

No Neutral Ground

Confronting Evil,
Ending Drift,
and Carrying the Light of Jesus



DAN MUHLENKAMP

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Confronting Evil, Ending Drift, and Carrying the Light

By: Dan Muhlenkamp

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Dedication

To Jesus Christ,
my Lord, my King, and the Light of my life.
You are the One I wrestled with.
You are the One who reduced me.
You are the One who now carries me.
Everything I have written here is Yours.

To my wife Susie,
you are God's greatest gift to me in this life.
More than any sermon, any book, or any season of prayer,
He has used you to reveal both who He is
and who I am called to become.

You have loved me when I was distracted,
guarded me when I was drifting,
and forgiven me when I failed to guard the Light in our home.
I stand before you deeply indebted—
not just grateful, but humbled.

In this last quarter of my life,
I will strive to love you as Christ calls me to—
not perfectly, but faithfully.

And to our children,
you are a gift I do not take lightly.
I love you with all my heart.
I entrust you to God, who loves you even more than I do.
I pray I become the father you need,
and that you will one day walk fully in His Light.

Thank you for never giving up on me.

Dan

*“I am the light of the world.
Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness,
but will have the light of life.”*

— John 8:12

*And the light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness has not overcome it.*

— John 1:5

Chapter 1 — The Confrontation

“Thirteen-Year-Old Girl Kills Her Father With a Machete.”

That’s the headline as I remember it. I read it years ago. I cannot verify every part of this story. But I know this: something in it rang true enough to confront me.

Somewhere in Africa, a family was captured by a gang or rebel group. The captors ordered a young girl—twelve or thirteen—to kill one of her parents with a machete. If she refused, they said they would behead everyone in the family except her.

All four of them were on their knees: the girl, her father, her mother, and her eight-year-old brother.

When the girl was later rescued from human trafficking, she told the story. She picked up the machete, walked to her father. He nodded, closed his eyes, and lifted his chin. The girl swung the machete at his throat as hard as she could.

She said her father had spoken to her ahead of time about this possibility. They had heard stories. He told her exactly what to do if it ever happened to them.

When she was found, she didn’t even know whether her mother or brother were alive.

When I first read that story, I couldn’t even process it. I just coldly ignored it. Literally years later God brought it back to me in prayer, and I relived it in my soul.

My heart didn’t analyze it. It revolted.

There are moments in life when something pierces straight through every layer of abstraction. No theology. No philosophy. No nuance. Just horror.

A child forced to butcher her father.

A father instructing his daughter how to kill him.

A mother and brother watching.

If this is the world we live in, something is terribly wrong.

And if God exists—if He is good—then this is not just tragic.

It is unacceptable.

I didn’t whisper my prayer. I didn’t dress it up.

“God, how could You let this happen? How could You create a world where something like this is even possible?”

And beneath that question were others, harder ones:

If You are all-powerful... You could have stopped it.

If You are all-wise... You could have designed something better.

If You are love... why...how can this happen?

This wasn't the first time I had asked God questions like this. But the memory of this story brought them roaring back to the surface.

I wasn't looking for a devotional answer.

I wasn't looking for comfort.

I wanted an explanation. I wanted it now.

And if God was going to claim goodness in a world like this, then I believed there had to be an answer. Sometimes I even felt like He owed me an answer.

Chapter 2: Before The Answer

I wanted an explanation. And I wanted it now.

He didn't give me one.

There was no sudden clarity. No lightning bolt of understanding. No defense of His goodness. Just silence.

That didn't surprise me, but it frustrated me.

If He was going to allow a world like this, then He could at least explain Himself.

Days passed. I brought the story back to Him again and again. The horror didn't fade. The questions didn't soften.

And still—nothing resembling the answer I thought I deserved.

Before I go further, I need to explain something.

When I write, "God said," I don't mean I hear an audible voice. God speaks to me the way He speaks to many people—through Scripture, through conviction, through clarity that unfolds over time. What I'm writing is the substance of that unfolding conversation, gathered into simple dialogue so it can be followed. It isn't a transcript. It's the closest I can come to describing what happens between Him and me.

Finally, when movement came, it didn't come during prayer.

It came from a business video.

I had watched Simon Sinek explain something about leadership. He drew a large circle and said most people know *what* they do. Inside that, a smaller circle—fewer people understand *how* they do it. Inside that, a smaller one still—only a few know *why* they do it.

That idea stayed with me and I used it for years. For some reason it was on my mind again, and slowly God showed me there was another circle. It was a tiny circle inside the "Why" circle.

It was labeled "Who".

"You see Dan, there's an even smaller group. The people who know *who*. They know who they are. They know who the people around them are. They understand other's hearts. And only the people who truly know who can move wisely into *why*."

I didn't connect that to the story immediately.

But over time, it began to press in on me.

I kept asking God *why* the horror of that story could exist.

And slowly, something became clear:

Before I could understand why, I had to understand who.

Who God is.

Who I am.

Who humanity was created to be.

And only then could I begin to ask why we were created at all.

That wasn't an answer to the story.

It felt like a redirection.

But it was unmistakable.

“Before we talk about evil...

Before we wrestle with suffering...

You must understand three things.

Who I am.

Who you are.

And why I created you.

Without those, nothing else will make sense.”

Who God Is

The question came from Jesus.

“Who do you say that I am?” (Matthew 16:15)

I did not answer that question in one sitting.

I answered it over time, in different rooms.

In chairs.

On floors.

For years I had what I called the “Jesus seat.”

In our house it was my desk chair in the sunroom. Across from me, draped over the couch, was a red t-shirt with a cross on it. That was where I imagined Jesus sitting while I prayed.

Later it was a rocking chair facing a crucifix I brought back from the Holy Land. That crucifix hung on the wall in our living room. The rocking chair had belonged to my father-in-law. I would sit there and talk to Jesus as if He were directly in front of me.

And at first, that felt sufficient.

When Jesus asked me who I believed He was, I answered the way most of us do.

“You are love.” (1 John 4:8)

“You are good.” (Psalm 34:8)

“You are powerful. Eternal. Wise. Creator.”

All true. All familiar.

But something began to change.

Scripture would rise in my memory — not because I was trying to construct theology, but because it would not leave me alone.

Isaiah in the temple (Isaiah 6:1–3).

“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts.”

Not loving, loving, loving.

Holy.

And that word began to press into me in ways I did not expect.

Holiness is not warmth.
It is not comfort.
It is not sentimental goodness.

It is purity beyond comparison.
Otherness beyond measure.
Infinite separation from corruption.

Infinite.

That word began undoing me.

Because if God is infinitely holy, then sitting casually in a chair and speaking to Him as if we were equals began to feel... wrong.

So I stopped sitting.

I began kneeling.

Then kneeling didn't feel like enough.

I began lying prostrate on the floor in my living room, face down before the crucifix.

Not because someone told me to.

Because anything less felt dishonest.

He is holy — infinitely holy. I am not.

And the distance between infinite and finite is not small.

It is immeasurable.

And then one morning, before dawn, I felt compelled to go to church. It was around five o'clock. I wasn't even sure the doors would be unlocked.

They were.

The lights were on.

There was a motorcycle in the parking lot, and I knew whose it was. An acquaintance, not really a friend. I had thought I was being led into something new, but he was already there.

Inside, he was lying prostrate in front of the tabernacle. I kneeled in a pew and prayed as I watched him. He eventually got up and then prayed The Way of The Cross. Then he sat down and adored Jesus.

And Jesus seemed to be telling me, "There is a Catholic Warrior."

From then on, I tried to return to the small church every morning.

I wanted to be in church, face down before Jesus in the tabernacle.

And something happened in that posture, in Jesus' real presence that has kept me coming back.

Not theatrics. Not emotion.

Clarity.

Smallness.

Reality.

When you are lying face down before the Eucharistic presence of Jesus, you do not construct theology.

You are confronted by it...or by Him.

And over time, other truths surfaced.

Jesus did not only say He loves.

He said: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life." (John 14:6)

Not a guide to truth.

"I am...*the Truth*."

When He stood before Pilate and said, "Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice" (John 18:37), He was not offering philosophy.

He was claiming identity.

"I am truth itself. Falsehood is not merely a mistake — it is separation from Me.

I am life. *Life* is not biological survival — it is living in Me.

I am the way. Another way is not exploration — it is separation from Me."

Then Exodus rose in my mind:

"I AM WHO I AM." (Exodus 3:14)

Uncaused.

Self-existent.

Eternal.

Infinite.

Not becoming better.

Not adjusting.

Simply — I AM.

And that is when justice began to trouble me.

“The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and right is he.” Deuteronomy 32:4

Holiness that is infinite cannot ignore corruption.

It must be addressed.

That is justice.

Not revenge.

Not cruelty.

Coherence.

Holiness encountering rebellion.

And Scripture would not let me escape that either.

“At the name of Jesus every knee should bend... and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.”
(Philippians 2:10–11)

Every.

Not only the saved.

Which means that in the end, no one will accuse Him of injustice.

Even those who reject Him will see clearly enough to know they were not wronged.

That reality still overwhelms me.

Because I do not see that justice clearly now.

Often I see suffering without resolution.

But lying face down before Him, something became undeniable:

Either He is not who He claims to be, or I see almost nothing.

And at the center of it all stands the cross.

“Jesus died in my place, on my cross, for my sins.”

Justice is not ignored.

It is satisfied.

Mercy is not weakness.

It is cost beyond comprehension.

And as these things settled in — slowly, painfully, over years — something else happened.

My back had been wrecked. Surgery. Pain returning. Miserable most days.

Praying prostrate stretched it in ways nothing else had.

Over time, the pain lessened.

It was not magic. I was doing exercises. I was working on healing.

But something about placing myself physically beneath His holiness changed more than my posture.

It changed me.

I did not arrive at an understanding of who God is.

I was reduced into it.

He is not partially holy.

He is infinitely holy.

Not occasionally just.

Infinitely just.

Not loving in moments.

Infinitely love.

Not truthful.

Truth.

Not alive.

Life.

And I am none of those things in that way.

Which is exactly why this conversation had to continue.

Who Am I... and Who Did God Envision I Would Be?

It started in a conference room in the business I owned.

Our interview process is strange. I know that. Many companies have multiple people interview a candidate...a person in one at a time. We don't. For our first in person interview, we bring them into a room with the entire team — ten, sometimes twelve people — sitting around a table. The look on their face when they walk in is always worth seeing.

Some of the questions are scripted so we can compare answers. Others are spontaneous. Anyone can ask anything, including the candidate.

My job is simple. I'm not most interested in skills. Skills can be taught.

I'm listening for something deeper. Not a polished plan. Not a carefully rehearsed answer.

I'm listening for a dreamer.

Someone who wants goodness. Service. Humility. Growth.
Someone who wants to be part of a real team that is going somewhere.
Someone who will tell the truth, receive coaching, and serve.

I'm not first asking what job they want.
I'm asking what kind of person they want to become.

Do they want to grow?
Do they want to contribute?
Do they have the kind of heart that can be formed, stretched, and trusted?

On this particular day, the candidate was extraordinary. Still, to this day, the best interview I've ever experienced. When it was over, I was almost stunned. I walked back to my office replaying their answers in my head — not what they could do, but who they were and who hoped to be five, ten, twenty years from now.

And right there, in the middle of that replay, Jesus interrupted my thoughts.

“So, Dan... are you ready to talk about who you are?”

It caught me off guard.

Not what you do.
Not what you've built.
Not what you've fixed or failed at.

Who you are.

“And,” He added — and I can still hear the tone — “who I created you to be.”

That second part landed harder.

“Okay,” I stuttered. “Where do we start?”

“The beginning.”

I laughed out loud. I really did. Of course He would say that.

Genesis.

I grabbed my Bible off my desk and opened it to the first page.

“Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness.” (Genesis 1:26–27)

I had read those words a hundred times. Maybe more. But this time they did not glide past me.

“Our Image.”

What is an image?

My mind went to a mirror. A mirror looks like you. It moves like you. It reflects you. But it is not you.

“Jesus... what does it mean that I am Your image?”

He didn’t answer directly. He made me go back.

“Think about who I am.”

So I did.

Infinitely holy. (Isaiah 6:3)

Infinitely just. (Deuteronomy 32:4)

Infinitely powerful. (Jeremiah 32:17)

Infinitely wise. (Romans 11:33)

Eternal. (Psalm 90:2)

Uncreated. (John 1:3)

“I AM.” (Exodus 3:14)

Truth itself. (John 14:6)

Life itself. (John 14:6)

Love itself. (1 John 4:8)

Creator of everything that exists — galaxies, oceans, gravity, light. (Colossians 1:16)

None of those things are small.

None of them are partial.

They are without limit.

And then He said something that felt simple but wasn't.

"Now remove the 'infinite.'"

Remove infinite power.

Remove infinite wisdom.

Remove infinite holiness.

Remove infinite self-existence.

What remains?

Not nothing.

But something astonishing.

Capable of holiness — though not holiness itself.

Capable of justice — though not perfect justice.

Capable of real love — not sentimental affection, but self-giving love.

Capable of knowing truth.

Capable of choosing.

Capable of creating — not from nothing, but from what already exists.

Capable of reason.

Capable of communion.

Capable of freedom.

And then it happened — not like a logical chain, not like stacking bricks — but like a door swinging open.

Psalm 8 rose up in my mind:

"What is man that You are mindful of him...
You have made him little less than the angels
and crowned him with glory and honor." (Psalm 8:4–5)

Crowned.

Glory.

Honor.

That is not language for accidents.

That is not language for advanced animals.

That is royal language.

And then another truth came crashing in — one I had experienced but never fully grasped.

When a man and a woman come together, cooperating with God, an immortal soul comes into existence.

Not a temporary being.

Not a creature that fades.

An eternal person.

A son.

A daughter.

Destined for eternity.

The night when my first child was born, I remember stopping at a church on the way home from the hospital. I knelt there overwhelmed, and I prayed, “Father... now I understand why angels announced the birth of Your Son. But I don’t understand how You let Him be crucified. Because right now, I would burn the universe down before I let my son hang on a cross.”

That moment came flooding back.

We do not merely produce children.

We cooperate with the infinite Creator in bringing into existence the most precious thing in the universe — a human soul that will live forever.

And then Jesus’ prayer came to mind:

“That they may all be one... as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You.” (John 17:21–23)

One.

With Him.

Not near Him.

Not observing Him.

Participating in His life.

And something inside me expanded.

We were not created just to avoid sin.

We were not created just to behave morally.

We were created to become like Him.

Not infinite.

But filled.

Not self-existent.

But alive with His life.

Not divine by nature.

But sons and daughters by adoption. (Romans 8:15–17)

“Partakers of the divine nature.” (2 Peter 1:4)

Those words are almost too much to take in.

Partakers.

That means sharing.

The God who contains the universe — the universe does not contain Him — created human beings to share in His own life.

That is not exaggeration.

That is Scripture.

That is destiny.

And I did not build that thought step by step.

It opened.

Like light flooding a dark room.

Like realizing the ceiling you thought was ten feet high is actually gone.

And in that light, I understood something that took my breath away:

We have been thinking too small about what it means to be human.

Why We Were Created

A few weeks after wrestling through who God is and who I was created to be, I found myself in deep prayer over something far more personal.

My wife and I love each other deeply. We have a good marriage—one I am grateful for. But over the years, I have come to see something in myself more clearly.

I have often longed for her to rest in me—to feel safe, to trust my decisions, to believe in my love without hesitation. That longing is real. But so is this: I have not always been the kind of man who made that easy.

There are ways I have failed her. Ways I was absent, distracted, or not as steady as I should have been. And because of that, there have been times when she carried more than she should have had to carry.

I see that more now.

And yet, even in that, something deeper was happening in me. Not a demand—but a longing. A desire for her to experience peace, to feel secure, to rest.

One night, carrying both the longing and the weight of my own failures, I brought it to God again.

Not as a complaint—but as a question.

“Lord... what is this? Why does this ache run so deep in me?”

What came was not a correction, but an invitation.

“I want you to feel how I feel.”

Not sharply.

Not accusing.

Steady.

“Take what you feel for your wife—your desire for her to rest, to trust, to know your love—and begin to see it as only a shadow.

Expand it because I am infinite and you are not.

Expand it because I know what is truly possible and you do not.

Expand it because I am perfect and you are not.”

“And now understand,” He continued, “that this is how I feel about all of humanity.”

It stopped me.

The frustration drained out of me.

Because suddenly my situation felt small — not unimportant, but small.

Human beings do not simply hesitate with God.

They reject Him outright.

They distrust Him.

They assume He does not mean well.

They believe He is withholding something better.

Even those who say they love Him often live braced, anxious, guarded — not resting, not trusting, not surrendered.

And He is perfect.

I am not.

And yet the longing is the same...except His is infinite, and mine is partial.

That moment changed everything for me.

My frustration toward my wife softened — not because my longing disappeared, but because I saw something far greater.

God did not create humanity for performance.

He created us for trust.

For rest.

For joyful surrender inside perfect love.

He did not create us merely to obey.

He created us to live without fear in Him.

To stop bracing.

To stop steering.

To stop grasping.

To believe — truly believe — that He is for us. Who can be against us?

And for a few weeks, I thought the revelation was about how God feels toward the world.

It took time before I realized something even more personal.

That is how He feels about me.

I had thought I was on the inside.

I trust Him. I follow Him. I believe.

But do I rest?

Do I live every day without bracing?

Without anxiety?

Without subtle control?

Without guardedness?

No. Not even close.

And if that is true, then His longing is not abstract.

It is personal.

This is why we were created.

Not simply to exist.

Not simply to avoid sin.

But to live in such trust that surrender feels like rest.

To be sons and daughters who know they are loved.

To live without fear in the presence of infinite holiness.

To participate in divine life not with tension — but with joy.

That is design.

That is purpose.

That is the “why.”

So here is where we stand.

We have wrestled with who God is — not the version shaped by headlines or emotions, but the One who is infinitely holy, infinitely just, infinitely loving, infinitely wise. We have wrestled with who we are — created deliberately in His image, capable of knowing Him, capable of loving, capable of freely choosing union with Him. And we have wrestled with why we were created at all — not for survival, not for comfort, but for communion. For oneness. For a love freely given and freely received.

Existence is not random. It is purposeful. Freedom is not accidental. It is necessary. Love is not sentimental. It is structural.

And if all of that is true — if God is who He says He is, if we are who He created us to be, and if we exist for union with Him — then even the horrors of the story we began with must fit somewhere inside that design.

I believed that meant I was finally ready to understand it.

Chapter 3: We Are Judging Reality from Fragments

I had been returning to the dark, empty church for months. The days began to blur together. Morning after morning. Sometimes late in the afternoon. Sometimes only a few minutes, sometimes longer. I prayed. I read a little Scripture. God and I talked about other things. But that story—the one we started with—would not let me go.

At first, I thought I had it sorted out. An innocent girl. An innocent father. A machete. A cruel gang leader. It all seemed clear enough. And yet, the more I tried to set it aside, the more it pressed in on me. Something about it wouldn't settle.

I kept asking myself why. Why did this one story stay lodged in my chest when so many others passed through my mind and faded? I couldn't name it. I just knew it wasn't finished with me.

One habit God has gently led me into when reading scripture over the years is slowing down and paying attention to people—not themes or lessons, but the individuals themselves. Letting them stand there as themselves, or even putting myself in their shoes. One day, sitting alone again, I wondered if I should try that here. Not with Scripture, but with this story.

The moment the thought crossed my mind, it felt right. Not dramatic. Just right. Like a quiet nudge saying, *yes—finally*.

I assumed we would start with the girl. Or maybe her mother. That's where I wanted to go. But that's not where I was led.

Almost immediately, my attention fixed on the one person I did not want to face.

The gang leader.

Just thinking about him made my blood boil. I didn't understand him. I didn't want to understand him. Nothing about his existence made sense to me. If God is good, how could someone like this have been born? How could a world contain a person who would hand a machete to a child and issue that command?

I couldn't fix it. I couldn't reason it away. I couldn't make it fit inside anything I thought I knew.

And so I just sat there with it.

I wanted it over. *Monster. Evil. Case closed*. I wanted to move on and never look back. It felt like an open-and-shut case—clean, decisive, satisfying.

And yet the relief never came.

I couldn't settle it that way. I wasn't allowed to just be done with him. And then, in the way God often does, I felt challenged—not loudly, not dramatically, but unmistakably: *Try to see him the way I see him*.

It was impossible.

I realized how little I knew. God had known this man as an infant in his mother's arms. God had watched him crawl and learn to walk. He had seen every day of his life—what formed him, what wounded him, what twisted inside him over time. God knew his past completely and, somehow, his future too.

I knew none of it.

I couldn't imagine a future for him that didn't end in destruction. And yet I had to admit—reluctantly—that God could see a future I could not. That thought unsettled me.

And as I sat with that realization, my mind turned to the girl.

I saw that I had done the same thing there too.

I had assumed her suffering settled everything. That her innocence was automatic. That her eternity was obvious. And suddenly I realized how little right I had to assume any of that. I didn't know her beginning. I didn't know what she would do in the future. I didn't know what wounds would shape her choices.

It was one act, in the middle of a story I barely understood.

I couldn't say—honestly—where either of them would end up. Heaven or hell. Mercy or refusal. I simply didn't know. And the more I sat with that, the more unsettled I became.

Because it wasn't just them.

I realized how often I had done this with people in my own life—my wife, my children, people walking past me on the street. I had made judgments, generous or harsh, based on fragments so small they barely deserved the name "knowledge."

God knew. I didn't.

That didn't make my anger disappear. It didn't erase my compassion. But it forced me to admit something uncomfortable: what I was feeling might not be what God was feeling at all.

Then I had to leave.

Life doesn't usually wait for clarity. And that's when this really began to work on me.

The story followed me through the day—through conversations, through passing faces, through moments when my attention should have been elsewhere. God doesn't always finish a thought all at once. Sometimes He lets it surface and resurface in ordinary life.

What disturbed me most wasn't the horror of the story. That hadn't changed.

What had changed was me.

I saw how confidently I had judged people. Not situations—people. How quickly I had written someone off. How easily I had equated strong emotion with understanding, decisiveness with accuracy.

I wasn't shattered. But what I had been leaning on—the idea that I usually see enough to judge rightly—no longer held my weight.

As that unease stayed with me, something else surfaced.

I hadn't just judged the people in the story. I had used them.

Without realizing it, I had turned everyone—the gang leader, the child, the parents—into pieces on a board. They existed to serve a conclusion I needed. I decided who mattered, who was disposable, who could be written off so the story would make sense to me.

That realization shook me deeply, because I knew the language I claimed to believe.

I believed every person was made in the image of God. I could say that easily. But when I tried to hold that belief up to this story, it began to collapse.

God opened my mind. The gang leader was made in His image.

The same God present in the little girl had to be present in the gang leader as well. The same God in the child, the mother, the father. Not different versions. The same.

That didn't add up.

It didn't fit the God I thought I knew—or the image of God I had learned to live with. Suddenly nothing about the situation felt safe.

Because if I was going to be honest, then seeing God in him meant something had to change. I just didn't know whether that meant rethinking my image of him, my image of God, or myself.

Nothing was settled after that.

For a while, the best way I could describe it was this: I thought I had been working on a puzzle. I assumed most of the pieces were already in place, or that I at least understood what the finished picture was supposed to be. And suddenly I realized I hadn't been missing a few pieces.

I had only been working with a hundred pieces of a puzzle with hundreds of thousands.

And worse than that—I wasn't even sure what the picture on the box was meant to be.

I returned to ordinary life, but I moved through it differently. Judgments slowed. Faces lingered. Words caught in my throat.

I hadn't been given a better explanation of the world. I had been shown how partial my vision was within it.

That awareness stayed with me.

Not as a conclusion. Not as a rule. Just as a quiet reminder that I was no longer standing where I thought I had been, and I no longer understood what I once thought I knew.

Chapter 4: Engagement With God Is Real — and It Costs Something

For a while, that realization was enough. I didn't see clearly, and I wasn't supposed to. They were not pieces on a board. They were sons and daughters. That settled something in me — but it didn't finish the wrestling.

Because if I wasn't allowed to judge their ending, then I had to ask something harder.

What was God actually doing with them?

The Collision With the Cross

When it finally struck me that Jesus died knowing He was dying for that gang leader, I didn't argue.

I didn't analyze it.

I was awestruck.

It wasn't clean. It wasn't one emotion. It was several at once, layered over each other so quickly I couldn't separate them. I felt something close to reverence — not the quiet kind, but the kind that makes you step back because what you're looking at is too large to take in.

He knew.

He knew what that man would do. He knew the horror. He knew the command with the machete. He knew the terror in that family's eyes. And He still went to the Cross...for that man.

There was nothing sentimental about that realization. It wasn't soft. It was immense. His love was larger than I had categories for. Larger than justice as I understood it. Larger than the outrage that had started this whole wrestling in the first place.

And alongside the awe came something else.

Shame.

Not theatrical shame. Not self-loathing. Just a quiet, unmistakable awareness that I was nowhere near that kind of love. I had written the man off. I had closed the case. I had decided what he deserved and what he did not.

Jesus had not.

That moved me more than the original story.

Because it meant I could no longer stand where I had been standing. I could still say the gang leader's actions were evil. They were. Nothing about what he did became less horrific. But I could not give up on him. God had not given up on him.

And I had to admit something I did not want to admit.

Part of me wanted God to give up on him.

That was the part that began to crumble.

I was looking at a kind of mercy that did not make sense to me. I did not understand how justice and forgiveness could coexist at that scale. I did not understand how someone so guilty could still be wanted.

But I knew this much: I was not standing above him anymore.

I was standing beneath a Cross that had been raised for both of us.

Terribly Wrong and Terribly Right

There was an odd moment that followed that realization — one I still struggle to describe without sounding confused.

Something about it felt terribly wrong. And at the same time, terribly right.

The thought that both the gang leader and the girl could end up in heaven — standing in the same light, welcomed the same way — offended something in me. The difference between them felt enormous. One had commanded horror. The other had been forced into it. To imagine them somehow brought to the same place felt like a distortion of justice.

And yet the Cross stood there, immovable.

If Jesus knew what that man would do and still chose to die, then something larger than my sense of proportion was at work. I could not dismiss it without dismissing Him.

That was the tension.

I could still say the gang leader's actions were evil. Nothing about them softened. Nothing about them became excusable. But I could no longer pretend that my outrage was the final word.

There was a love operating here that I did not understand.

The Nudge In The Quiet

Sitting there in that quiet, with the Cross heavy in front of me, something familiar began to surface.

It wasn't a new idea. It was something I had used for years when explaining salvation to others. I would bring out a large, clear container of pure water and place it on a table. That represented God — perfectly pure, without stain, without corruption.

Then I would line up several smaller glasses of water. Each glass represented a human person as God created us and intended us to be. Pure. Able to be united with Him without anything distorting that union. The water in those glasses (us - humanity) could be poured into the larger container (God), and the

water in the container poured into the glasses, and nothing would be damaged. There would be no contamination. No separation.

That was the design.

Then I would put red food coloring, representing sin, in each small glass.

Into one glass, ten drops.

Into another, five.

Into another, three.

Into another, one.

I would stir them slowly and hold them up.

Some were dark red. Some faintly pink. To human eyes, they were clearly different. One looked far worse than another. One appeared almost clean by comparison.

But here was the point I would always make: not one of them could be poured back into the large container without defiling it. It didn't matter whether the glass was dark or barely tinted. Once the dye was there, it was there. The water was no longer pure.

Holiness will not be contaminated. God will not be defiled.

And sitting there in that church, I realized something that felt both obvious and devastating at the same time: I had always understood the mechanics of that demonstration, but the story showed its extremeness - greatness.

The problem is not that some of us are worse than others. The problem is that none of us are pure.

Not one.

And if union with God requires purity — not relative goodness, not moral effort, not comparison — but purity, then something has to happen that I cannot accomplish on my own.

That was always the second part of the demonstration.

I would bring out another container of pure water. Inside it, a crucifix. That container represented Jesus — fully God, fully man. Perfectly holy, yet able to receive what would destroy us.

Any of those glasses — dark or faint — could be poured into Him. The stain would not corrupt Him because He had paid the price. He had justified forgiveness. He did what we could never do. He accepts what is impure, what is ours, and gives back what was His.

That is the Cross.

Justice is not ignored. The stain does not disappear as if it never existed. It is taken in. Absorbed. Paid for.

For years, I had explained that.

But now it was no longer a diagram.

It was that man.

The gang leader's glass is dark. Almost black. No pretending otherwise. His actions were evil. They remain evil. Nothing in this illustration softens that.

But if he were ever to see—truly see—what he had done, and in desperation cast himself upon Jesus at the Cross, Christ would receive him. Not because his evil was small, but because Jesus' sacrifice was personal and sufficient. Jesus did not die for humanity only in the abstract. He died for persons—one by one. Barabbas was one man. So was the gang leader. So am I. And because He died for me personally, everything He suffered was for me: the scourging, the carrying of the Cross, the nails, the thirst, the lifting up, the shame, the agony—all of it. Not partly for me. All of it. The question is whether I will receive that death in my place—or reject it.

That thought stunned me.

Because it meant the decisive question is not how dark the water is.

The question is whether the glass is poured out at all.

And then my mind turned to the girl.

If her glass has only a single drop — if compared to him she appears almost clear — it still cannot be poured into the pure container as it is. Suffering does not remove the stain. Being a victim does not erase separation. Good works, admiration, resilience — none of it restores purity.

She, too, must pour herself into Jesus.

There is a terrible danger in assuming otherwise. She could live a long life, do immense good, help many people, and quietly believe that what she endured has somehow balanced the scales. She could feel that she has already paid enough.

But in the light of holiness, the question remains the same.

Will she surrender?

Kneeling there, it became painfully clear that I had been thinking in comparisons. Darker. Lighter. Worse. Better.

God was not.

From His perspective, the question is singular.

Will they accept My Son's suffering and death on the cross for them personally...or not?

And then something deeper came over me.

Jesus did not go to the Cross wondering who would qualify.

He went knowing exactly who He was dying for...everyone...yet *every one*.

Including the gang leader.

Including the girl.

Including me.

And I understood, in a way I never had before, that I will spend eternity coming to grips with who He is — the kind of God who can absorb that much darkness without being diminished.

The logic of salvation made sense.

The love behind it didn't.

The Ache of God

As I sat there with that ache — for souls, for my wife's rest, for myself — something became painfully clear.

I had grown comfortable.

Not in obvious sin. Not in rebellion. But in a world that felt stable. I was someone there. People respected me. They invited me into their causes and their conversations. I could lead. I could speak. I could move easily between faith and everything else.

And yet, in the quiet of that church, it became undeniable: I was living at a distance.

Not apart from God. But not as near as He was asking. Not even close

The terror I felt for souls was real. The ache was real. But the most honest thing I could say in that moment was this — I was the one who needed to move.

He was not asking me for minor adjustment.

He was asking me to step out of the boat and onto the stormy water.

To leave what had been holding me up — reputation, rhythm, certain comforts, certain patterns — not because they were evil, but because they were not leading me further into Him. They took up space. They dulled urgency. They made faith manageable.

And this was no longer manageable.

I did not yet know what would have to go. I did not have a list. I only knew that staying as I was would be dishonest. I could not speak of holiness and mercy and the Cross while clinging to a life calibrated for safety and familiarity.

If I stayed in the boat, I would remain dry.

But I would not be close.

And I knew, sitting there, that if I was going to walk with Him into this ache — into this messy, costly, beautiful reality — I would have to leave what I knew could hold me and step toward what only He could sustain.

The distance was not on His side.

And I could not pretend otherwise.

What I did not yet fully see in that moment was that He had already begun taking things away.

The stepping out of the boat was not something I was about to start. It had been happening quietly for years.

The back pain. The retirement. The plans that never gained traction.

I had interpreted those as setbacks, confusion, even failure.

Only later did I begin to see them differently.

Chapter 5: Pain, Loss, And Falling Are Not Wasted

The Collapse of the Impressive Plan

When I stepped away from what had been a successful business career, I did not think I was stepping into obscurity.

I thought I was stepping into something larger.

I had plans — good ones. I would help churches organize more effectively so pastors could evangelize freely. I would build programs. I would teach. I would speak. I would create systems that would serve the Kingdom in visible, measurable ways.

The instincts were not selfish. They were sincere. They were rooted in a desire to serve God well.

And almost all of it failed.

Not dramatically. Not scandalously. It just... did not happen.

The doors did not open. Invitations did not multiply. Momentum never built. What I imagined would expand instead collapsed into something small and quiet.

At the time, I felt embarrassed. I was not used to failing. I felt confused.

Had I misheard God? Had I mistaken ambition for calling? Was this hesitation on His part — or weakness on mine?

Underneath all of that was something harder to admit: I was afraid that the strong, capable man I thought I was might not be as strong as I believed.

And yet, woven into the confusion, there was relief.

The image was gone.

There was no stage to stand on. No impressive trajectory to maintain. No story of rapid success to defend. It was just me — and a life that was shrinking in ways I had not planned.

It did not look like advancement.

It looked like reduction.

Restricted

Around the same time my plans were shrinking, my body was doing something similar.

My back began to fail in ways that were not dramatic but were relentless. It limited what I could carry, how long I could stand, how freely I could move. Some days I felt simply constrained. Other days I felt miserable.

At first, I treated it as an obstacle. Something to overcome. Something to fix so I could return to what I was building.

But the pain did not cooperate with my plans.

It slowed me down.

It canceled things.

It kept me home when I would have preferred to be elsewhere. It reduced my mobility in a way that made ambition inconvenient.

I would never have chosen it.

And yet, looking back, I cannot ignore what it did.

It created space.

Space where noise had been. Space where busyness had been. Space where constant motion had been.

Long drives to a chiropractor an hour and a half away — four times a week — became hours of listening. Books. Podcasts. Silence. Prayer. Conversations with God that I would not have scheduled on my own.

I did not experience the pain as a gift.

But I cannot deny that it was a restriction that stripped away distractions I had normalized.

What I thought was interruption may have been invitation.

The Man I Thought I Was

On those drives, I listened to books and talks that began to expose something I did not expect.

Pride.

I would never have said it was a major issue in my life. I wasn't chasing money. I wasn't manipulating people. I wasn't living in obvious sin. I thought of myself as someone who worked hard, carried responsibility well, and got things done.

But somewhere between mile twenty and mile ninety on those drives, it began to dawn on me that I liked being the strong one.

I liked being the one who could take a struggling organization, put it on my back, and carry it across the finish line.

I liked being needed.

I liked being capable.

And when my plans failed and my body limited me, something inside me felt exposed.

If I was not building something impressive... who was I?

If the evangelistic programs didn't launch... what did that say about me?

If I wasn't the strong one... what was left?

There were days I wondered if I had misheard God entirely. Maybe I had wrapped ambition in spiritual language. Maybe I had mistaken competence for calling. Maybe the collapse of my plans was simply proof that I wasn't who I thought I was.

And even when I resolved to simplify — to live more plainly, to give up small indulgences, to move toward something like asceticism — I was surprised by how hard it was.

It sounded noble in theory.

It was uncomfortable in practice.

Patterns fight back.

Comfort fights back.

The world you fit into does not easily adjust when you begin to change.

And I kept slipping.

Not into scandal.

Into familiarity.

Into the same habits that had always made life manageable.

The hardest part was not silence.

It was weakness.

Realizing that I was far more fragile than I wanted to admit.

Not Abandoned — Reduced

I never felt abandoned by God.

That battle had been fought much earlier in my life. Silence did not mean absence. Confusion did not mean God had stepped away. I knew He was there.

What I did not know was what He was doing.

I wanted clarity. I wanted traction. I wanted to know that the sacrifices were building toward something visible.

I wanted at least a sketch of the map.

Instead, I was being asked to take His hand and walk without one.

To die to the need to control the pace.

To let go of the identity of being the capable one.

To accept that weakness was not a temporary glitch but a classroom.

The drives continued. The plans stayed small. The pride resurfaced. The habits reappeared. I would resolve to simplify and then discover how entangled I still was.

It did not feel heroic.

It felt repetitive.

But slowly — so slowly I could not see it while it was happening — something in me was loosening.

The need to impress. The need to build something measurable. The need to be the strong one.

God was not building something impressive.

He was beginning to form a fisherman disciple.

A man who would learn to follow even without a map. A man who would learn to step out of the boat without knowing how long the water would hold.

I cannot pretend that work is finished. Most days I still see how much remains unfinished in me.

But I have begun to understand something I did not understand before.

Pain is not wasted. Failure is not wasted.

Falling is not proof that I misunderstood Him.

More often it is proof that I am still learning to remain.

And most days, remaining does not feel strong.

It feels small. It feels unfinished.

It feels like being a mess in the hands of Someone who is not.

Chapter 6: “I Am the Light of the World”

Being reduced to “a mess” left me with very few options.

I could not build anything impressive.

I could not outrun weakness.

I could not fix what I did not understand.

So I prayed.

Not efficiently. Not strategically.

Desperately.

I had never been good at sitting with God for long stretches. If I prayed for an hour—outside of Mass—it was rare. It felt like a miracle. But now the plans were gone. The noise was quieter. There was nowhere else to put my urgency.

So I went to my knees.

This was not entirely new. Not long before, I had walked into what I thought would be an empty church and found a man I knew already there—face down, completely surrendered before Jesus in the tabernacle.

That moment stayed with me. It changed how I approached prayer. I kept returning to that small, dark church, almost every morning.

What began as something I was learning became something I needed.

Prayer felt important but undefined. I knew it mattered. I felt drawn to it. But I did not know what it was actually doing.

And in that season, in that small, dark church, these words of Jesus pressed in on me in a way they never had before:

“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”
(John 8:12)

I had always heard that as poetic. Symbolic. Beautiful, but abstract.

But Jesus does not speak casually when He says, “I am.”

At the burning bush, God revealed His name: “I AM WHO AM.”

This is not the language of metaphor. It is identity.

Jesus *IS* the Light of the world.

Not a symbol.
Not a comparison.
Not an idea.

And one morning, something in me bloomed in my soul.

I was not in a small, dark church.

I was in something immense—filled with Life, filled with Him.

Jesus was there.

More real than the building.
More real than the pews.
More real than the darkness.

And that realization did not stay contained.

It was not a new thought.
It was reality breaking through.

Everything I had treated as solid began to feel secondary.
Everything I had centered my life around began to feel like a shadow.

The things I could see and touch—the things I had spent years building—did not disappear.

But they were no longer primary.

What I could not see...
what I had struggled to trust...
what I had kept at a distance...that was the substance.

I could not explain it.

But I knew it.

This was not just about light.

It was about everything.

I want to say “There is a world more real than this one. A world where what is unseen here is primary.”

But that is not the truth. There is only one true world and what we can see and touch is just a small part of that much larger world...the *real* world. Yes what we do and touch is important, very important, and effects all of the cosmos. But what we cannot see and cannot touch is immensely more important and has much great impact.

And the Light in this world is not something that shines.

It is Someone.

Jesus.

Not an energy. Not a force.

A Person... *The Person*

Alive. Present. Acting.

And from that point forward—through the struggle, the forgetting, the falling—

I no longer believe that what I see is the truest thing.

Because I had seen, however briefly, what is.

And there, with Him—not analyzing, not building, just remaining—something real was happening.

Not emotional. Not symbolic.

Real.

Prayer was not asking.

It was participation in Him. *In Jesus.*

And slowly, quietly, something became clear.

Jesus was not pointing me toward something called light.

He was revealing Himself.

He is the Light.

And He changes everything.

Because what happened there did not stay there.

Even now, I know I am not saying it well.

Words reach for it and fall enormously short.

What I experienced in that place—what began to open in me—was not something I could begin to explain then, and it is not something I can begin to explain now.

It was not just a new understanding. It was a breaking open of reality itself.

And even that does not say enough.

Every word spoken. Every act of love or selfishness. Every moment of attention or neglect—all of it moves toward Him...or away from Him.

Prayer was simply where I first saw it.

Not the Source — Not Irrelevant

Prayer opened the door.

But what unfolded did not stay confined there.

The more I remained with Him, the more I began to see that everything connected to Jesus increased His presence.

Scripture did not simply inform me.

He is the Word.

And when I received it, something in me became more aligned with Him.

The Eucharist was not symbolic nourishment.

It was Him—His Body, His Blood, His Soul, His Divinity—entering me.

Confession was not a ritual of relief.

It was restoration.

What had been weakened was strengthened again.

Even speaking His name—simply, casually—carried weight.

Not because of the words.

Because of Him.

And slowly, I began to sense something immense.

What remained after being with Him—whether in prayer, in Mass, in Scripture, in confession—was not a feeling.

It was Him.

Not mine.

His.

And that presence mattered.

Immensely.

I was not the source.

I could not create it.

I could not control it.

But I was not irrelevant.

I was carrying Him.

And that changes me...forever.

Because what I once thought of as small—private, contained, insignificant—was not.

Nothing stayed contained.

Not prayer.

Not neglect.

Not obedience.

Not compromise.

Everything either welcomed Him more fully...or resisted Him.

Not symbolically.

In reality.

And that meant every part of my life had weight.

Every word spoken.

Every act of love or selfishness.

Every moment of attention or neglect.

None of it was neutral.

Because none of it was separate from Him.

This did not inflate me.

It humbled me.

Because I am the source of nothing that matters.

But I am never absent from what does.

When Our Home Was Not As Bright As It Should Have Been

Light—Jesus—increased where I carried Him.

I sat in that for a while. Prayer, Scripture, the Mass, confession—everything intensified. I slowed down the Our Father, line by line. And when I reached “forgive us our trespasses,” I asked—no, I begged—the Holy Spirit:

Let me see my sins. Let me see what they actually do.

I did not know what I was asking.

Jesus answered.

“What happens when you don’t carry Me? What happens when your sins smother the Light?”

I was given a glimpse.

It was horrifying.

Not abstract. Not theological.

My home.

My marriage was young. My children were small—watching everything.

I had been given them to defend.

To guard.

To flood with Light—with Jesus.

And I did not.

I had prayed.

I had gone to Mass.

I had read Scripture.

There were many moments when Jesus was present—bright, real, unmistakable.

There were lamps of His Light, of Him.

But in too many moments, I blocked the Light. I blocked Jesus

I chose something else.

Not in defiance.

In drift.

I built my life around work.

For years, I woke up at three in the morning.

I would read Scripture.

Then plan my day—how to get more done, move faster, produce more.

And then I worked.

All day.

I told myself I was building something good.

A strong business. A responsible future. A good life for my family.

And from the outside, it looked right.

I was disciplined.

Productive.

Respected.

I came home.

I showed up.

I provided.

And when everyone went to bed—

I went back to work.

Again.

And again.

And again.

For years.

And in all of that—

I could not find time to pray.

Not an hour.

Not fifteen minutes.

I said God was first.

But I did not stop for Him.

And my children saw it.

And so did my wife.

I thought I was loving her by providing.

But what she experienced was different.

I had energy for work.

Focus for work.

Drive for work.

And far less of it for her.

I said faith mattered.

But she lived with a man who was consumed by something else.

And over time, something between us weakened. Nothing shattered or vanished, but weakened.

Not in a moment.

Over time.

That is what drift does.

I was not rejecting God.

I was building without Him.

I was depending on my effort.

My discipline.

My ability to produce.

And I thought I was doing well.

I thought I was faithful.

I was not.

I was far from Him.

And I did not know it.

I can see it now.

A bucket of sixty baseballs in my hand.

Four or five nights a week, I stood in the batting cage throwing pitch after pitch—one full bucket to both of my sons.

Hundreds of throws.

Ground balls after that. Again and again.

I trained their swings.

I shaped their discipline.

I showed up.

And nothing in me resisted it.

It all felt right.

Good. Responsible.

That is how drift works.

And I never took them to the Way of the Cross.

I never formed in them the sight of a suffering Savior.

I can still see it.

Swim meets on Sundays.
Cities miles away.
Schedules tight.

We always made the meet.
We sometimes missed the Mass.

Not as a rejection.
As a quiet adjustment.

Just enough to teach them what came first.

My priorities were not what I said.
They were what I scheduled.

And I did not feel like I was choosing against Jesus.

I was just moving past Him.

I thought I was giving them opportunities.

I was teaching them what mattered most.

And I did not see it then.

In our home, celebration almost always happened on the back patio—by the pool.
Warm nights. People gathered. Laughter. Music.

And I was always part of it.

When something was worth celebrating, I had a drink in my hand.
Not excess by the world's standards.
Just normal. Expected.

It was never a decision.

It was just what I did.

And my children saw it.

They saw what I reached for.
What I returned to.
What marked a good night.

And I never asked what it was teaching them.

Or what it was doing to the place Jesus was meant to have there.

Prayer felt like an interruption.

Jesus felt secondary.

And it was devastating.

My home was not dark.

It was dim.

And dimness hides damage.

It does not need to be attacked.

It simply exists...until you are forced to see it.

I was providing. Organizing. Leading.

But I was not guarding what mattered most.

The horror was not that I had committed some spectacular sin.

It was that I had tolerated partial Light.

Partial Jesus.

And called it enough.

Because drift does not demand darkness.

It only asks you to accept less Light.

My children grew up inside what I allowed. They are all wonderful people, but I do not pretend to explain the full story of their hearts—only God knows that—but I cannot deny this: I had influence over the presence of Jesus in our home. And I did not choose fullness.

Not even close.

That realization did not correct me.

It broke me.

Because I could see it now.

Not rebellion.

Drift.

Because once you see that Jesus' Light increases where He is carried—and dims where He is resisted—you lose the right to call your compromises private.

They are not.

And it did not stop at my home.

The scenes widened.

Friends. Work. Conversations. Rooms I walked into and left.

Nothing I did was contained.

Every prayer I refused to pray left a void.

Every time I chose distraction over Him, I carried less Light.

Every careless word. Every indulgence I defended. Every resentment I held.

It did not just affect “atmosphere.”

It affected whether Jesus was present...or resisted.

Not symbolically.

Really.

And the opposite was just as real.

Every confession restored what I had damaged.

Every Eucharist was not comfort—it was Christ entering me.

Every prayer for another person was not sentiment—it was bringing Jesus into a place I could not see.

This was not about mood.

Not about influence.

This was participation in the presence of Jesus—the only Light that remains when everything else is gone.

And that participation carries weight.

Not because I am powerful.

But because He is.

His Light is not an idea.

Not an energy.

A Person.

Jesus.

And whether I welcomed Him or avoided Him was not private.

Souls were being formed in His Light—or in His absence.

Chapter 7 — The Weight of Eternity

I had lived for years with the words of Jesus echoing in me:

“Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.” (Matthew 7:13–14)

He did not soften that.

Many.

Few.

Jesus said it plainly: most people are on the wide road that leads to destruction.

Not accidentally.

By choice.

That thought did not stay theoretical.

It followed me into real places.

A family gathering.

A room full of people I know.

Faces I love.

Voices I recognize.

And standing there, looking around the room, I could not escape it—most of the people I was looking at were on the wrong road.

And I do not know which ones.

I could not sort it out.

I could not label anyone.

I could not see what only God sees.

And I am not exempt from that warning.

But I could not un-hear Him.

Many.

Few.

And suddenly the room felt different.

Not because the people changed.

Because what was at stake had.

Eternity.

Not long.
Unending.

We try to explain it.
We can't.

A child forced to kill her father.
A moment so horrific you would do anything to escape it.

Now remove the escape.

Never leaving that moment.

Ever.

Or Auschwitz.

A place where suffering stripped people of everything—until even purpose was gone.

Now remove death.

No end.
No release.
No meaning returning.

And we are still light years from understanding it.

Because whatever hell is, Jesus warned about it more than anyone else.

Not as a metaphor.

As reality.

He did not speak as if this were symbolic.

He warned as if it were real.

This is not something to think about later.

This does not end.

For me. For my wife. For my children.

What does that mean for us?

For the people I love.

For the people I avoid.

For the people I pass every day without a second thought.

For me.

I could not resolve it.

I could not make it comfortable.

I could not escape it.

I only knew this:

He said it.

And I have not been living like it matters.

Indifference is not harmless.

Comfort has consequences.

These are not ideas.

These are people.

And they will exist forever.

And they are not being forced onto that road.

They are choosing it.

And so am I—unless I change.

Chapter 8: No Neutral Ground

I used to believe there was a middle space.

Not rebellion.

Not devotion.

Just... decent.

Faithful enough.

Responsible enough.

Comfortable.

I thought that was neutral.

I was wrong.

I was alone in a church.

Not really alone.

I had been asking God to show me my sins—
not just what they were, but what they did.

And the question came:

What is really happening when you choose against Me?

Not in theory.

In reality.

I could see it clearly.

Morning after morning.

I woke early.

I opened Scripture.

And then I turned to work.

Not to prayer.

Not to Him.

I knew.

There was a pull.

A quiet resistance.

A moment where I could stop.

Turn.

Be with Him.

And I didn't.

I moved past Him.

Not in defiance.

In drift.

It felt responsible.

Disciplined.

Productive.

Good.

That is what made it so dangerous.

Because I was not rejecting God.

I was choosing something else—over Him.

And I began to see it.

Not with my eyes.

But with something deeper.

I was standing at the door of my life—

and I was holding it open.

Not passively.

Not accidentally.

I opened it.

And something entered that did not belong there.

Not dramatic.

Not loud.

But real.

And it did not stop with that moment.

Every time I chose productivity over prayer—

I opened it again.

Every time I chased success, recognition, being known—

I opened it again.

Even when I did good things—

I wanted them seen.

Recorded.

Shared.

Rewarded.

And I called it good.

But something else was being formed.

Not just in me. In my home. In the atmosphere my children breathed every day.

I thought I was a good man.

I thought I was faithful.

I thought I was leading.

I was not neutral.

I was choosing.

Not always in defiance.

But in drift.

And drift is not harmless.

It moves.

It leads.

It cooperates.

I thought I was standing still.

I was not.

I was moving.

And it was not toward Him.

I thought I was neutral.

I was fighting for both sides.

And that is not neutrality.

There is no middle ground. There is no safe space between.

There is a wide road leading to death and there is a narrow road leading to life.

There is no third road. There are only two roads.

And I was already on one of them.

Chapter 9: It Is Not Flesh and Blood

Without a third road, I could not escape it.

Not the cost to me.

The cost to them.

The girl with the machete.

The father.

The boy.

The mother.

The story came back without warning.

Not as an idea.

As reality.

That level of cruelty does something to you.

It strips away explanation.

I could not look at it and say,
"This is just human weakness."

I could not call it random.

That outcome was not accidental.

It was desired.

The destruction.

The fear.

The tearing apart of innocence.

Someone wanted it.

And something in me stopped resisting that truth.

I saw it.

Not with my eyes.

With the same knowing I had felt in prayer. He was showing me.

This was not just happening.

It was being willed.

This was not a force. This was not just “darkness.”

I could no longer avoid it. There was someone behind it.

And I could not keep it at a distance anymore.

Because I had seen the same pattern in my own life.

Not in violence.

But in direction.

I had felt that same pull.

Quieter.

Cleaner.

Easier to justify.

I had stepped away from my business.

Reduced my hours.

I started going to Mass almost daily.

It looked like I was finally moving toward God.

And I was.

But not completely.

At the same time, I threw myself into a new ministry.

Plans.

Projects.

Ideas.

Seminars.

A website.

Work that felt important.

Work that felt like it mattered.

Work that felt... good.

And again, I did not pray.

Not really.

Not consistently.

Not with Him at the center.

I stayed busy.

And I told myself it was for Him.

But it wasn't.

It was for me.

For recognition.

For impact.

To be seen.

To matter.

And I could see it clearly now.

The direction had not changed.

Only the form.

I had left one thing behind—

and picked up another.

And it was leading me the same way.

Away from Him.

And I was choosing it.

Not by force.

By redirection.

By pride.

By keeping me active, engaged, and distracted—even in things that looked good.

This was not accidental.

It was not just my personality.

It was not just habit.

That outcome was not accidental. It was desired.

By someone.

The same intent I saw in that story.

Not the same expression—but the same direction.

Away from God.

And I could not pretend anymore that nothing stood behind that.

I stopped avoiding it. I knew his name.

Satan.

Not equal to God. Not sovereign. But real.

And opposed.

He hates God.
And everything God loves.

He hates me.
He hates my wife.
He hates my children.

Not abstractly. Not generally.

Personally.

Not always violently.

Often through what looks good.

That hatred was not contained in that story.

It turned toward my life.

Toward my home.

And I could see it— not only in what I had suffered...but in the choices I had made and the direction I had chosen.

This is how it happens.

Chapter 10: The Enemy's Tool

Scripture does not hide the reality of the conflict.

God calls His people into the Light. Satan works in darkness.

Jesus Himself warned that every soul eventually walks one of two roads:

“Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy, that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few.” — Matthew 7:13–14

That wide road seldom looks rebellious. More often, it looks ordinary.

Busy lives. Comfortable routines. Good intentions delayed until tomorrow.

You mean to pray.

You mean to change.

You mean to take it seriously.

But not today.

After what I saw, I thought something dramatic would change.

I thought I would walk differently the very next day.

Stronger. Clearer. More disciplined.

But from the outside, almost nothing looked different.

And inside—I failed almost immediately.

I had decided to fast. To pray. To take this seriously.

That very night, I sat down and snacked anyway.

It was small.

Almost laughable.

And it exposed something I could not ignore:

I was not as strong as I thought I was.

The enemy I had just named...

I could not fight him on my own.

The enemy rarely needs open rejection of God.

Open rebellion exposes him.

Drift hides him.

What he prefers is much quieter.

Distraction. Comfort. Delay.

Not a sudden fall—

a slow drifting of the soul away from the Light.

Satan is content to leave many people drifting.

Why interrupt someone already moving the wrong way?

But the moment a soul begins turning toward the Light, the battle changes. Drift may have been enough before—but it will not remain his only weapon.

And drift has a destination.

Not inconvenience. Not simply a weaker faith.

Drift carries a soul down the wide road that ends in eternal separation from God.

Hell is real. The loss is real. And the enemy works constantly to lead souls there.

The horror in the story that opened this book made evil visible. The cruelty was so brutal it could not be ignored.

But that is not how the enemy usually works.

The same hatred.

The same enemy.

But a different method.

Most of the time, the war remains hidden.

People continue building their lives, raising their children, pursuing success and happiness—never realizing that drift is quietly carrying them farther and farther from the Light...from Jesus.

Nothing in the day announces it.

It feels like normal life.

Progress. Stability. Responsibility.

And all the while, a soul is being led away from God.

Not by force.

By choice.

By small decisions made daily—
often without urgency,
often without resistance.

I began to see it everywhere.

Not just in obvious failure—
but in good things that replaced God.

Even in work that looked like it was for Him.

I had been writing. Planning. Building.

But I stopped.

Not because it was wrong—
but because I could see something in me.

Pride.
Control.
The need to be seen.

I was not ready to lead anyone.

I needed to let God deal with me first.

Satan is the enemy. Hell is his goal. And drift is one of his favorite tools.

And to follow Jesus,
you must stop drifting.

Chapter 11: We Desperately Need the Light

The battle between light and darkness is not poetic language.

It is real.

And the One who stands against us does not wait for dramatic moments.

He works in the shadows of what we allow.

Jesus said: “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” — John 8:12

The Light is not something He gives.

The Light is Him.

And without Him, we are not standing in safety.

We are standing exposed...in the shadows.

Satan hates God.

He hates what God loves.

He hates me.
He hates my wife.
He hates my children.

Not abstractly. Not generally.

Personally.

And he does not need to break down a door.

He works in what is left unguarded.

Darkness is not empty.

It is occupied.

It is where the enemy works without being seen.

Where he watches.

Where he waits.

Where he looks for what is unguarded.

He does not only want influence.

He wants souls.

And most of the time, it does not look dangerous.

Life continues.

Careers advance.

Homes are built.

Children grow.

Nothing looks wrong.

But something is missing.

And that absence can alter the eternity of souls.

I had already seen this in my own life. There were patterns in my home—especially around celebration, rest, and alcohol—that felt normal to me at the time. I am not saying no one should ever drink. But I knew God was asking something different of me, and I kept resisting Him. Alcohol had too much place in my life. I did not question that honestly enough. And it dulled something in me. It left me less attentive, less guarded, less alive to God. I was not leading anyone straight into darkness. But I was not leading them clearly toward Jesus either. And that matters.

The Light matters.

Because in the shadows, we are not just struggling.

We are exposed.

We are not dealing with a distant threat.

We are living in the presence of an enemy who hates us.

Who watches for weakness.

Who looks for openings.

Who is willing to take what we fail to guard.

And we cannot protect what we love on our own.

Not against him.

Christ is not an addition to life.

He is the only Light that makes anything visible.

The Light that reveals truth.

The Light that exposes what harms us.

The Light that drives out what has no right to remain.

Without Him, we are not seeing clearly.

We are not choosing clearly.

We are not protecting what has been entrusted to us.

And we do not have the strength to do that on our own.

The closer we remain to Him, the more His presence fills our lives.

And where He is present, darkness cannot remain.

Satan cannot remain.

Jesus did not intend His Light to stay hidden.

“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden...” — Matthew 5:14–16

His Light is meant to be lived.

Because without Him, we are not just walking in difficulty.

We are walking with evil.

And what we love is not beyond the reach of the enemy.

Chapter 12: Carry and Guard the Light

People we love are not beyond the reach of the enemy.

Ordinary life is not ordinary.

Every day is a field of small decisions.

And those decisions matter more than we can comprehend.

We are not living in neutral territory.

We are living in the middle of a spiritual battlefield.

Every word, every action, every choice either carries Jesus into the moment—or creates a shadow Satan can work from.

A disciple who understands this begins to ask a simple question throughout the day:

Is this bringing Jesus here—or Satan?

The answer appears in ordinary moments.

Patience with a family member.

Kindness toward a stranger.

Choosing truth instead of gossip.

Jesus works through these things.

But darkness spreads just as easily.

A careless word.

A resentful heart.

A moment of cruelty or gossip.

When we do those things, we are not simply having a bad moment.

We are extinguishing lamps of Jesus' Light.

Sometimes in our own hearts.

Sometimes in the hearts of others.

I often think about this when I pray for my wife.

Each day I ask God to bless her, to protect her, to guide her. And I know that every prayer lights a small lamp of Christ's Light in her life—perhaps in her heart, perhaps at her workplace, perhaps in the car as she travels.

But God recently reminded me of something I did.

While talking with friends, I made a careless joke about my wife that was meant to be lighthearted but ended up diminishing her instead of honoring her. In that moment I realized how easily one careless word, a small sin, can extinguish lamps my prayers had lit.

And once you begin to see life this way, you cannot easily stop.

You begin to look back over your own day—your own words, your own silences, your own small choices—and wonder: “How many lamps have I quietly lit... and how many have I unintentionally extinguished?”

Most of these choices do not feel dramatic.

That is why they are dangerous.

They pass unnoticed while still shaping direction and eternity.

Because in a world where Jesus and Satan are at war, no lamp goes out without consequence.

Sometimes we see the result.

Often we do not.

Every moment of holiness strengthens the presence of Jesus and helps move people toward the narrow road to Life.

Every careless shadow makes things darker and gives Satan more room to guide people toward the wide road to death.

This rarely happens in dramatic gestures.

It happens in the small choices that move the world around us.

That is why vigilance matters.

The Light Christ places within us must be carried.

And guarded.

And when it is carried faithfully, people notice.

Not because the Christian becomes perfect.

But because something about that life is different.

Patience becomes visible.

Forgiveness becomes natural.

Hope replaces bitterness.

And joy appears.

Joy is one of the clearest signs that a soul belongs to Christ. A person who knows he is loved by the God of the universe cannot remain bitter, skeptical or gloomy.

Joy does not mean life is easy.

It means Jesus is stronger than the darkness—and we let Him shine through us.

Sometimes carrying Jesus into the world simply means speaking about Him as naturally as we speak about the people we love.

We mention friends in conversation without thinking twice.

If Christ truly lives at the center of our lives, His name should appear just as naturally.

Not as a speech.

Not as an argument.

But as the quiet reality of our lives.

In this way, the Light spreads.

Through conversations.

Through kindness.

Through courage.

And through countless small moments when someone chooses Jesus instead of drift.

Living this way is not easy.

It is training.

It is vigilance.

It is learning to stay close to Jesus because the world you wake up into each morning is not neutral.

You are not walking into an ordinary day.

You are walking into a world where the people you love are under attack.

That is why every day must begin by returning to Jesus.

Because if you do not remain with Him, you will not stand.

And if you do not stand, you will not be able to protect what has been entrusted to you.

Chapter 13: This Is War

Once you begin living this way, the battle becomes unmistakably real.

The moment a soul begins carrying the Light of Christ into the world, darkness responds.

Satan does not waste effort attacking those who are simply drifting down the wide road.

But when someone begins advancing the kingdom of God—when someone begins bringing Jesus into homes, conversations, and hearts—that person becomes a target.

This is not occasional.

It is part of the war.

This is not a metaphor.

This is not strong language to make a point.

This is war.

Not visible in the way human wars are.

Not announced with sirens or explosions.

But no less real.

And no less costly.

The enemy knows where to strike.

Sometimes through discouragement.

Sometimes through temptation.

Sometimes through suffering that seems to come from nowhere.

Often through the people or circumstances closest to your heart.

This is not meant to frighten you.

It is meant to wake you up.

You do not enter this war.

You discover you were already in it.

And once you begin to see it clearly, something else becomes clear:

Christ has already won the decisive victory.

Through His cross and resurrection, the power of darkness was broken.

The enemy still fights—but he fights like a defeated enemy.

Ferocious at times.

Cunning.

But not victorious.

Satan knows he has lost. And a defeated enemy can still be vicious.

Not sovereign.
Not equal.
Not ultimate.

But vicious.

His hatred intensifies because his future is sealed.

And God has a way of turning the enemy's attacks against him.

The cross itself proves this.

What Satan intended as the ultimate symbol of humiliation and defeat became the greatest symbol of hope the world has ever known.

God turned the instrument of death into the instrument of victory.

He still works this way.

When we persevere through suffering with faith, God often turns what was meant to harm us into something that strengthens us—and blesses others.

Sometimes we see it quickly.

Often we do not see it for a long time.

But learning to pray in the middle of the battle changes everything.

Instead of despairing, a Christian can say: Lord, I know You will turn even this into a blessing. Give me the strength to persevere until I see it.

That kind of faith confuses the enemy.

And it changes the person who lives it.

Because when others see someone endure hardship with quiet courage, joy, and hope, the Light grows brighter.

Not dimmer.

This is the quiet discipline of the Christian life.

Not dramatic.
Not perfect.
But vigilant.
Steady.
Faithful.

Because every day we are carrying something precious into a world that desperately needs it.

Jesus. The Light.

This is not about becoming impressive.

This is about knowing where you stand.

I was no longer trying to build something impressive.

No longer trying to be the strong one.

No longer trying to be seen as spiritual.

I was not the leader.

I was not the strategist.

I was not the center.

I was a warrior with Jesus.

Part of something older, larger, stronger than me.

A soldier does not have to invent the mission.

He follows it.

He does not have to secure the victory.

He simply has to do his part.

And even when he falls—he rises and returns.

Because this is where he belongs.

Not in comfort.

Not in drift.

Not in the illusion of neutral ground.

But as a warrior fighting with a warrior King, taking back what Satan had stolen.

In the Light.

Carrying it.

Guarding it.

In the middle of a world at war with eternal consequence for souls we love.

Your Mission

Do not forget the girl with the machete.

Do not forget the father.

The mother.

The boy.

Do not forget what that story did to you when you first heard it.

That horror was not a strange exception from a distant world.
It showed you what kind of world this is.

A world where evil is real.
Where Satan hates what God loves.
Where souls are at stake.
Where drift is not harmless.
Where the people you love are not standing on neutral ground.

But now you know something more than you knew at the beginning.

Jesus Christ is the Light.

He is not absent.
He is not weak.
He is not losing.

And you are not called merely to grieve the darkness.

You are called to step into the Light, be formed by Him, and carry Him into a world that desperately needs rescue.

So do not close this book and go back to sleep.
Do not admire these words and call that obedience.

Pray.
Return.
Confess.
Forgive.
Stand.
Carry Jesus into your home, your speech, your habits, your suffering, your friendships, and your work.

The world at the end of this book is the same world as at the beginning.

Now live in it differently.

Begin now.

Your Next Step

If this book has helped wake you up, do not stop at wakefulness.

Seeing the war is not the same as learning to stand.
Feeling conviction is not the same as forming new habits.
Good intentions are not enough.

That is why I wrote the companion Field Manual.

It is simple, practical, and meant to help you begin. It will help you return to prayer, Scripture, confession, forgiveness, intercession, and the daily choices that either carry the Light or dim it.

Read it slowly.

Use it honestly.

Do not aim at impressiveness.

Aim at faithfulness.

Begin with one step, then take the next.