words and puts them into practice—I will show you what he is like: He is like a man building a house, who dug down deep, and laid the foundation on bedrock. When a flood came, the river burst against that house but could not shake it, because it had been well built. But the person who hears and does not put my words into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. When the river burst against that house, it collapsed immediately, and was utterly destroyed!” — Luke 6:46-49

Jesus gave the enemy no footholds, there was nothing to exploit. No disordered desires to draw Him away from doing just the Father commanded Him. There were no trust issues to work out. Jesus heard the whispers of the devil to be sure, but He counteracted those whispers with the truth of Scripture and a life of obedience to the Father.

"I will not speak with you much longer, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no power over me, but I am doing just what the Father commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father. Get up, let us go from here." — John 14:30-31

Practical Steps to Apply Jesus' Teachings

1. Study and Understand: Regularly engage with Scripture to understand Jesus' teachings. This might involve daily Bible reading, participating in Bible studies, or listening to sermons.
2. Reflect and Internalize: Take time to meditate on what you've read or heard. Ask yourself, "What does this mean for my life?" Remember that building a strong foundation is a lifelong process. Be open to learning and growing.
3. Identify Specific Actions: For each teaching, think about concrete ways you can apply it in your daily life. For example, if Jesus teaches about forgiveness, identify a specific person you need to forgive.

4. Start Small: Don't try to change everything at once. Begin with small, specific, manageable steps of obedience. Every time you have an opportunity, write out an *I Will Statement* and share it with someone for support. "I will...." "I will talk to my brother and ask for forgiveness on Tuesday." View difficulties as opportunities to strengthen your faith and put Jesus' teachings into practice.
5. Seek Accountability: Share your goals with a trusted friend or mentor who can encourage you and hold you accountable. Surround yourself with other believers who can support and encourage you in your faith journey.
6. Practice Regularly: Make applying Jesus' teachings a daily habit. Consistency is key in building a strong foundation. Practices like fasting, solitude, and service can deepen your faith and strengthen your spiritual foundation.
7. Evaluate and Adjust: Regularly assess how you're doing and make adjustments as needed. Be honest with yourself about areas where you're struggling.

Practical Application: R.O.W. in Action

Repent: Identify areas where you've been hearing Jesus' words but not putting them into practice. Confess this to God and turn away from this pattern.

Obey: Choose one specific teaching of Jesus that you've struggled to apply. Make a concrete plan to put it into practice this week.

Worship: Thank God for His Word and the wisdom it provides. Praise Him for being the solid rock on which we can build our lives.

Conclusion

Building our lives on the rock - on Jesus and His teachings - is not a one-time event, but a continuous process. It requires intentionality, effort, and perseverance. But the result is a life that can withstand the storms of this world, a life that stands as a testimony to the power and wisdom of God. Following Jesus is stepping where He steps and stopping where He stops and loving whom He loves.

As we continue to repent, obey, and worship, we're not just going through religious motions. We're actively building our lives on the unshakeable foundation of Christ. This is how we become unstoppable in our faith, how we truly "ROW against the flow" of a world that often pushes us away from God.

Remember, the storms will come, the currents will rage, that's a guarantee in this life, but when we've built our lives on the rock of Christ and His teachings, we can face those storms with confidence, knowing that our foundation is secure.

Reflection

- In what areas of your life have you been hearing Jesus' words but struggling to put them into practice?

- The chapter highlights that trust is developed through practice—saying "Yes" to Jesus even when it's difficult. How can you practice trusting Jesus in the middle of a personal "storm surge," even if you don't trust Him very much yet?

- Jesus gave the enemy "no footholds" because He had no disordered desires or trust issues. In what ways might your own lack of trust or obedience be giving the enemy a "foothold" in your life, and how can you address this?

- The chapter emphasizes the importance of "digging down deep" by putting Jesus' words into practice. What is one specific area of your life where you need to transition from simply hearing His words to actively applying them, starting with a concrete "I Will Statement"?

- What specific steps can you take this week to start building a stronger spiritual foundation?

- How might your life look different if you consistently applied Jesus' teachings in every area?

Prayer Focus

Heavenly Father, we come before You with humble hearts, recognizing our need for a solid foundation in life. We thank You for the wisdom of Jesus' teachings and the parable of the wise and foolish builders.

Lord, help us to be not just hearers of Your Word, but doers also. Give us the courage and strength to put Your teachings into practice in our daily lives. When we face challenges or temptations, remind us of the importance of building our lives on the solid rock of obedience to Christ.

We confess the times we've built our lives on shifting sands - on our own wisdom, on worldly values, or on fleeting pleasures. Forgive us for these moments of foolishness and help us to turn back to You as our true foundation.

Holy Spirit, guide us in applying Jesus' teachings to our lives. Give us discernment to understand His words and wisdom to know how to live them out. Help us to start with small steps of obedience and grow in our faith day by day.

Father, we pray for strength to persevere in building our spiritual foundation, even when it's difficult or unpopular. Help us to dig deep, past surface-level faith, to a place of true commitment and trust in You.

Lord Jesus, thank You for being our Solid Rock. Thank You for the example You set in perfect obedience to the Father. Help us to follow in

Your footsteps, to step where You step and stop where You stop, loving who You love.

We pray for our Christian community - our church, our small groups, our families. Help us to encourage and support one another in building lives of obedience to Christ. May we be accountable to each other and spur one another on toward love and good deeds.

Father, we know that storms will come in our lives. When they do, help us to stand firm on the foundation we've built in Christ. Give us peace in knowing that our lives are secure in You, no matter what challenges we face.

For those of us facing storms right now, we pray for Your strength and comfort. Help us to see these challenges as opportunities to trust You more deeply and to put Your teachings into practice.

Finally, Lord, we pray that our lives would be a testimony to Your faithfulness. As we build our lives on the rock of obedience to Christ, may others see the difference it makes and be drawn to You.

We pray all this in the mighty name of Jesus, our solid rock and firm foundation. Amen.

Chapter Seven

Navigating Daily Storms

Sometimes I pretend I don't have a care in the world, but then an anxious sigh slips out and I remember I'm carrying a load of complaints and concerns. In those moments, I can choose to turn that prayer inward (anxiety) to what I can do about it including manipulating circumstances and people. Jesus gives us another choice, in fact a command, to humble ourselves under God's mighty hand and to cast our cares on Him because he cares for us (1 Peter 5:6,7).

On the night my dear Ella died, my internal circuits were overloaded, I was out of the control seat. Nothing that I could do could get us out of this situation. As I watched the paramedics stream into the house, each with a red bag and a trained mind full of ideas for what to do next, I paced about 10 feet away praying, "Jesus, What are you doing here? What are you doing right now?" I could do nothing but watch the syringes fly and listen to the commands of the first responders.

When I turn the worry upward instead of inward, when I approach God with my concerns instead of making a plan to solve them I experience something unique. When I thank God for His presence and His wisdom and humble myself under Him I experience His peace.

In our journey through spiritual warfare, we've explored the reality of the battle, our authority in Christ, and the importance of building our lives on the solid foundation of Jesus' teachings. Now, we turn our attention to the practical application of these truths in our daily lives. How do we navigate the storms that come our way each day?

The Ongoing Nature of Spiritual Warfare

Spiritual warfare isn't a one-time battle; it's a lifelong journey. Even after we've experienced freedom in Christ, the enemy continues to seek ways to pull us back into bondage.

God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. And God will exalt you in due time, if you humble yourselves under his mighty hand by casting all your cares on him because he cares for you. Be sober and alert. Your enemy the devil, like a roaring lion, is on the prowl looking for someone to devour. Resist him, strong in your faith, because you know that your brothers and sisters throughout the world are enduring the same kinds of suffering. — 1 Peter 5:5-9

This ongoing struggle requires us to:

1. Stay alert: Constantly be aware of the enemy's tactics
2. Maintain sobriety of mind: Keep a clear, focused perspective

on truth

3. Actively resist: Take a stand against the enemy's schemes
4. Stand firm in loyalty: Hold onto the truths of God's Word
5. Remember we're not alone: Take comfort in the shared experience of believers worldwide

Recognizing Everyday Temptations and Challenges

Daily life is filled with temptations and challenges that can shake our allegiance and pull us away from God. These might include:

- Peer pressure to compromise our values
- The lure of instant gratification through technology or social media
- Discouragement from setbacks or failures
- Doubts about God's goodness
- Conflicts in relationships
- Stress from school, work, or family responsibilities

It's crucial to recognize these challenges as potential battlegrounds where our faith is tested and refined.

Applying the R.O.W. Principle in Various Situations

The R.O.W. (Repent, Obey, Worship) principle we've learned can be a powerful tool in navigating these daily storms. Let's look at how to apply it in different situations:

1. When facing temptation:

- Repent: Acknowledge the allure of the temptation and turn away from it.
- Obey: Choose to follow God's commands.
- Worship: Thank God for His strength and the way out He provides.

2. When dealing with discouragement:

- Repent: Turn from negative self-talk and lies about your worth.
- Obey: Choose to believe God's truth about you.
- Worship: Praise God for His unchanging love and faithfulness.

3. When experiencing conflict:

- Repent: Acknowledge any part you've played in the conflict.
- Obey: Follow Jesus' teachings on forgiveness and reconciliation.
- Worship: Thank God for the opportunity to grow in love and grace.

Turning Worries into Prayers

So you're a world class worrier? Maybe you've been muttering your prayers at the wrong altar. Have you been grousing to yourself in expectation that you have to accomplish these major things in your life?

World Class Worriers can become World Champion
Prayer Warriors with a change of altar.

It's the same energy, just directed to the One who is truly in control.

Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I say, rejoice! Let everyone see your gentleness. The Lord is near! Do not be anxious about anything. Instead, in every situation, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, tell your requests to God. And the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. — Philippians 4:4-7

One of the most powerful ways to navigate daily storms is to turn our worries into prayers. This involves:

1. Identifying our concerns and anxieties
2. Bringing them to God in honest, heartfelt prayer
3. Trusting God with the outcomes

4. Thanking Him in advance for His faithfulness

Practical Application: R.O.W. in Action

Repent: Identify an area of worry in your life. Confess any lack of trust in God's provision or control.

Obey: Choose to bring this worry to God in prayer, following the pattern in Philippians 4:6-7.

Worship: Thank God for His care, His wisdom, and His power to work in your situation.

Conclusion

Navigating daily storms and engaging in ongoing spiritual warfare is a continuous process of trusting God, resisting the enemy, and growing in believing loyalty to Jesus. As we consistently apply the R.O.W. principle, turn our worries into prayers, and stay alert to the enemy's schemes, we'll find ourselves better equipped to face whatever challenges come our way. Remember, the goal isn't to avoid storms altogether, but to learn to stand firm in Christ through them, knowing that we're not alone in this battle.

Reflection

- What are some common "daily storms" you face in your life?

- How can you practically apply the R.O.W. principle to one

of these situations?

- The chapter emphasizes that "World Class Worriers" can become "World Champion Prayer Warriors." What specific area of worry in your life can you intentionally redirect from anxiety toward prayer and petition with thanksgiving this week?

- The author highlights that in moments of crisis, we are often "out of the control seat." When your internal circuits are overloaded, how can you choose to turn your prayers "upward" to God's control instead of "inward" toward self-reliance or manipulation?

- The text encourages us to humble ourselves under God's mighty hand by casting all our cares on Him. How does consistently practicing this act of humility empower you to resist the enemy, as described in 1 Peter 5:5–9?

- What strategies can you implement to stay alert and maintain a sober mind in your spiritual walk?

- How does knowing that other believers face similar struggles impact your approach to spiritual warfare?

Prayer Focus

Heavenly Father, we come before You with hearts full of gratitude for Your constant presence in our lives, even in the midst of daily storms and challenges.

Lord, we acknowledge that we often face temptations and difficulties that can shake our faith. Help us to be alert and of sober mind, recognizing the enemy's schemes in our everyday lives. Give us the strength to resist him, standing firm in our allegiance to Jesus.

We confess, Father, that we sometimes allow worry and anxiety to overwhelm us. Forgive us for the times we've tried to carry our burdens alone instead of bringing them to You. Help us to turn our worries into prayers, trusting in Your infinite wisdom and care.

Holy Spirit, guide us in applying the R.O.W. principle in our daily lives. When we face temptation, help us to repent quickly, obey Your Word faithfully, and worship You wholeheartedly. In moments of discouragement, remind us to turn from negative thoughts, believe Your truth about us, and praise You for Your unchanging love.

Lord Jesus, we thank You for the example You set in navigating earthly challenges. Help us to follow in Your footsteps, facing conflicts with

grace, forgiveness, and a desire for reconciliation. May we reflect Your character in all our interactions.

Father, we bring before You our specific worries and concerns. (Pause for silent prayer). We choose now to release these burdens into Your capable hands. Thank You for Your promise of peace that transcends all understanding. Guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

We pray for discernment to recognize the daily storms in our lives, whether they come in the form of peer pressure, the lure of instant gratification, doubts, or stress from our responsibilities. Give us the courage to face these challenges head-on, relying on Your strength and wisdom.

Lord, help us to be consistent in applying the truths we've learned. May we not just be hearers of Your Word, but doers also. When we falter, remind us of Your grace and empower us to stand firm again.

Finally, we thank You for the assurance that You are with us in every storm. Help us to see these challenges as opportunities for growth and deepening our trust in You. May our lives be a testimony to Your faithfulness and power.

We pray all this in the mighty name of Jesus, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Chapter Eight

Finding Yourself at the Altar

One of my favorite aspects of ministry is making disciple makers. But most disciples start out as non-disciples, correct? Did I just blow your mind? I think not. It makes sense that people learn to apprentice after Jesus. They start the process and someone needs to help them do that. This **Repent Obey Worship** framework is a part of learning to follow Jesus.

There was a particularly memorable experience with Billy, a high school student I was mentoring. Billy had a natural talent for connecting with his peers, and we often found ourselves reaching out to the community together. His friend Bobby caught on to what we were doing and invited some of his friends to a youth group meeting at the park.

As I got to know Bobby's friends, I had no idea they would soon provide Billy and me with one of our most intense spiritual warfare experiences. These young men, curious about the supernatural, had

been exploring various spiritual practices. One night, I received an urgent call – they were in over their heads with a spiritual encounter.

Their "research" into contacting the spirit world had led them to attempt a ritual. It wasn't elaborate – they had simply turned their TV to static and recited a summons for a spirit to join them. But now, they were clearly rattled. Recognizing this as a crucial teaching moment, I immediately called Billy. This would be an opportunity to train him in real-world spiritual warfare.

When Billy and I arrived at the house, the scene was chaotic. Two usually tough young men were visibly shaken, their voices cracking with fear. One clutched a baseball bat, while an axe leaned ominously against the wall. It was clear that whatever had responded to their summons wasn't going to be intimidated by physical weapons.

This scenario brought to mind the words of the Apostle Paul:

For though we live as human beings, we do not wage war according to human standards, for the weapons of our warfare are not human weapons, but are made powerful by God for tearing down strongholds. We tear down arguments and every arrogant obstacle that is raised up against the knowledge of God, and we take every thought captive to make it obey Christ. – 2 Corinthians 10:3-5

I explained to Billy and the others that in spiritual warfare, we don't fight with baseball bats or axes, but with truth, faith, and prayer.

Understanding Idolatry

Our sin problem is fundamentally a worship problem. It all starts with worshipping something other than God. While we may not bow down to golden statues today, idolatry is still prevalent in our modern world. We all have disordered desires and they lead us to dark places.

Front of House Idolatry

Try looking at it this way. We've all seen images of golden idol temples somewhere in the world currently active. People lineup and sacrifice to those gods. They give more than they receive and they end up bound to spiritual beings who do not have their best interest in heart. That's what we'll call "front of house" idolatry. Front of house idolatry is overt and easily recognizable. It's like the spirit summoning incident we just encountered. This is the direct approach for picking up spiritual contamination.

Back of House Idolatry

I think there is another way into idolatry though.

We all have disordered desires and there exist spiritual forces that lurk behind our attempts to satisfy those desires.

It is as if we've entered through the back of the temple for the goods on the table not realizing at first that the trap is set. From the "front of

house" you knew you were embracing an idol to get what you wanted. Having entered from the "back of house" you're now in the center of the temple. Here, you're just looking at the goods on the table that you think will fix you, save you (Money, Sex, Power, etc.). Once they've got a hook in us it's just a matter of reeling us in like a fish. We don't necessarily know that we are practicing idolatry, but further down the road this becomes an ultimate thing that takes the place of God. If you can't live without it, or him or her, they have become an idol. I call this "back of house" idolatry which I think is more insidious.

These disordered desires come from our own upbringing and brokenness because of sin (The Flesh), they are amplified by The World, and The Devil lurks to take advantage as necessary. It stems from our disordered desires, often rooted in our upbringing and brokenness due to sin.

This form of idolatry doesn't announce itself. We may not even realize we're practicing it until it has become an ultimate thing in our lives, taking the place of God. It's fueled by three primary sources:

1. The Flesh: Our own sinful nature and brokenness
2. The World: Cultural influences that amplify our disordered desires
3. The Devil: Spiritual forces that exploit our vulnerabilities

Modern Day Idolatry

In short, an idol is anything we make ultimate above God in our lives. If it exists in your head or your culture without critique it has become an idol. By that I mean you just assume it is correct and don't bother to contradict it.

In short, an idol is anything we make ultimate above God in our lives. If something exists in your head or your culture without critique—if you just assume it's correct and never challenge it—it may have become an idol.

- “Might makes right.” (Mars/Ares)
- “Sexual attractiveness is everything.” (Aphrodite/Venus)
- “Gotta make that money.” (Mammon)
- “If you’re not winning, you’re not trying.” (Apollo)
- “Live for pleasure.” (Dionysus/Bacchus)
- “Get ahead by any means.” (Hermes/Mercury)
- “Sacrifice anything for success, even your children.” (Molech)

Some common forms of modern idolatry include:

- **Materialism:** Placing ultimate value on possessions and wealth.
- **Career success:** Defining our worth by our job or achievements.
- **Relationships:** Looking to others to fulfill needs only God can meet.
- **Technology:** Allowing devices and social media to consume our time and attention.
- **Self:** Prioritizing our own desires and comfort above all else.

These idols promise fulfillment but ultimately leave us empty, perpetuating the cycle of sin and separation from God.

Reflection

- What in your life or culture do you never critique?

- Where might you be serving an idol without realizing it?

The Weapons of Our Warfare

As we saw in the incident with Billy and the young men, our battle against idolatry isn't fought with physical weapons. The baseball bat and axe were useless against spiritual forces. Instead, we need to rely on the spiritual weapons God has given us:

- Truth: Recognizing and embracing God's truth about Himself, ourselves, and the world.
- Faith: Trusting in God's promises and character, even when circumstances tempt us to doubt.

- Prayer: Communicating with God and aligning our hearts with His will.
- The Word of God: Using Scripture to counter lies and temptations.
- The Holy Spirit: Relying on His power and guidance in our daily lives.

The Progression of Idolatry

As Paul describes in Romans 1 (take a minute to look up the passage starting at verse 16), there's a progression that occurs when we give in to idolatry:

1. Rejection of God's revelation
2. Failure to honor God or give thanks
3. Darkened thinking
4. Embracing idolatry
5. Sexual impurity and unnatural relations
6. Depraved mind leading to all kinds of wickedness
7. Approval of evil

Each step in this progression alienates us further from God, and He may allow us to experience the consequences of our choices as a form of His wrath. This "giving over" state is a serious spiritual condition, but the gospel provides the solution to halt this downward spiral.

R.O.W. Practice

Repent: Confess aloud to Jesus any participation in ANY occult practice (Astrology, Tarot Cards, Psychics, Ouija Board, Seances, Oaths in Secret Societies, and Mediums, etc.) in an attempt to know what God has forbidden. This may be controversial, but the basic meaning of Yoga is to yoke. It's a spiritual clearing house for the demonic. Keep stretching your muscles but understand your physical posture may leave you open for spiritual contamination by way of its design. Invoke your authority in Jesus to break any claims that the spiritual world might have on you. Acknowledge any areas where you've given in to idolatry, whether overt or subtle. Turn away from these false gods and towards the true God.

Obey: Obey the Gospel. King Jesus is Lord. Choose to actively resist idolatry in your life. This might mean setting boundaries with technology, reassessing your priorities, or seeking accountability in areas of weakness.

Worship: Redirect your worship to God alone. Cultivate practices that help you keep God at the center of your life, such as regular prayer, Bible study, and fellowship with other believers.

And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us insight to know him who is true, and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. This one is the true God and eternal life. Little children, guard yourselves from idols. — 1 John 5:20-21

For although they knew God, they did not glorify him as God or give him thanks, but they became futile in their thoughts and their senseless hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for an image resembling mortal human beings or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles. — Romans 1:21-23

“You shall have no other gods before me. “You shall not make for yourself a carved image or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above or that is on the earth beneath or that is in the water below. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I, the Lord, your God, am a jealous God, responding to the transgression of fathers by dealing with children to the third and fourth generations of those who reject me, and showing covenant faithfulness to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments. — Exodus 20:3-6

Key Takeaways

- Idolatry can be both overt ("front of house") and subtle ("back of house").
- Modern idolatry often takes the form of materialism, career success, relationships, technology, and self-worship.
- Spiritual warfare against idolatry requires spiritual weapons,

not physical ones.

- The R.O.W. principle (Repent, Obey, Worship) is an effective tool for combating idolatry.
- Recognizing and resisting idolatry is an ongoing process that requires vigilance and reliance on God.

Reflection

- Can you recall a time when you encountered or participated in "front of house" idolatry? How did it affect your spiritual life?

- What are some "back of house" idols that you struggle with in your daily life? How can you start to identify and address these subtle forms of idolatry?

- How can you apply the spiritual weapons discussed (truth, faith, prayer, Word of God, Holy Spirit) to combat idolatry in your life?

- Think about a recent situation where you may have unknowingly engaged in idolatry. How could applying the ROW principle have helped in that situation?

- What practical steps can you take to redirect your worship solely to God and away from modern-day idols?

- How can you help others recognize and overcome both overt and subtle forms of idolatry in their lives?

Action Steps

1. Conduct a personal inventory to identify potential idols in your life.
2. Choose one area where you struggle with idolatry and apply the R.O.W. principle this week.
3. Memorize one of the scripture verses about idolatry to use when facing temptation.
4. Share what you've learned about modern idolatry with a trusted friend or family member.

Prayer Focus

Heavenly Father, we come before You, recognizing that we are in the midst of a spiritual battle. We confess the times we've handed control of our lives over to the enemy through our choices and actions. Forgive us, Lord, and help us to fully grasp the authority we have in Christ.

We ask for Your wisdom and discernment to recognize the subtle ways the enemy tries to influence us. Give us the strength to resist his schemes and the courage to stand firm in our faith.

Lord, we offer ourselves to You as instruments of righteousness. Use us to bring Your light into dark places, Your love into broken relationships, and Your truth into confused minds. Help us to be effective ministers of reconciliation, reflecting Your character in all we do.

Holy Spirit, guide our thoughts, words, and actions. May we be living testimonies of Your transforming power. We pray for opportunities to share the message of reconciliation with those around us.

Father, we thank You for the victory that is already ours in Christ. Help us to live in that victory daily, choosing to align ourselves with Your Kingdom of light. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Chapter Nine

Instruments of Righteousness

My wife, Heather and I were on a rare weekend away in Los Angeles when we got two calls at the same time interrupting our movie. A woman I was training to follow Jesus had given into urges to binge on alcohol and was in extreme distress leaving dozens of voicemails. We also got a call from our daughter that our son had "borrowed" our car and had jumped an intersection and totaled the vehicle. Heather and I took our respective calls and shook our heads at the crazy circumstances when we finally hung up. We still haven't finished that movie.

One of these situations was obviously awash in temptation and, while the other one might be as well, it was more of a metaphor for something we do in our lives.

How often do we hand the keys of our soul to our enemy, naively asking him not to cause too much damage?

But unlike my son, who had no intention of harming my car, our spiritual adversary has every intention of wreaking havoc in our lives.

Throughout this book, we've explored the reality of spiritual warfare, our authority in Christ, and practical strategies for living out our loyalty to Jesus. In this final chapter, we'll focus on how to maintain the freedom Christ has won for us, recognizing that our journey is ongoing and requires constant vigilance.

The Battlefield of Human Choice

These verses encapsulate a profound truth about spiritual warfare: it's not just about unseen battles in heavenly realms, but about how we choose to live our daily lives.

Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its desires, and do not present your members to sin as instruments to be used for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who are alive from the dead and your members to God as instruments to be used for righteousness. For sin will have no mastery over you, because you are not under law but under grace. –

Romans 6:12-14

We are constantly faced with a choice - will we offer ourselves as instruments of righteousness or unrighteousness?

The war is in the spiritual realm, but it happens on the ground with humans influenced by one Kingdom or the other.

Spiritual warfare isn't primarily about demons fighting angels with swords in the sky (how would that happen exactly?). It's about the choices we make every day. When we obey heavenly voices, we become instruments of righteousness. When we heed hellish whispers, we become tools of darkness. While the weapons of our warfare are not about the flesh the battlefield sure is.

The Power of Choice

Many people argue that life isn't so black and white, that there's a lot of gray area. While it's true that situations can be complex, at the core, we're always choosing to align ourselves either with the Kingdom of light or the kingdom of darkness. There's no neutral ground in spiritual warfare.

If you have no desire to worship the LORD, choose today whom you will worship, whether it be the gods whom your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living. But I and my family will worship the LORD! — Joshua 24:15

Every choice we make either moves us closer to being instruments of righteousness or pushes us towards being tools of unrighteousness. When we gossip, we become instruments of division. When we forgive, we become ministers of reconciliation. When we lust, we become tools of moral corruption. When we love sacrificially, we become instruments of God's grace.

Reclaiming Our Authority

It's crucial to understand that the enemy has no power over us that we don't give him.

When we sin, when we harbor bitterness, when we give in to fear or pride, we're essentially handing over the keys to our lives and inviting the enemy to take control. Let's look a key verse again.

So submit to God. But resist the devil and he will flee from you. — James 4:7

This reminds us that we have the authority to resist the enemy. We're not helpless victims in this spiritual battle. We're empowered children of God, called to stand firm in our faith and actively resist the devil's schemes.

Breaking Agreements with the Enemy

One of the most crucial aspects of maintaining our freedom is recognizing and breaking any agreements we've made with the enemy. These agreements often take the form of lies we've believed about ourselves, God, or our circumstances.

Steps to break agreements:

1. Identify the lie: Recognize thoughts or beliefs that contradict God's truth
2. Confess and renounce: Admit you've believed the lie and

reject it

3. Replace with truth: Actively choose to believe and declare God's truth instead
4. Take action: Live out the truth in practical ways

Practical Application: R.O.W. in Action

Repent: Confess any agreements you've made with the enemy, even unknowingly.

Obey: Choose to act on God's truth, rejecting the lie in your daily decisions.

Worship: Thank God for His truth and the freedom it brings.

The Power of Testimony

Sharing your story of freedom in Christ is a powerful weapon against the enemy. It not only encourages others but also reinforces your own loyalty to Jesus. Make it a practice to regularly share how God has worked in your life.

But they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives so much that they were afraid to die. — Revelation 12:11

One regular practice that I have is to keep a conversation with God going while I am having a conversation with my pre-Christian friend.

Truth be told I do this with everyone when I'm in conversation with them. It usually sounds like this, "Jesus, make your move! Jesus, what are you doing in this conversation? Jesus how can I participate with what you are doing?"

Ministers of Reconciliation

More than just being defensive, we are called to gain ground for the Lord. As believers, we're not just passive observers in this spiritual conflict.

So then, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; what is old has passed away—look, what is new has come! And all these things are from God who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and who has given us the ministry of reconciliation. In other words, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting people's trespasses against them, and he has given us the message of reconciliation. Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making His plea through us. We plead with you on Christ's behalf, "Be reconciled to God!" — 2 Corinthians 5:17-20

We're active participants, called to be ministers of reconciliation; to bring two parties back into peaceful relationship. Our choices, actions, and words can be powerful instruments in God's hands to bring healing, restoration, and reconciliation to a broken world. We will work more on this in the coming chapters but here is a start.

Practical Steps to Become Instruments of Righteousness

1. Prioritize Daily Time with God

- Engage in regular prayer and Bible study
- Practice spiritual disciplines like fasting and solitude

2. Guard Your Mind and Heart

- Be selective about what you allow into your thoughts
- Fill your mind with God's truth and cultivate a thankful heart

3. Watch Your Words and Actions

- Speak words that build up and encourage others
- Make choices that align with God's will, reflecting Christ's character

4. Cultivate Righteous Relationships

- Stay connected with other believers for support and accountability
- Surround yourself with people who encourage you in righteousness

5. Serve Others and Share Your Story

- Use your gifts to serve others and advance God's Kingdom
- Look for opportunities to be a minister of reconciliation
- Share your faith to strengthen your own convictions

6. Practice Continual Surrender

- Regularly recommit your life to Christ
- Engage in ongoing spiritual growth and renewal

By consistently applying these steps in community, by His Spirit, we can become more effective instruments of righteousness, actively participating in God's work of reconciliation in our communities and beyond.

Conclusion

Maintaining freedom in Christ and engaging in spiritual warfare is an active, ongoing process that requires vigilance, commitment, and a continual turning towards God. As we consistently apply the R.O.W. principle (Repent, Obey, Worship), we strengthen our relationship with Christ and our ability to stand firm against the enemy's schemes.

Remember, the goal isn't perfection, but progress. There will be times when we stumble, but God's grace is always sufficient. As we continue to ROW against the flow of this world, we can trust that He who began a good work in us will carry it on to completion (Philippians 1:6).

In this spiritual battle, we're not just fighting against something, we're fighting for something. We're fighting to be instruments of righteousness, to be ministers of reconciliation, to be ambassadors for Christ in a world that desperately needs Him. Every day, we have the choice to hand over the keys of our lives to God or to the enemy.

Let's choose wisely, offering ourselves as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God. This is our true and proper worship, and it's the most powerful way we can engage in spiritual warfare.

Reflection

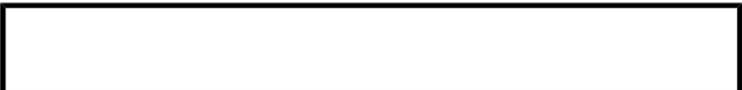
- What are some specific agreements with the enemy that you need to break in your life?

- How can you incorporate the strategies for spiritual growth into your daily routine?

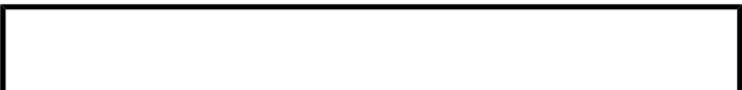
- What's a recent testimony of God's work in your life that you could share with others?

- In what areas of your life might you be unknowingly handing control over to the enemy?

- How can you actively choose to be an instrument of righteousness in your daily life?



- What steps can you take to become a more effective minister of reconciliation in your relationships and community?



Prayer Focus

Heavenly Father, we come before You, recognizing that we are in the midst of a spiritual battle. We confess the times we've handed control of our lives over to the enemy through our choices and actions. Forgive us, Lord, and help us to fully grasp the authority we have in Christ.

We ask for Your wisdom and discernment to recognize the subtle ways the enemy tries to influence us. Give us the strength to resist his schemes and the courage to stand firm in our faith.

Lord, we offer ourselves to You as instruments of righteousness. Use us to bring Your light into dark places, Your love into broken relationships, and Your truth into confused minds. Help us to be effective ministers of reconciliation, reflecting Your character in all we do.

Holy Spirit, guide our thoughts, words, and actions. May we be living testimonies of Your transforming power. We pray for opportunities to share the message of reconciliation with those around us.

Father, we thank You for the victory that is already ours in Christ. Help us to live in that victory daily, choosing to align ourselves with Your Kingdom of light. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Chapter Ten

Healing the Wounded Places

The first nine chapters of this book laid the biblical foundation for understanding spiritual warfare—what it is, how it works, and why it matters. Now, we reach a turning point: healing and resilience are not just individual pursuits; they are deeply communal. In this chapter, we begin to see how Yahweh’s faithful community—those who choose allegiance to Him—walks out healing, resistance, and hope together.

Carry one another’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. — Galatians 6:2

From Solo Battle to Shared Journey

For much of our lives, we may fight spiritual battles alone, tending to our wounds in silence. But scripture reveals a different way: God’s

people are called to walk together, to carry one another's burdens, and to heal in community. Daniel and his friends in Babylon, the early church in Acts, and countless others in scripture model this shift from isolation to solidarity.

There's a reason I used to stay silent about my wounds. I can almost guarantee it's the same reason you have. There's this voice inside that says if you tell them what you're really thinking about and what your internal life is like, they will reject you. I spent much of my second decade convinced that no one else was as sick and twisted as I was. No one else had such deep, festering wounds. There's no way I could bring this into the daylight.

But confession, like daylight, has a great effect. One thing I found was that other people did struggle with the same patterns and behavioral problems and disordered desires. My confession became a way to heal their wounds as well. Bringing things into the daylight—living as instruments of light—became my new way to live. Now, when you meet me for the first time, it's most likely that when you ask how I'm doing, I'll tell you the same thing I just admitted to my therapist (without scandalizing you, of course).

Life in the daylight is a really good thing. By now you've learned the repentance model to make sure we don't stay stuck in our sins. As we learn to share this with others we find freedom. Some of you have had the experience of reaching into the bottom of the sink to grab a sponge. Sometimes that's pretty nasty depending on how much food is there. Some of us live like a sponge at the bottom of the sink at the end of Thanksgiving day and are really afraid of what might come to light, but a good rinse and some sunlight are all that's needed to get a sponge back in action. Once we're cleaned up, we can be used to help others as well.

Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. — James 5:16

This really began two decades ago with my friend Weston. We started making hard confessions. Instead of waiting for the other person to ask the hard questions, we just started making hard confessions. We could start to freely tell each other, “My thoughts are really twisted right now. I’m pursuing this and that and need some prayer coverage.” To this day, we still continue to text each other this way and it’s become a regular pattern—now we reach out to other people as well. This developed over years of prayer walking together and deepening our friendship beyond the high-fives and “I’m fine, how are you?” conversations. Now we have hiking adventures like in chapter 2 and do as much life alongside each other as possible.

Sometimes I’m embarrassed to admit to Weston that I have conversations with other people like we have had over the years. Our intimacy has grown to where we can share that with a broadening group of people, with not just emotional health but growing emotional wealth. But I know that he has developed those kinds of relationships as well. Vulnerability is one of the best ways to open up. I’m sure some of you already knew this, but as a man who prides himself in his own independence, this has become quite a journey for me. I’d like to make my own rules just like everyone else. I like to think that I know the right way to live and the right way to think, but when I admit that I am in a spiritual battle and I share that by opening up with a friend, we give each other access to do battle with us.

Exile, Trauma, and Shared Faithfulness

Torn from their homes in Judah, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were thrust into the heart of Babylon—a world that was both physically and spiritually hostile. The trauma of exile was immediate and profound: they lost their homeland, families, and the rhythms of worship that had shaped their identity. Babylon’s strategy was not only to displace them but to erase their allegiance to Yahweh, their God, and to remake them in the image of the empire.

These name changes were more than administrative; they became daily reminders of Babylon’s relentless attempt to overwrite Daniel and his friends’ faith and identity. Each new name deepened their sense of loss and spiritual violation, reinforcing the message that their past, their God, and their true selves were being erased.

Yet, in the midst of wounds both visible and hidden, Daniel and his friends chose faithfulness. Instead of letting Babylon erase their allegiance to Yahweh, they forged a new kind of community—one marked by shared grief, honest prayer, and steadfast resistance. Their companionship became a source of healing, enabling them to withstand spiritual attacks and cultural pressure. Together, they transformed their suffering into a living testimony: not merely surviving Babylon, but creating a small outpost of Yahweh’s kingdom in the very heart of empire. Their story is a powerful reminder that even in exile, communal allegiance and courage can birth hope and resilience.

They were reeducated in a hostile environment, with every effort made to erase their identity. I can only imagine what that was like, because my own experiences away from home as a teen were at a Christian university—a far cry from Babylon. In chapter 4, I shared about my new identity forming in Jesus, and how attending Seattle

Pacific University became a season of transformation for me. I was a young man full of disordered desires and relational chaos, searching for who I was becoming.

One day, I was sitting in a small group led by a student peer on our residential floor. We were going around the circle, sharing affirmations about what we saw in each other's character. To my surprise, every single person said, "With Aaron, it's always about Jesus!" I couldn't believe it. As they spoke, I had a vivid vision: I was reaching out to adjust my rearview mirror, and behind me—at high speed—loomed the Grand Canyon. It was as if I had just crossed a massive gap, and I instantly knew it was only by the grace of Jesus that I was here, now, in a community that could help me keep moving forward. I kept my foot on the gas, determined not to go back to the deep pit I'd once been in. This was the kind of overwrite I needed and I'm not looking back.

How the Enemy Exploits Untended Wounds

- **Unforgiveness:** When we refuse to forgive, we give the enemy a foothold. Unforgiveness acts like a seed that, if left to grow, becomes a root of bitterness. This root doesn't just poison us—it can defile those around us, creating a fertile ground for demonic oppression and torment.
- **Bitterness and Resentment:** Bitterness is a spiritual toxin. It grows from unhealed wounds and opens the door for spiritual darkness to take up residence. The Bible warns that a root of bitterness can cause community trouble.

See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God, that no one be like a bitter root springing up and causing trouble, and through him many become defiled. — Hebrews 12:15

- **Lusts and Disordered Desires:** These are not simply personal struggles; they are spiritual vulnerabilities. When left unchecked, they become open doors for bondage, manipulation, and shame.
- **Agreements:** The enemy looks for moments when we agree—consciously or unconsciously—with lies, self-condemnation, or destructive patterns. These agreements give him legal ground to influence our thoughts, emotions, and actions.

The Progression of Wounds

- **Bruises and Contusions:** Small hurts ignored can deepen into bitterness or mistrust.
- **Broken Bones:** Major traumas, if left unaddressed, can lead to unhealthy patterns or spiritual “limping.”
- **Infection:** Unhealed wounds become entry points for lies, shame, and spiritual darkness.

He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.

— Psalm 147:3

Healing as Spiritual Warfare

Bringing wounds into the light—through confession, repentance, and community—breaks the enemy’s hold. Healing is not just about feeling better; it’s a spiritual act of reclaiming territory for God’s kingdom. When we refuse to let wounds fester and instead seek God’s healing, we close the doors the enemy tries to exploit.

- **Confession and Vulnerability:** Exposing our wounds to trusted friends and to God is like cleaning out gravel from a skinned knee. It may hurt, but it prevents infection and allows true healing to begin.
- **Repentance and Renunciation:** Naming and turning from bitterness, lust, or unforgiveness shuts down the enemy’s legal ground.
- **Community Support:** Healing happens in community. When we walk with others, share our struggles, and pray together, we become instruments of light rather than hosts for darkness.

Scars and Limps: Marks of Grace

Scars are not marks of shame, but of survival and grace. Sometimes, we walk with a limp—a reminder of pain, but also of God’s faithfulness and the support of others. Just as a broken bone, if set well, heals stronger, so too our wounds—when tended in community—can become places of strength and testimony.

Practical Steps

- **Examine your heart:** Are there wounds you've tried to hide? Is there unforgiveness, bitterness, or a hidden agreement you need to bring into the light?
- **Invite God's healing:** Pray for the Holy Spirit to reveal and cleanse any area where the enemy may have taken up residence.
- **Reach out:** Share your struggle with a trusted friend or group. Healing accelerates in the presence of supportive community.
- **Renounce agreements:** In prayer, break any agreement with lies, shame, or destructive desires, and declare your allegiance to Christ.

Healing is a vital front in the spiritual battle. By tending to our wounds in community and refusing to let the enemy take up residence, we become living testimonies of God's power to heal, restore, and set free.

I've had many opportunities to reframe the wounds in my mind with trusted friends like Weston. We work through the anger, the bitterness, the cravings to remind each other who we are, whose we are and what we actually desire.

Scripture Exploration — Community Allegiance to Yahweh

Read these passages in full in your Bible and explore together how community allegiance to Yahweh brings healing and courage:

Daniel and friends resolve together not to defile themselves.

Daniel made up his mind that he would not defile himself with the royal delicacies or the royal wine. ... Then Daniel spoke to the warden ... ‘Test your servants for ten days by providing us with some vegetables to eat and water to drink. ...’ At the end of the ten days their appearance was better and their bodies were healthier than all the young men who had been eating the royal delicacies. ... In every matter of wisdom and insight ... the king found them to be ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers who were in his entire empire. – Daniel 1:8–20

They pray as one for God's mercy and wisdom.

Then Daniel went to his home and informed his friends Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah of the matter. He asked them to pray for mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery... so that Daniel and his friends would not be destroyed. ... Then in a night vision the mystery was revealed to Daniel. So Daniel praised the God of heaven ... ‘To you, O God of my fathers, I give

thanks and praise, for you have given me wisdom and power. – Daniel 2:17–23

Through these moments—resolving together not to compromise and praying as one for mercy and wisdom—the people of God found healing and courage. Their shared allegiance to Yahweh transformed suffering into solidarity and fear into faith, forging a community that heals, endures, and becomes a living testimony of hope.

Study Prompts:

- What pressures did Daniel and his friends face, and how did they support each other?

- How does praying together for wisdom and mercy change the outcome of a trial?

- Where do you see this kind of community in your own life or church?

Reflection

- Where have you tried to heal in isolation? Who are your “battle companions” now?

- Share a time when someone’s presence helped you persevere or heal.

- The chapter highlights that the enemy exploits untended wounds through bitterness and unforgiveness, leading to spiritual “infection.” What “unhealed wound” are you carrying that needs to be brought into the light to prevent it from becoming an open door for the enemy?

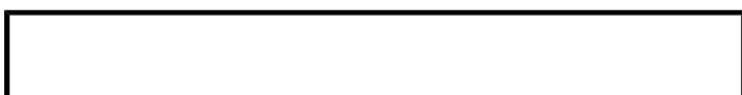
- Drawing on the analogy of the “sponge at the bottom of the sink,” are you living in fear of bringing your struggles into the daylight? How can you embrace the “good rinse and some sunlight” of confession and vulnerability within a trusted community?

- Daniel and his friends transformed suffering into solidarity

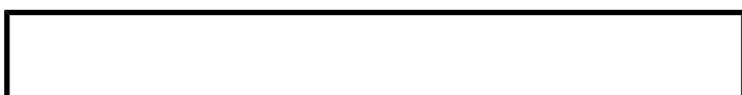
by forging a community of "shared grief, honest prayer, and steadfast resistance." How can you and your community create a similar "outpost of Yahweh's kingdom" by addressing wounds and supporting each other's spiritual battles?



- Is there a hurt you're carrying that you haven't spoken about?



- Can someone pray with you or simply be with you in this?



ROW Application

- **Repent:** Name and turn from isolation or bitterness.
- **Obey:** Bring a wound into the light with a trusted friend or group.
- **Worship:** Thank God for His healing and for the community He provides.

Next Steps

- **Journal:** “What is one wound I need to bring before God and my community this week?”

- **Community Action:** Schedule a time to pray or share with a friend or group about healing and resilience.

- **Scripture Memory:** Choose a verse (e.g., Daniel 1:8 or Psalm 16:8) and write it out as a reminder to keep your focus on God and walk together.

Prayer Focus

Lord Jesus,

We come before You as wounded people in need of Your healing touch. Thank You for never leaving us to fight alone. Thank You for the gift of community, for brothers and sisters who walk with us, pray for us, and help us carry our burdens.

We confess the places where we have hidden our pain, nursed bitterness, or made agreements with lies and shame. We repent of isolation and self-sufficiency.

Holy Spirit, shine Your light on every wound—old or new. Cleanse us, heal us, and close every door the enemy has tried to exploit. Give us courage to confess, to invite others in, and to receive Your grace through the hands of Your people.

Knit us together as a community marked by honesty, prayer, and steadfast allegiance to You. May our scars become testimonies of Your faithfulness. May our limps remind us of Your strength in our weakness.

Help us to walk in the light, to reach out for help, and to offer help to others. Make us instruments of healing, hope, and resilience.

In Your name, Jesus, we pray. Amen.

Chapter Eleven

Standing Shoulder to Shoulder

Healing in community is not the end of the journey—it's the beginning of a new kind of courage. When wounds are tended and burdens shared, God's people are equipped to stand together in the face of spiritual opposition. True resilience is not forged in isolation, but in the trenches of faithful friendship and communal resistance. The strength to endure and overcome is born when we lean on each other, offering and receiving support as we face the battles of life together.

The Gift and Call of Encouragement

Let's take a moment to reflect on encouragement. When I encourage you, I'm lending some of my courage to you at a time when you're just not feeling it. And then, when I'm struggling, you can return the gift,

offering encouragement to me. Together, we build each other up and send one another forward into the mission of Jesus—to walk where Jesus walks, stop where he stops, and love whom he loves. This mutual encouragement is at the heart of Christian community.

And let us hold unwaveringly to the hope that we confess, for the one who made the promise is trustworthy. And let us take thought of how to spur one another on to love and good works, not abandoning our own meetings, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging each other, and even more so because you see the day drawing near.

— Hebrews 10:23-25

The Power of Standing Together

Independence is prized in our culture, but in spiritual warfare, isolation is dangerous. In *Still Waters: A Prayerful Guide to Following Jesus as Shepherd*, I note that stragglers are easily picked off. Many of us think of ourselves as lone travelers, but this is highly dangerous in the spiritual realm. The enemy's oldest strategy is to divide and isolate, whispering lies that grow louder when we're alone. Scripture offers a different vision: God's people are called to lock arms, carry one another's burdens, and fight side by side.

Two people are better than one, because they can reap more benefit from their labor. For if they fall, one will help his companion up, but pity the person who falls

down and has no one to help him up. — Ecclesiastes 4:9–10

Grief, Loss, and the Ministry of Presence

Today marks the 21st anniversary of the birth of my daughter Ella. Heather is at the graveside and I'm here with you. Just now, I looked up from my computer to see a dear Christian neighbor walking up with a bouquet of 21 roses and some cupcakes in memory of our girl. I'm processing the loss, and so are our neighbors and so many other friends. With some choked-back sobs, I receive the reminder from Jesus that we're not in this alone and shouldn't even try to press on by ourselves. Our grief has knit us together with so many others and provided a conduit for love, empathy, and community. What the devil meant for evil, God has meant for good.

United in the Fire

Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were more than survivors—they were a band of brothers, forged by adversity and bound by faith. When the heat was turned up, they stood together, refusing to bow to fear or compromise. Here they are again called by their Babylonian names.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego replied to King Nebuchadnezzar, “We do not need to give you a reply concerning this. If our God whom we are serving exists, he is able to rescue us... But if not, let it be known to you,

O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden statue that you have erected.”— Daniel 3:16–18

Their unity was their strength. When one faltered, the others stood firm. When fear threatened, they prayed as one. Their story is a living testimony: not merely resisting Babylon, but creating a small outpost of Yahweh’s kingdom in the very heart and the heat of empire.

Living the Story: Graceland, Sierra Leone

Recently, I had the privilege of traveling to Sierra Leone with my friends Britan and Cyrus, bringing the message and practices from the first nine chapters of this book into new territory. Cyrus, always ready for an adventure and passionate about photography, joined me for sunrise and sunset excursions. One morning, before dawn, we journeyed to a remote village with a heavy history—a place once known as Rofinka, which means “starvation” in the local Timne language. The name itself was a curse, spoken years ago by a wandering madman who, after being turned away while begging for food, walked naked through the village, loudly proclaiming “Rofinka, Rofinka, Rofinka!” The villagers, perhaps out of resignation or dark humor, adopted the name. Over time, it became woven into their identity, to the point that when someone was desperately hungry, they would say, “Well, I do live in Starvation.”

Entering the Village: History and Hesitation

We arrived with Dr. Roland, who leads a ministry (impactalife.org) in the region and whose own family history is deeply tied to the village. For Roland, this was not just another stop—it was a return to a place

of personal pain, as his grandfather had been the village chief, a man who wielded spiritual power through animistic practices. The weight of generational wounds and spiritual darkness was palpable. As we entered, we noticed women preparing cassava leaves and rice over open fires, getting ready for the market. The everyday rhythms of life continued, but there was an undercurrent of heaviness. The cooking fire was next to a sorcery hut. Even Dr. Roland was hesitant, burdened by memories and the spiritual legacy of the place.

A Moment of Bold Prayer

Our friend Cyrus nudged us to engage with the community. After a brief conversation with the elders, he encouraged me to pray for the village. Always up for a new experience with my "Yes on the table," I found myself suddenly leading the prayer—speaking words of blessing, calling on the Creator, and asking in the name of Jesus for a new story and a new name for this people. "Would you give them a new name, like love or hope or peace?" As I prayed, I kept my eyes closed, but a crowd had been gathering. I must have been praying aloud for a while. What began as a simple prayer soon drew a crowd; elders and townspeople gathered, some curious, some hopeful. We prayed for God's presence to break the curse of "starvation," to bring unity, love, and provision. We asked that the village would no longer be defined by lack or shame, but by the abundance and grace of God. On the way back to breakfast, Cyrus dreamed of a day when someone would come to this village and ask its name. "Why is this village called the community of love?" "Well, we used to be called Starvation, and then this pastor showed up one day and prayed for us, and we decided that we didn't want to be called that anymore."

The Power of Renaming: From Rofinka to Graceland

Weeks after our visit, the ministry team from Mankneh—committed to holistic outreach, community development, and gospel witness—spent enough time and shared enough love that the elders had a question for them. "What do you think we should be called?" The village decided on a new name: "Graceland." This act of renaming was not just a symbolic gesture to me. It was a declaration of God's power to rewrite stories, break generational curses, and bring light where there was only darkness. The smiles on the villagers' faces as we prayed, the openness of the elders, and the sense of hope that lingered after our time together were all signs that something real had shifted. The story of Graceland is now a living testimony: a community once defined by a curse is learning to walk in blessing, dignity, and new identity as they encounter Jesus and His people.

Reflection

- What names or labels have you or your community carried that need to be surrendered to God?

- Where is God inviting you to pray for a new name, a new story, or a new beginning?

- How can you, your group, or your church stand together to break cycles of shame and speak blessing over places of pain?

Prayer

Father, for every place and person who has inherited a name of shame, lack, or pain, we ask for freedom and a new identity. Bring Your light to Graceland and to every “starvation village” in our lives. Make a clear distinction between the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of light. May many see, fear, and put their trust in You. Amen.

Living the story of Graceland is a reminder that when we stand shoulder to shoulder—praying, blessing, and believing together—God can bring hope and transformation to even the most unlikely places.

The Enemy’s Tactics: Divide and Isolate

The enemy’s oldest strategy is to divide and isolate. He sows suspicion, shame, and comparison—anything to keep us from locking arms and standing together. When we are alone, our wounds fester, our defenses weaken, and our resolve crumbles.

See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has an evil, unbelieving heart that forsakes the living God. But exhort one another each day, as long as it is called “Today,” that none of you may become hardened by sin’s deception. — Hebrews 3:12–13

We all go through the “fire,” even if we’re not being executed for our allegiance to Yahweh. All around the world, many of our brothers and sisters are suffering for speaking the name of Jesus—these are our family, the body of Christ, enduring the fire of persecution. But even when our trials aren’t persecution, we still encounter fires of a different kind: the dissolution of a marriage, the death of a loved one, the mental breakdown of a family member, or the loss of a job or dream. These are the furnaces of our everyday lives.

In these moments, the question is: Can you see Jesus walking with you? We’ve learned that He is magnetically drawn to our brokenness—He walks with the brokenhearted and now we see that He is with us in the fire. I’ve heard so many stories, both in Scripture and from fellow believers, that back up this claim: Jesus is ever-present in our trials and faithful to provide courage and comfort. Sometimes the fire is not removed, but His presence transforms it. Sometimes we come out without even the smell of smoke; other times, we bear scars that become testimonies of His faithfulness.

The Early Church Prays for Boldness

When they heard this, they raised their voices to God with one mind and said, “Master of all, ... grant your servants to speak your message with great courage...”

When they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God courageously. — Acts 4:23–31

You can't get much more bold than to speak of Jesus in the face of opposition to His claim of universal dominion. Speaking truth in love to power is the essence of the Jesus life. The early church knew they needed more boldness—of course they did. That's a very difficult proposition, but together in prayer, their courage grew.

Real-World Application: Courage in Partnership

My assignment from King Jesus is to multiply disciplemakers to all nations, and one of my main enjoyments in life is to train disciplemakers. We end up spending lots of time in and for our city while we walk the streets and cover our city with prayer. It's amazing how having someone alongside emboldens you to pray big things for a neighborhood. We end up being led to pray for homes and marriages to come alive, for relationships to become restored, that Jesus would be elevated as Lord. The prayer and the partnership embolden us to take the next step to share our experiences with Jesus when we meet people along the way.

Reflection

- Where have you tried to stand alone in your struggles?

- Who are your “battle companions” in this season?

- Share a time when someone's presence helped you persevere

or heal.

- Is there a burden you're carrying that you need to bring into the light with someone else?

- Can you reach out and pray for someone who is fighting alone?

ROW Application

- **Repent:** Confess any pride, shame, or fear that keeps you from reaching out for help.
- **Obey:** Take a step to invite someone into your struggle or offer support to another.
- **Worship:** Thank God for the gift of community and for the ways He shows up when we stand together.

Next Steps

- **Journal:** Who are the people you can call when the battle

gets fierce? What's one step you can take to deepen those relationships?

- **Community Action:** Schedule a time to pray with a friend or group this week. Share honestly and ask for prayer.

- **Scripture Memory:**

Two people are better than one, because they can reap more benefit from their labor. For if they fall, one will help his companion up... — Ecclesiastes 4:9–10

Prayer Focus

Lord Jesus,

Thank You for calling us out of isolation and into Your family. Forgive us for the ways we have tried to fight alone, for the pride or fear that keeps us from reaching out. Knit us together as a community of courage and compassion. Give us eyes to see those who are struggling and hearts willing to stand with them. Strengthen our unity, deepen our honesty, and make us bold in prayer. May we resist the schemes of the enemy not as individuals, but as a body—shoulder to shoulder, heart to heart. Fill us with Your Spirit, that we might bear one another's burdens and

become a living testimony of Your love and power. In Your name, Jesus, we pray. Amen.

Standing shoulder to shoulder, we become more than survivors—we become a community that resists, endures, and brings the hope of Yahweh's kingdom into the heart of every battle.

Chapter Twelve

Warrior for Others

Why me? Have you ever asked that question? Maybe you’re still asking it. If you haven’t, just wait—life has a way of serving up challenges that make us wonder if we’re the only ones limping through. But as we discovered in chapter 11, when we start to open up, we find that everyone carries a difficult section in their story. No one escapes this life without wounds from the battle. Some people’s lives might look like a highlight reel, but don’t be fooled—beneath the surface, everyone is fighting their own battles with pain, disappointment, and struggle.

Over the last 111 days, I’ve meditated on a Psalm a day. If there’s one thing I’ve learned, it’s that God doesn’t mind hearing what’s really going on with you. Maybe the better question isn’t “Why me?” but, “How long, O Lord?” Yahweh is God welcomes our honest questions and even our laments—He might just be preparing us for something greater than we can imagine. A quick check on the Internet confirms: the death rate is still one per one. No one gets out of this life without

pain. The real question is: What will Jesus do with your pain? Maybe it's time to move from "Why me?" to "I wonder what God might do with this?"

I don't believe everything that happens is because someone deserves it. That's a crushing way to live—karma is a terrible master. Yes, sometimes I do things that bring consequences, but God is always gracious to show me my failures and guide me through repentance, obedience, and worship—ROW—to get me back on the right path.

Strength Through Struggle

Let's look at it another way. I enjoy construction and home remodeling. It makes me stronger and more capable. I tease my kids that while I may not hit the gym every day, I have the "muscles that matter"—what they call "old man strength." I treat everything as a workout: unloading groceries, helping a neighbor move, clearing debris with a chainsaw. Every challenge is training for the fight, and you can grow stronger through every battle you face. Wounds heal, faith muscles strengthen, and you become a more capable warrior for others.

*Now all discipline seems painful at the time, not joyful.
But later it produces the fruit of peace and righteousness
for those trained by it. — Hebrews 12:11*

Don't Waste Your Pain—Let It Become a Pathway

Do you want to waste your pain? I don't. I want to process it, to let God use it for something more. Pain demands a response, and the

truth is, God is always at work healing us—even when we can’t see it. The betrayals I’ve endured, the grief I bear, the scars from my own sin—all of it has become preparation to help others.

About a year ago, I had a conversation with Jesus that lasted all of a second. He revealed an area of my life that had caused pain for me and others—mostly in how I related to people. I asked Him, “Why didn’t you show me this twenty years ago?” Instantly, I sensed His reply: “Because you would’ve conquered it, felt smug, and judged everyone else. Now you’ll have empathy for those who struggle, too.” In that moment, He both humbled and lifted me. Jesus isn’t obsessed with our flaws; He wants to use them to build up His people and encourage them to trust Him.

One of the best ways to get out from under the weight of your own story—when it feels crushing—is to help someone else. Jesus not only provides the pathway for this; He commands it. We weren’t meant to be constantly looking at ourselves, endlessly analyzing our own lives. No wonder we get discouraged when all we do is look inward. That’s what our culture tells us: look inside, find out what’s wrong, fix it, then celebrate your own greatness. But that’s not the way of Jesus.

Jesus calls us to look outside of ourselves. Instead of looking inward—which often leads downward—we need to look upward, which leads us outward. When we shift our gaze from self to Savior, from our own wounds to the needs of others, we find purpose, hope, and healing.

Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. You should have the same attitude toward one another that Christ Jesus had. —

Philippians 2:4–5

Let your pain become a bridge, not a barrier. Let it move you to compassion, to action, and to the kind of service that brings life to others—and, in the process, to yourself.

From Wounds to Warriors: The Outward Turn

Healing is not the end of the fight—it's the rallying point. When God brings us through the valley, it's never just for our sake. He transforms battle wounds into marks of victory, and those scars become stories of survival. Our stories, in turn, become battle cries—calling out to others who are still deep in the struggle. The comfort, freedom, and courage we've received are meant to overflow, transforming not only our lives but the lives of those around us.

I continue to be amazed by the little church I get to pastor. God has been quietly preparing us to walk with the wounded. I see it up close as I walk my own grief journey, but I also see it in the gentle ways others in our community are being equipped. People who once hid their pain are now learning to walk with kindness, sensitivity, and love—opening up their stories to those who feel like they are bleeding out, alone and unseen.

We are learning together that our scars are not signs of shame or weakness, but testimonies of God's faithfulness. When we share honestly about where we've been and how God has met us, we offer hope to those still in the valley. Our community is becoming a forward operating base for the mission—not because we have it all together, but because we are willing to stand shoulder to shoulder with others on the front lines of brokenness.

- When someone shares their grief, there's always someone ready to listen, to pray, to simply sit in the silence.

- When a new face walks in with invisible wounds, there's a sense of welcome and understanding that can only come from people who have been there.
- As we open our lives, we find that God uses even our hardest chapters to draw others toward healing and hope.

This is the outward turn: moving from wounded to warrior—not by our own strength, but by the grace that has carried us. We become living invitations for others to step into the light, to believe that their story isn't over, and to discover that God can use even the deepest pain for a greater purpose. In this way, our church—and every community of faith—becomes a place where healing multiplies, and the mission of Jesus moves forward, one scarred and hopeful story at a time.

Joseph: God's Goodness in the Midst of Suffering

Joseph's life (Genesis 37–50) is a sweeping story of betrayal, endurance, and redemption.

- Betrayed by his brothers and sold into slavery, Joseph endured years of injustice and isolation in Egypt.
- Even when falsely accused and imprisoned, he remained faithful, using his gifts to serve others.
- By God's providence, Joseph was elevated to second-in-command in Egypt, ultimately saving many from famine—including the very brothers who betrayed him.

Joseph's Perspective on Suffering

When Joseph finally revealed himself to his brothers after years of betrayal, slavery, and imprisonment, he offered a perspective on suffering that is both honest and deeply hopeful:

“Now, do not be upset and do not be angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me ahead of you to preserve life... So now, it is not you who sent me here, but God.” — Genesis 45:5,8

Later, after their father's death, Joseph reassured his brothers with words that have become a cornerstone for understanding God's redemptive power:

“As for you, you meant to harm me, but God intended it for a good purpose, so he could preserve the lives of many people, as you can see this day.” — Genesis 50:20

What Joseph's Story Teaches Us

He Names the Evil:

Joseph never glosses over the wrong done to him. He acknowledges the harm and betrayal, calling it what it is. He doesn't excuse his brothers' actions or pretend they weren't painful.

He Refuses to Simplify Suffering:

Joseph doesn't claim that every painful event was “good” or that it was

all part of a neat, divine plan. Instead, he holds the tension: people intended evil, but God worked through it for good. He recognizes both the reality of human wrongdoing and the mysterious ways God can redeem even the darkest situations.

He Finds Hope in God's Redemption:

Joseph's faith is not in easy answers, but in God's ability to redeem even the worst circumstances. He trusts that God can bring life and blessing out of loss and betrayal, even when the path is unclear.

What Does It All Mean?

It's important to approach suffering with humility and honesty:

- We Don't Always Know the Meaning:**

You may never fully understand why you suffer. It's not always possible—or helpful—to declare that every hardship is God's plan to make you better or to improve the world. There is real evil in the world, and things are often deeply broken. Sometimes, pain simply doesn't make sense.

- Jesus Walks With You:**

While we may not have all the answers, Jesus does. He is the suffering Servant who understands what it means to be wounded, betrayed, and misunderstood. He can reveal your next steps as you walk with Him through the pain.

- Joseph's Story Is Not a Formula:**

Joseph's journey is not a license to tell others (or ourselves) that every tragedy is secretly a blessing or that God causes all suffering for improvement. Instead, his story reminds us to hold space for lament, honesty, and hope.

How to Respond

Joseph's story invites us to:

- **Affirm God's Power to Redeem:**

No suffering is wasted in God's hands. Even when we can't see the outcome, we can trust that God is able to bring good out of evil.

- **Hold Space for Honest Lament:**

It's okay to grieve, to question, and to admit that some pain doesn't make sense. God welcomes our honest cries and our confusion.

- **Look to Jesus, the Suffering Servant:**

Ultimately, Jesus knows what it is to suffer unjustly. He meets us in our pain, walks with us through it, and alone can reveal what our next steps should be.

In summary:

Joseph's perspective on suffering is both honest and hopeful. It does not deny the reality of evil or the complexity of pain, but it does point us to a God who redeems, a Savior who suffers with us, and a hope that our stories are not over—even when we don't have all the answers.

Reflection

- Where have you seen God bring unexpected good out of hardship in your life?

- Are there places where you need to acknowledge evil and grieve, rather than rush to explanation?

- How might Jesus, the suffering Servant, want to meet you in your pain today?

Joseph's story is a declaration: no suffering is wasted in God's hands. What others meant for evil, God can turn for good—but that doesn't mean we always see the "why" right away. Instead, we are invited to bring our pain to Jesus, trust Him with our story, and let Him lead us toward hope and healing, one step at a time. "How long o LORD?"

Esther: Courage for Such a Time as This

Esther's story (Esther 4–8) is one of risk, hidden identity, and deliverance.

- Taken from her home and made queen in Persia, Esther faced a moment when her people were threatened with destruction.
- Her cousin Mordecai challenged her not to remain silent, but to risk everything for the sake of others.

- Esther called her people to fast and pray, then approached the king on their behalf, risking her life to intercede.

“Who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?”... “I will go to the king, even though it violates the law. If I perish, I perish!” — Esther 4:14,16

Esther’s courage was not just for herself—it was for her people. Her willingness to act changed the fate of a nation.

Reflection

- Where is God inviting you to take a risk for the sake of others?

- Have you ever felt unqualified or out of place, yet sensed God calling you to speak up or step out?

- What does “for such a time as this” look like in your family, workplace, or community right now?

Joseph & Esther: Two Stories, One God

Consider how these two stories echo and complement each other:

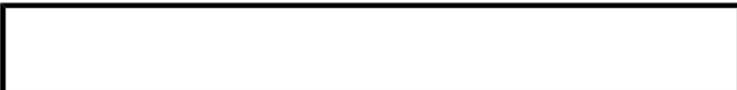
- Both Joseph and Esther were uprooted from home and thrust into foreign, hostile environments.
- Each faced injustice, risk, and the temptation to remain silent or bitter.
- Both rose to positions of influence not for their own comfort, but to save and bless others.
- Each saw God's hand at work, turning evil intentions into opportunities for deliverance and hope.
- Both forgave and acted with courage, trusting that their stories were part of something bigger than themselves.

Discussion: Joseph and Esther in Conversation

- How does Joseph's declaration—"God intended it for good"—shape your understanding of suffering and redemption?



- How does Esther's willingness to risk her life inspire you when you face fear or uncertainty?



- In what ways do both stories challenge you to move from self-preservation to sacrificial love for others?



- What would it look like for your group or community to embody the courage, forgiveness, and hope of Joseph and Esther?



Application: Becoming a Warrior for Others

- **Share Your Story:** Let your battle scars become testimonies of God's faithfulness. Your journey may be the rallying point that helps someone else find victory in their own fight.
- **Stand in the Gap:** Pray and act for those in crisis, even at personal cost.
- **Choose Blessing:** Like Joseph, speak life and provision over those who have hurt you.
- **Embrace Your Moment:** Like Esther, recognize that you may be placed "for such a time as this."

Reflection

- Who has been a “warrior for you” on your journey?

- Where is God inviting you to stand in the gap for someone else?

- What story or scar can you share to bring hope to another?

- How can your group or community become a source of blessing and strength for others?

- What is one step you can take this week to move from healed to healer?

ROW Application

- **Repent:** Release fear or reluctance to serve and bless others.
- **Obey:** Take a concrete step—pray, encourage, or serve someone in need this week.
- **Worship:** Thank God for the privilege of joining His mission to heal, restore, and rescue.

Next Steps

- **Journal:** Who is God putting on your heart to pray for, encourage, or bless this week?

- **Community Action:** Organize a group prayer, encouragement, or outreach for someone in need.

- **Scripture Memory:**

Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. You should have the same attitude toward one another that Christ Jesus had. —
Philippians 2:4–5

Prayer Focus

Lord Jesus,

Thank You for healing our wounds and making us whole. Now send us out as warriors for others—ready to pray, serve, and stand in the gap. Give us courage to share our stories, humility to bless, and faith to believe You can bring light to the darkest places. Knit us together as a community on mission, bearing one another’s burdens and bringing hope to the world.

In Your name, Jesus, we pray. Amen.

As you finish this book, remember: you are not just a survivor—you are a warrior. You are part of a healed, courageous, and mobilized community—fighting for others, carrying hope into the fray, and advancing Christ’s light wherever the battle takes you.

Conclusion: Becoming Unstoppable in Faith

As we conclude our journey through the realities of spiritual warfare and the power of living in Christ's freedom, let's reflect on the key principles we've explored and look forward to applying them in our daily lives.

Throughout this book, we've discovered that:

- We are in a constant spiritual battle, whether we recognize it or not.
- Our freedom in Christ is powerful, but requires vigilance to maintain.
- The R.O.W. principle (Repent, Obey, Worship) is a practical tool for daily spiritual victory.
- Building our lives on the solid foundation of Christ involves

not just hearing His words, but putting them into practice.

- We have authority in Christ to resist the enemy's schemes and live victoriously.
- We are part of God's plan to heal others and explain to them the battle they are facing.

Living as Battle-Ready Disciples

As you step back into your daily routines, remember that you are not alone in this fight. You are part of a global community of believers, all striving to live out their faith in a world that often pushes against God's ways. Your local church, small group, and Christian friends are all valuable resources in your spiritual journey.

The Power of a Life Built on Obedience to Christ

Jesus promised that those who hear His words and put them into practice are like a house built on a solid foundation. When the storms of life come - and they will - your faith will stand firm. This isn't about perfection, but about consistent, intentional choices to follow Christ in every area of your life.

As you continue to R.O.W. against the flow of our culture, you'll find that your faith doesn't just survive - it thrives. You'll become a powerful witness to the transforming power of the gospel, and you may be surprised at how God uses your obedience to impact others around you.

Encouragement for the Journey Ahead

Remember, spiritual growth is a process. There will be victories and setbacks along the way. When you stumble, don't be discouraged. Instead, quickly apply the R.O.W. principle:

Repent: Turn away from the sin or mistake.

Obey: Choose to obey the Gospel - Jesus the resurrected Messiah of Israel is true Lord of the world.

Worship: Thank God for His forgiveness and the strength to move forward.

As you consistently practice this, you'll find yourself becoming more resilient in the face of temptation and more attuned to God's voice in your daily life. As you continue this journey, remember: healing is not the end, but the beginning of a new mission. Stand shoulder to shoulder with others, and let your scars become stories of hope. You are called not just to survive, but to be a warrior for others—bringing light, encouragement, and the love of Christ to a world in need.

Final Challenge

I want to challenge you to commit to one specific action step based on what you've learned. Perhaps it's setting aside daily time for prayer and Bible study, finding an accountability partner, or addressing a specific area of disobedience in your life. Whatever it is, write it down and share it with a trusted friend or mentor who can encourage you and pray for you.

Remember, you are not fighting for victory - in Christ, you are fighting FROM victory. He has already won the ultimate battle. Your role is to stand

firm in that victory and to advance His Kingdom in your sphere of influence.

As you go forth from here, may you be filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, rooted deeply in God's love, and equipped to face whatever challenges come your way. Keep ROWing against the flow, and watch in awe as God works in and through you in ways you never thought possible.

You are loved. You are empowered. Now go and live as the unstoppable force for God's Kingdom that you were created to be.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Aaron Bauer".

Aaron Bauer

Issaquah, WA

Revised and Expanded July 2025

aaron@issaquah.cc