

IDENTITY WARS

The Road to Freedom

By Adrian Ebens

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adrian@maranathamedia.com

www.familykingdom.org

This book is dedicated to

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

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

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

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Section 1 – The Two Kingdoms

1. *The Duracell Tree*

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

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

The air was filled with a sense of desperation. My mind was grasping for tokens that would stabilise my state of mind: academic, athletic, articulate were some of the tokens I grasped for but they now seemed powerless to help me. A sickening cloud descended on me and started to squeeze out my sense of ambition. It kicked open the prized places of the heart and stole its treasure and then it made for the most sacred chamber of all – hope.

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

* * *

Depression. Depression is the single greatest curse afflicting our society today. In her opening address, the World Health Organisation's Director General Dr Gro Harlem stated: “...initial estimates suggest that about 450 million people alive today suffer from mental or neurological disorders.... Major depression is now the leading cause of disability globally.”¹

Try to grasp the enormity of this problem in the following statistics from 1998/99:

- 1 million suicides every year
- 10 to 20 million attempts every year or up to 38 attempts every minute
- Suicide in the US for males between the ages of 35-49 is the number three cause of death
- Australia's youth suicide rate is the highest in the world.²

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

In His book “The Mind Game” Phillip Day gives this very revealing statement

¹ The Mind Game – Phillip Day

² ibid

“In times gone by, caring family members gathered around and gave the depressed relative the assurance and attention to talk things through. ... Today, with the fracturing of the family unit, the denigration of religion, and the separation of many families from each other with the hectic pace of 21st century life, psychoanalysis has simply taken over the task of counselling that used to be carried out by caring relatives or the neighbourhood minister. I strongly believe that this has had a deleterious effect on our society”³

Phillip Day lists three factors: (1) The fracturing of the family unit; (2) The denigration of religion; (3) The separation of many families from each other with the hectic pace of 21st century life. The pivotal factor is the fracturing of the family unit. David Van Biema commenting on this subject said the following:

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

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

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

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

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

³ Ibid

⁴ David Van Biema, “Learning to live with a past that failed,” *People*, May 29, 1989, p 79.

⁵ Jim Conway, “Adult Children of legal or emotional divorce,” (Monarch Publications, 1990) p. 53.

⁶ Genesis 3:1

⁷ Genesis 3:2,3

challenge of Satan, left her unprepared for his following jaw dropping statement, “You will not surely die.”⁸

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

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

These few verses can be like passing through a small country town, blink and you’ll miss them. The concept that Satan introduced to Eve contained the seed of the curse that now plagues all of the children of Adam – the struggle for significance. A concept that sounds so liberating provides the very substance of the chains that enslave the human soul in misery and darkness. Sound like a bit of a stretch? Stay with me as we unpack this concept “*You shall not surely die*” and look at its fruit and its role in reaping the nagging question “Does anyone care about me” and “Am I worth being loved?”

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

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

⁸ Genesis 3:4

⁹ Genesis 3:5

the instantaneous effect of preventing you from ever returning to that blissful state. We will talk more about this later on. But first, Let's go back to that fateful tree.

Notice Satan's suggestion that when they ate this fruit, somehow their eyes would be opened to a higher state of existence. The inference here is not only that you have power in yourself, but that the material universe contains powerful objects, that once you possess, can make you even more powerful. Welcome to the material world. In Genesis 3:4,5 Satan is in full scale evangelistic mode to win converts to his new utopian kingdom. He offered a kingdom that promised power and satisfaction to all that would embrace it. This kingdom is based on two core principles:

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

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

It is important to remember that when Adam and Eve ate the fruit of the tree, there was no inherent poison in it that made them afraid, sinful and rebellious. The Bible tells us that the fruit was good for food.¹⁰ The poison was the words that Satan spoke to Eve. The poison is the principles of his kingdom. Some people raise the question, why do I have to suffer when Adam and Eve ate the fruit, I didn't eat from that tree? The truth is that every time we act independently of God, we eat of that tree in exactly the same way that Adam and Eve did because we have swallowed the poison of Satan's kingdom. In fact, we will learn that we actually eat from this tree every day and we are suffering horrible indigestion as a result.

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

¹⁰ Genesis 3:6

2. The Fountain of Life

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

At that moment I wished I could have jumped through that phone and just held onto my Dad, but he was 12 hours away by road and I would have to wait till morning to catch a plane. When I hung up the phone, my mind was spinning – shock, fear and numbness all hit me at once. Right then I remembered Jesus and I just sunk to my knees and I cried out “Oh Jesus – please don’t let her die.” I opened my Bible and I just prayed and prayed until a sense of calm came over me and I felt almost peaceful. My mind then wandered to the mundane things of life until it would hit me again, fear, helplessness and shock. Repeatedly I went to my knees and just prayed and held onto Jesus.

Mum had been travelling on her way to teach a music lesson. She was on a double lane highway with a 10 meter garden strip between the two roads. She was just passing another car as she went over a crest and that is all she remembers. A car coming the other way had lost control and crossed the 10 meter gap between the two roads and hit my Mum head on. The force of the impact pushed the engine of Mum’s car through the firewall, at the same time thrusting the steering wheel straight into her face. For some unknown reason, at that moment the seat broke, and I am so thankful it did otherwise she would have died instantly. When they got her to hospital, she had broken arms, legs and the whole left side of her face had disintegrated.

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

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

thankful for the life giving power of Jesus. Today, Mum is walking and sometimes when she plays the piano, I feel a deep sense of thanks to Jesus for saving my mother from certain death.

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

For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. Colossians 1:16,17
NIV

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

“The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth ... From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live.²⁷ God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us.²⁸ ‘For in him we live and move and have our being.’ As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring.’ Acts 17:24-28 NIV

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

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

If we live *in Him* then simple logic tells us we can't live without Him. Putting it another way, Jesus said “...apart from me you can do nothing.”¹² Please understand that this means we can't do anything physically, mentally or spiritually without Him.¹³ We are totally and utterly dependent on Jesus for everything, just like a little baby depends on its parents.

Let me illustrate this point because its implications are far reaching. Consider the amazing organ of the heart. It works as a pump to circulate blood around our bodies, without a break, for decades. What is amazing about the heart is that the pulsing of the heart does not appear to be aided by anything outside of itself. The muscle of the heart can contract and relax without any direct stimulus from the nervous system. It has

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

¹² John 15:5

¹³ In the book Education, Ellen White States the following “As through Christ every human being has life, so also through Him every soul receives some ray of divine light. Not only intellectual but spiritual power, a perception of right, a desire for goodness, exists in every heart.” Education Page 29.

what is called an intrinsic regulating system. As an anatomy textbook puts it “The conduction system is composed of specialized muscle tissue that generates and distributes the electrical impulses which stimulate the cardiac muscle fibers to contract.”¹⁴ These muscle fibers certainly are specialized because they generate electrical impulses that do not come from the nervous system. It is totally amazing that nowhere in the anatomy textbook does it address the question of how do these heart muscles fibers produce this electrical charge to contract the heart. It is called specialized and intrinsic, but how does it do it, where does this energy come from?

Here is where the road divides. The Bible tells us that this energy comes directly from God, “In Him we live” Acts 17:28. But Satan tells us that it is inherent within us, it is simply part of the biological process that we possess as our own, “you will not surely die” Genesis 3:5. This is such a fundamental issue. It is either one or the other. There are many Christians who try to take a middle road on this issue and say “Yes, God made everything, but it is like a wind up clock. He started it and let it run.” As if somehow God made the Duracell batteries and placed them inside of us. The Bible does not teach this idea. We are intimately connected to him and totally dependent on Him every millisecond of every second of every minute of every hour of every day.¹⁵ God is actively, knowingly, lovingly supplying us the electrical charge that keeps our hearts beating. There is something about this reality that can make us as human beings really uncomfortable, but we will address that later. The fact is that we need to get this issue clear right now. Either we believe “In Him we live and move and have our being” or we believe “we shall not surely die.” There is no middle ground.

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

“My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge...” Colossians 2:2,3

Then the LORD said to Moses, “See, I have chosen Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts—to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze, to cut and set stones, to work in wood, and to engage in all kinds of craftsmanship. Exodus 31:1-5

The Bible reveals God as the source of all wisdom and knowledge. Colossians 2:2,3 challenges the concept that we as human beings can originate wisdom and knowledge. All wisdom and all knowledge come from God. An example of this is shown in

¹⁴ Gerard Tortora and Nicholas Anagnostakos, “Principles of Anatomy and Physiology”, (Harper and Row Publishers, New York, 1984) p 463.

¹⁵ “The creation belongs to God. The Lord could, by neglecting man, stop his breath at once. All that he is and all that he has pertains to God. The entire world is God's. Man's houses, his personal acquirements, whatever is valuable or brilliant, is God's own endowment. It is all His gift to be returned back to God in helping to cultivate the heart of man.” Faith and Works Page 22

Exodus 31:1-5. Here we see God giving a man wisdom and skill in craftsmanship. It is interesting that we often refer to people who show great ability and talent as “gifted”. Indeed they are, gifted by God. Let’s transport ourselves into the middle of a concert. The audience is held spell bound as a talented young lady runs her fingers up and down the Grand piano that stands impressively on the stage. She makes the piano literally sing – the touch of the master’s hand. She then builds to the climax, and we sense the end has come. We will her to continue – but the song ends and the crowd erupts into applause, awed by such elegance and grace, combined with passion and intensity. The young lady bows and inhales the aroma of praise and then walks from the stage.

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

Here lies the curse of the Duracell tree. Imagine this tree perched on the edge of a cliff. The sense of freedom we experience when we succeed, believing that we have originated that success compares to the exhilaration of the free fall bungy¹⁶ jump off the cliff with the bungy rope tied to the base of the tree. But when failure comes, the bungy rope converts into a sling shot and rams us back into the launch point at breath taking velocity. The further we dive into the lie of the power within, the higher the velocity of impact when failure arrives. There is no escaping the curse of the Duracell tree, once you have tasted its fruit, that rope is firmly attached to your leg and the rest is inevitable. It is no accident that “depression is the leading cause of disability globally”¹⁷. The Duracell tree stands at the edge of a great cliff face. A rope is securely bound to each of our legs and the further we launch into its lie over the cliff face, the harder we are propelled back into the base of that tree when failure arrives. How many hits have you received already? How many more can you take? It’s worth thinking about.

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

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

¹⁶ A bungy is a long elastic rope that thrill seekers use to jump off bridges and other high places. The bungy rope stretches to within a few meters of the ground and then propels the person upwards as the rope contracts.

¹⁷ The Mind Game – Phillip Day

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

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

I have presented this idea many times when preaching or speaking at seminars and it is interesting to see the audience respond. Some people's faces look as if I have just attacked the very foundation of the human race. For all the millions of love songs that have ever been sung and the billions of promises at the marriage altar that "I love you and will love you forever" not one of those promises can ever be kept without God pouring His love into our receptive souls. Let's place the attribute of love on the end of the bungee rope. Why do so many people "fall out" of love? A person who believes that love is originated in our own souls can often wake up in the morning and not "feel" in love with their partner. He/She begins to doubt whether this person is right for them anymore and often begin to look for someone else to bring that feeling back. The Duracell credit card has reached its limit and now it time to pay up.

What about the sincere man who really meant their vows to love his wife forever and then suddenly he find himself attracted to another woman. He may not want to feel this way but he "can't help it", love is confused with lust, and there is doubt as to one's integrity. He then begins to withdraw from his partner because the sense of guilt from acting this way prevents him from believing he could still be lovable. He thought he could maintain the flow of love from his hearts but now the Bungee rope propels him into the base of the Duracell tree from where he launched and his marriage is over. Is it any wonder that finding joy in marriage is so elusive for most people?

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

3. Near to the Heart of God

We were racing down the freeway at a great rate of knots. Lorelle's contractions had developed into a pretty regular pattern. We didn't want to be caught out, so we bolted for the hospital. It was all very new and exciting; soon we would have our first child. We glided up to the labour ward, the nurse took one look at us and said, "You're too happy, you need to go for a walk". Well that put a hole in our drum. 45 minutes later we came back and now Lorelle wasn't smiling any more. Another 30 minutes and we landed right in the middle of labour. Yep, there is no other word to describe it, labour, hard labour. We tried to remember all the techniques from the prenatal classes but it was hard to stay focused. Those contractions hit like a freight train coming head on. As soon as you had dealt with one the next one was straight on top of you. Finally after 11 hours, we received our first born son, Michael.

There is a really interesting photo of Lorelle and I, just after she gave birth. It's absolutely amazing. She is sitting there just beaming as though it was all in a days work and I'm swaying in the breeze looking like I was about to collapse. I developed a profound new respect for womanhood that day. I must tell you ladies, that watching your wife give birth is really hard work. When you finish laughing, I'll finish my point ☺. The emotional stress of watching the one you love in so much pain is incredible. For us men, we usually have a solution to a problem, but I had no answers this time and it hurt. I just prayed "God, I know there is a reason for all this pain but right now I can't see it." Man, I was glad when it was over.

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

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

real sense I felt like I was being held in His arms. I could not have been happier. I realised my Father in heaven loves me so much that He doesn't want anything to come between us and it hurts Him to think that we could be separated and He is doing everything He can to stop that from ever happening.

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

Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows. Luke 12:6,7

Jesus is explaining the principles of His kingdom. In these verses we have a formula for what makes people significant in that kingdom. What makes them count, what makes them worth something, what makes them valuable? If these issues are not important to you, then this text won't mean much, but I have not found anyone yet who is not wrestling with them.

Jesus states the value of two sparrows in human terms. The word penny there is actually *assarius*. One *assarius* was equal to one day's pay for an average person. In two days you could buy 5 sparrows. Thus in an earthly sense these sparrows have little value. Jesus then makes a contrast and says "Yet not one of them is forgotten by God." The contrast here is that because God remembers the sparrows they are very valuable in God's Kingdom. Jesus extends this principle by comparing how much God thinks about us as compared to sparrows. "Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered." If that is not 'up front close and personal' then what is? Do you know anyone who wants to know so much about you that they even monitor the number of hairs on your head? Then comes the punch line. "Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows." Can you see how worth and significance is gained in God's kingdom. It comes from simply realizing that God lovingly thinks about us continually. We are definitely on His mind: He is giving us life, making our hearts beat, and actively pouring His love into our lives so that we can enjoy life and He imparts to us rich gifts, talents and abilities for our satisfaction, enjoyment and service for others. Here is the secret of God's kingdom, the secret of significance. It is the key that unlocks the enslaving kingdom of worthlessness and depression. Do you have the courage to believe it?

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

Many, O LORD my God, are the wonders you have done. The things you planned for us no one can recount to you; were I to speak and tell of them, they would be too many to declare. Psalms 40:5

If our value is determined by the loving thoughts that God has towards us, then this text tells us that we are priceless, because it says His plans and thoughts for us are

greater than can be declared or numbered. How does it feel to be priceless? But it can only be as good as your belief in the truth that God loves us so much regardless of how good or bad we are. This is wonderful news and I am so thankful for it. So whenever you are tempted to doubt your worth, just look at the sparrows and believe!

4. The Family Kingdom

It is warm humid day. A festive spirit pervades the room. A delicious aroma wafts out of the kitchen promising the taste buds a real treat. Laughter rings out as stories are told of times past. The Christmas tree stands proudly in the corner beckoning household members to unwrap the treasures that lie at its feet. Children are out the back cooling off with the hose and spraying water everywhere. This is Christmas in Australia. A time for family, a time to reaffirm where you belong, a time to reconnect with those you love and to share gifts, a precious and important time to be together.

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

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

THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS A FAMILY

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

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

1. This is my Son = IDENTITY
2. Whom I love; In Him I am well pleased = VALUE

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

In God's Kingdom your identity and value are as enduring as the everlasting never changing God Himself. Regardless of success or failure the relationship remains constant and your worth is secure. In Satan's kingdom your worth is about as secure as the stock market after September 11, 2001 – extremely volatile, totally insecure and bound to crash. Can you guarantee that you will always succeed? Can you be sure that the people around you, to whom you look for encouragement and support will always applaud your efforts? Hardly! For those who have ears to hear, the wise man built his house upon the rock rather than shifting sand.

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

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” Matthew 22:37-40

These two great commandments are designed to safeguard our identity and value as children of God. These two great commandments are of course a summary of the Ten Commandments. Have you ever thought of the Ten Commandments as being vital in preventing you from losing your self worth? Within the kingdom of God the Ten Commandments are understood in the context of relationships. If you sever those relationships, you are destroying your identity and when you destroy your identity, death is yearning to embrace you. There is nothing arbitrary in God's statement that the wages of sin is death. Sin (which the Bible defines as the breaking of the Law 1 John 3:4) destroys our identity and value. When identity and value are gone the soul longs for death. This is exactly the reason why depression and suicide are the greatest problems in society today, the answer is simple – sin. Can you see why God hates sin so much? Sin is the robber of our identity and value as children of God and God is determined to destroy it.

Just to quickly summarize where we have been.

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

5. Family Crisis

I could tell by the look on his face that he had suffered some sort of trauma. The bags under his eyes betrayed his valiant attempt to appear “together”. I said to him “You look really weathered!”

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

Only those who have been to the hellish land of separation and divorce will understand the emotion behind those words. The shock, anger and grief felt by the unwilling party have often been compared to experiencing the death of a partner.¹⁸ The devastating realities of divorce mean more than simply a division of assets, it means redefining your whole identity.¹⁹ The greatest victims, of course, are the children. The range of destructive emotions that pass through the heart of a child, not simply at the time of the event but for the rest of their lives, can never be fully calculated.

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

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

Issues that arose from being subject to divorce as children, left these adults with the following:

Constantly seeking approval	58%
Block out some of their past	54%
Judge themselves too strictly	53%
Take themselves too seriously	47%
Overact to situations over which they have no control	42%
Still having trouble with relationships	40% ²⁰

¹⁸ Nelly Zola and Renata Singer, “True Stories from the Land of Divorce”, (Pan Macmillian, Sydney, 1995) p 2.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Conway, 31

Is it any wonder that God says “I hate divorce!” Mal 2:16. Regardless of how it occurs, or who walks out on who, the loss of family relationships is devastating to all parties. There are no winners when family relationships breakdown. Yet this is exactly what happened in heaven. God’s family was torn apart by a crisis, when one of his dearly beloved sons turned against him.

The Bible says in Revelation 12:7 “And there was war in heaven.” When we read this verse we can be tempted to think that this is a war between two kings and their kingdoms, but this war was the tearing apart of God’s family. Can you imagine when God first made Lucifer and tenderly held his new son? God had shared his very heart and soul with this angel. He had shown him nothing but love and given him the privilege of serving at the highest levels of his family government. But now this child of his was spitting words of anger and rebellion. Moving in the shadows of deceit and lies, he poisoned the minds of many of God’s other children. Can you imagine the sorrow? Lucifer, created so perfectly, was now filled with hate and murder. He was bent on destroying the eternal Son of God, for Jesus reveals that Satan was a murderer from beginning.²¹ The reality of this feeling was displayed on the cross of Calvary, where Satan hoped to get rid of Jesus.

Who can comprehend the loss that God has felt for His son Lucifer. We have an echo from the heart of God in the story of David and Absalom. “Oh my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you—Oh Absalom, my son, my son!”²² Absalom, a beautiful and handsome son of David, desired to kill his father and take his kingdom. But David’s army routed his son’s forces and Absalom was killed in the battle. Instead of joy at the victory, David wept for the loss of his rebellious son. There are no winners when families are ripped apart.

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

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

²¹ John 8:44

²² 2 Sam 18:33

Satan did not know which way was up anymore. He had to redefine who he was and somehow smother that emptiness, that worthlessness, that nothingness that he felt inside. Like any child who feels worthless, Satan carries all the marks of insecurity, fear, insanity and a desperate need for approval from whomever he can get it. He craves attention, and to satisfy that emptiness, his perverted nature yearns to be worshipped, adored and loved. Anything to take away the pain, the loneliness and the worthlessness – anything.

Since Satan has rejected relationships as the basis of worth, he could never establish a kingdom based on relationships. There was only one option left to him. Be known by what you do rather than to whom you belong. This kingdom could never work if everyone acknowledged that all life and wisdom and love comes from God. So Satan invented the principle of ‘the power within’, in order to reduce God to a force which is incapable of having a personal relationship. A force that you could use and abuse at will. Satan’s kingdom is a kingdom of power and performance and pleasure seeking. Its central theme is to be responsible to no one, and care only for those who will be useful to you.

This kingdom is doomed of course, because the life force belongs to one who is not inanimate, and one day He will withdraw it from those who stubbornly refuse to acknowledge their identity as children of God. It is doomed because nothing can take away the pain and loss that come from rejecting that identity. Here we learn the truth of the proverb – “There is no rest for the wicked”.

If we return to the garden of Eden within this context we see that on the outside Satan seems cunning and clever as he seeks to thwart his expulsion from heaven by God. But on the inside there lies a heart full of emptiness and insecurity that is struggling to form a new identity and to escape the ever widening chasm of hopelessness.

6. Hell on Earth

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

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

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

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

I have often imagined God closely watching His daughter Eve as she found herself in the middle of the garden and suddenly engaged in dialogue with the "stranger". After all the time that God had spent with Eve, showing her unnumbered tokens of His love, would she cling to the security and love of her heavenly Father or embrace the words of Satan via the serpent? Why didn't God intervene and send an angel to stop the severing of their relationship? I guess there are many "why" questions to answer at this point. But while we don't have the time or space to address them all, indeed some of them can't be fully addressed until we see Him face to face, the central answer is love. Love grants the privilege to choose even when the choice will severely hurt the choice giver. If God had the habit of intervening every time His children were about to head in a wrong direction, then in reality they would have no choice at all. There is time for instruction and correction but there also comes a time when the silence of the choice giver validates all the "I love you's" they have uttered, because love without choice is not love at all. This is a reality that all parents wrestle with while dealing with their children. If after all our instruction and directions, our children still choose against us, do we forbid them to save ourselves the pain of rejection; or do we be silent and grieve, allowing them the choice to reject us? A tough choice for any parent.

God, clothed in the strength of love, silently watches Eve, his precious daughter become the instrumental in destroying His beloved son Adam. By now the level of pain in God's heart must be incredible. Will pain in God's heart at the loss of His daughter cause Him to intervene to save Adam? NO! Divine love grits its teeth and waits in silence, proving beyond question that He truly is the God of freedom and free choice. He will allow Adam to choose for himself. When we talk about tests, please do not entertain the absurd idea that God is carelessly watching the proceedings of the test from the safety of heaven to see whether Adam and Eve have got what it takes to be part of the heavenly club. Such ideas can only ascend from the abyss of hell itself. NEVER! God was being tested just as much as Adam and Eve. For God knows that if Adam and Eve fall then He must endure collateral damage, meaning He must invoke the pledge that was determined before the creation of the world²³ to give the life of His Son – Jesus Christ, in order to win them back. All this, God was fully aware of as He watched Adam and Eve in silence. What kind of love was in that silence? This demonstration of love will forever annihilate the wicked idea that God was moved by self interest in dealing with our original parents.

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

At this point it is important to remember what we looked at in Chapter 2. God is the source of life, wisdom and joy. Adam and Eve have now cut themselves off from that source by believing the lie that they possessed all this in themselves. Their reasoning powers can no longer be used selflessly or objectively. Their minds are totally in harmony with Satan. They have no ability to unmask the lies Satan tells them. Satan begins to fill them full of false theories about God's character. At the same time Satan tells Adam and Eve that they are bad. He tells them they deserve to die and that they are worthless individuals. Satan is still hell bent on destroying our sense of identity and he does this by telling us lies about God and lies about ourselves. As long as we believe the lies about God and ourselves, we can never be reconciled to God.

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

²³ I Peter 1:20; Revelation 13:8

Imagine coming home one day from work, joyfully anticipating the happy ritual you have developed with your child. Each afternoon your child comes running out the front door singing “Daddy, Daddy” and then throws himself into your arms with a tender hug. As you approach home you find that your beloved child has not come to greet you. Puzzled you enter the front door and you hear this shriek of terror and little foot steps running quickly into the garden to hide. Something has broken the relationship. Where there was love, there is now fear. No real father enjoys having his children run away at the beckoning sound of his voice. It hurts. It is a tragedy that sin can make us afraid of the most loving, generous, patient, freedom-loving Person in the universe.

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

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

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

Adam is addressed directly, “Did you eat from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?” This is a simple question that demands a simple yes or no. Now that Adam’s mind pictures God as selfish and revengeful and himself as being stupid and worthless, he puts two and two together in his mind and gets 64. Adam “*knows*” that if he says yes, he is going to cop it and if he says no, he will cop it twice, once for eating from the tree and once for lying. Knowing there is no way out, Adam puts his boxing gloves on and comes out of his corner with fists flying (like any insecure person does) trying to lay a few blows on God. As the saying goes, “if you are going down, you may as well go down fighting.”

“The WOMAN whom YOU gave to me, SHE gave to me of the tree and I did eat.” He accused

That has got to be a classic one-liner. The man is caught red handed and he lays two blows on Eve and one on God. Can you imagine Eve’s shock at this man who had only shortly before pledged to face with her whatever would come, but at the first hurdle he falls flat on his face! Sin cannot produce a heroic figure that gives himself selflessly to help and support others. It always results in every man for himself.

We don’t want to miss the process going on here. Adam’s reactions are being driven by his guilt and insecurity, combined with a false conception of the character of God, all stirred together with a large helping of pride. Now that he no longer sees himself as a child of God, he must embrace the philosophy “If I don’t stand up for myself, no-one else will!” He thinks this, because he no longer has a father. Here is the great heartbreak of sin: how does God show Adam that he has a false picture of his Father and that he is not worthless and stupid? How can Adam be given a true assessment of his situation when he has lost the power to reason objectively? God is the only source of true wisdom and Adam has disconnected himself from that source. And even when Adam does reason, how could his reason be freed from the mixture of guilt and pride that fiercely rejects anything resembling truth. Adam can’t handle God telling him he is wrong even if it is done in love for his own sake because his insecurity controls his reason.

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

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

The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so. Romans 8:7

“There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.” Romans 3:10,11

The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? Jeremiah 17:9

The Bible declares that our minds, in their natural state, hate or are hostile to God. Our minds, in their natural state, are rebellious, they do not submit to his commands and it is impossible for our minds to break free from this condition. I have found in my own experience, and in the experience of many people I have shared this truth with, an intense spirit of resistance. This spirit of resistance to the fact that human nature is totally hateful towards God, is a direct echo of the resistance that Adam manifested towards God, when he blamed Eve and God rather than accept his situation. Adam's insecurity is our inheritance and we can bear the truth no more than he could. If you find yourself upset or angry at these statements, if you find yourself in a state of contempt and scorn at these statements, if you find yourself categorizing the author of this book as a kill joy with nothing better to do than tell people they are evil, then ask yourself why you feel that way? If you are secure in yourself then these statements would not concern you at all. Adam's insecurity and emptiness are our inheritance. This is all that he can give us, nothing more.

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

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

1. A means of giving the human race the wisdom to recognise their desperate situation along with a way for them to be influenced in the right direction without violating their freedom of choice
2. A way of showing them that they had a wrong perception of God's character and kingdom and to some how show them that He really loves them
3. A way to remove their guilt and insecurity and to restore their true identity and value as children of God
4. A way to reclaim their sense of purpose, their reason for existence or their destiny
5. All of the above needed time. Adam and Eve had forfeited their own lives, so they needed a life support system to give them time to choose and decide
6. While doing all this, God must maintain a sense of justice. He can't ignore their rebellion and say it is OK. There must be a penalty for rebellion. This penalty is completely separate from the consequences of sin. Being removed from the Garden of Eden was not a punishment for sin it was a consequence of their choice.

There is a crucial point we need to make here. God was not caught out by surprise. The plan was already in place. A plan that was comprehensive enough to meet this desperate situation.

7. Heaven's Life Line

The story is told of a Railway station master who had the responsibility of opening and closing a railway bridge to allow ships to pass under. When the bridge was up, a signal just up the line would indicate to the train driver to wait while the bridge was open. On this particular day the bridge was up and was not due to be lowered for some time. The railway master suddenly noticed a train coming around the bend. The signal must have failed. He felt he could get the bridge down in time but then noticed his son climbing on the big cog wheels that raised and lowered the bridge. The railway station master knew that if he did not lower the bridge to save his son's life, all of the passengers on board the train would be killed. If he wanted to save the passengers on the train he would have to sacrifice his son. There was no time to delay making a decision. With an intense pain ripping through his heart, he wrenched the lever and the bridge began to lower. He fell to his knees in agonizing sobs as he heard the anguished cry of his son being crushed in those giant cogs. The train with its passengers passed safely over the bridge knowing nothing of the great danger they had faced, or of the incredible sacrifice that had just taken place to save them.

I always find it hard to stay composed when I hear this story because of its striking parallel to the decision that God faced, in dealing with the human race and its destiny. Would God let the human race plunge off the rails into the darkness below or would he provide the alternative. There was little time to act because Adam and Eve had cut themselves off from their life force and would soon be corpses upon the ground with their destiny forever sealed in the tomb of death.

Before the creation of the human race, God the Father and His Son had been in deep dialogue in what the Bible calls the counsel of peace.²⁴ At that time, the plan was laid for what would happen if the Human race chose against them. Now it was time to act. Who can estimate the suffering of God? Would He allow His son to be the substitute for Adam and Eve and pay the consequences of their choice? Would he allow His Son to take upon Himself their worthlessness and hopelessness taking it to the grave? Would He allow His Son to suffer a total loss of identity and the severing of his Sonship that would wrench from his heart the words "why have you abandoned me?"

As I am writing these words, my son is peacefully sitting just across from me. I turn to look at his beautiful face and feel the sense of joy and love rise up in my heart for him. Then I try to imagine putting myself in God's place, allowing my son to take the penalty of death for a group of people that now hate me and everything I stand for. I confess that my mind just shuts down those thoughts. I will not even allow myself to think them. My sub-conscious knows that even the thought of it is too painful for me to deal with as it would cause me to collapse! My thoughts return to God and His dilemma and I feel numb. I feel the deepest sense of gratitude to Him for allowing it to happen, knowing that I was, as it were, one of those passengers on that train and for many years I had no understanding, let alone appreciation, for the heavenly station master and his incredible sacrifice. This thought always makes me pause and worship Him in thankfulness for his boundless love and sacrifice.

²⁴ Zech 6:13

I am amazed that the Son of God, who later became Jesus, was willing to do this for us. The Bible tells us that God knows the end from the beginning, and therefore He could see what awaited Him when He came to earth, the rejection, the beating, the mocking, the hatred, the cursing and swearing, the nakedness and the blackness upon the cross, the worthlessness of billions of souls heaped upon Him, and the accumulated guilt and sorrow of 100's of generations. He saw it all and yet the Son of God says "I desire to do your will Oh God, your law is within my heart" The Son of God did not reluctantly agree but he desired to do it. His heart like the heart of His Father yearns to restore His children to the fullness of joy that is to be their destiny. What kind of a God is this? Who shall we compare Him to and what words are sufficient to praise Him?

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

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

And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel."

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

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

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

Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. Romans 5:18

²⁵ Vines Expository Dictionary - Enmity

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

This is an incredible truth that can bring peace and joy beyond compare. The above fact means that every breath you take (whether you believe in God's Son and His sacrifice or not) has come directly from Jesus Christ.²⁷ It is His life that makes your heart beat and makes you breath and keeps you alive. All the functions that we refer to as involuntary on our part are in fact voluntary on God's part. He is the heart of the truth that says:

God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' Acts 17:27,28

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

Add to this the fact that God puts in our hearts a desire to do right and a desire to resist evil thus we have a lot to be thankful for. Think about the times you have been tempted to do something wrong and then thought better of it and did not do it. This was the gift that God has given you, the enmity against evil. It does not matter whether you believe in God or not, you still are given this gift through Jesus. We are told in scripture that God makes the rain to fall on the good and the bad.²⁸ Think about how many times Satan has placed an evil thought in someone's mind to do something to you or to take your possessions and the enmity placed in their hearts by God encouraged them not to do it. Of course we still have the choice to reject that prompting and go ahead and commit evil but if that enmity was not there, none of us would be able to stop carrying out the evil thoughts placed in our minds.

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

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

²⁷ "Man broke God's law, and through the Redeemer new and fresh promises were made on a different basis. All blessings must come through a Mediator. Now every member of the human family is given wholly into the hands of Christ, and whatever we possess--whether it is the gift of money, of houses, of lands, of reasoning powers, of physical strength, of intellectual talents--in this present life, and the blessings of the future life, are placed in our possession as God's treasures to be faithfully expended for the benefit of man. Every gift is stamped with the cross and bears the image and superscription of Jesus Christ. All things come of God. From the smallest benefits up to the largest blessing, all flow through the one Channel--a superhuman mediation sprinkled with the blood that is of value beyond estimate because it was the life of God in His Son." Faith and Works Page 21

²⁸ Matthew 5:45

8. Comparing the Two Kingdoms

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

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

We can contrast the two kingdoms in the following way.

	God’s Kingdom	Satan’s/Worldly kingdom
Government	Family	Strongest
Currency	Loving Relationships	Assets
Citizenship	Children of God	Performance and achievement as successfully rated by yourself and others

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

God’s kingdom trades on the strength of its relationships. Love is the currency of heaven. Each citizen is secure in the love of their Father and have no need to prove their worth or value. They can enjoy one another’s company innocently without any hidden agendas. Learning to know God is the highest joy and ambition²⁹ and because God’s knowledge and wisdom and character are limitless, this joyful occupation will never end. There will always be something to learn about Him. Its citizens learn about Him directly or through the things that He has made. Therefore observing one another and studying nature and the universe is also a joyful part of being in this kingdom. Since it is clearly acknowledged that everything comes from Him, all creation worships God with joyful gratitude and thanks giving.³⁰

In contrast to this Satan’s kingdom trades in assets. Worth comes from what we achieve, so accumulation of assets is vital to being valuable. These assets can be material or mental or relational. The bigger the house, the more toys you own the more

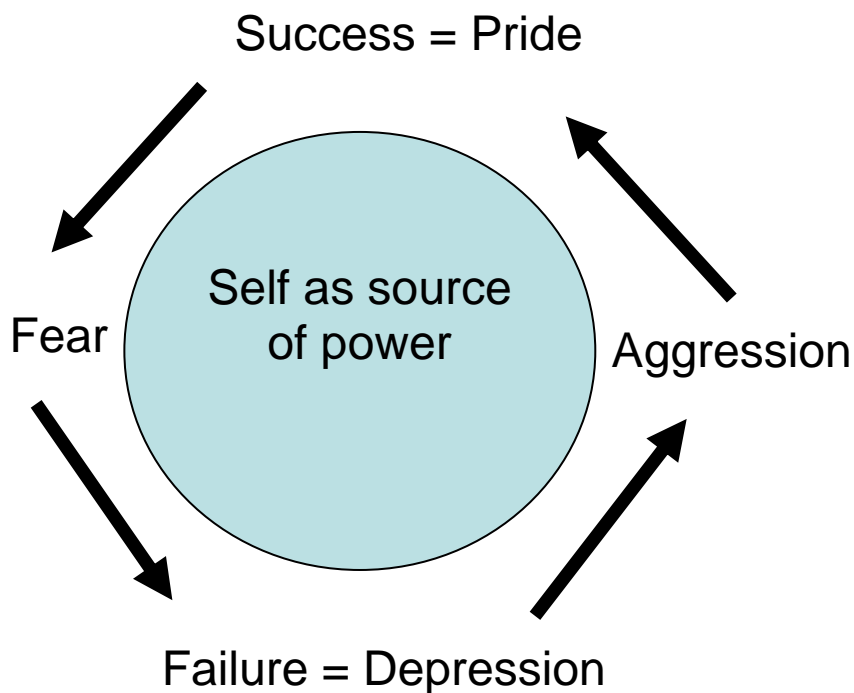
²⁹ Phil 3:9,10

³⁰ Revelation 14:6,7; Rev 4:1-9

worth you have. The higher the level of education, the higher the position of the job you have the more worth you possess. The people you associate with are very important because a person can be a great asset to your cause. Satan's kingdom believes that people have power within, so possessing other people can make you more powerful. Relationships with people become tools by which we gain more. This makes the need to control other people very important. There are many ways to control other people. Being nice and friendly is a common one. It is used by sales people all the time. Performing great deeds can impress people to follow you and when these fail you can use force, blackmail and intimidation to control people and secure their allegiance. This is why so many relationships are filled with pain and sorrow today, because often people have joined together to increase their worth and their value.

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

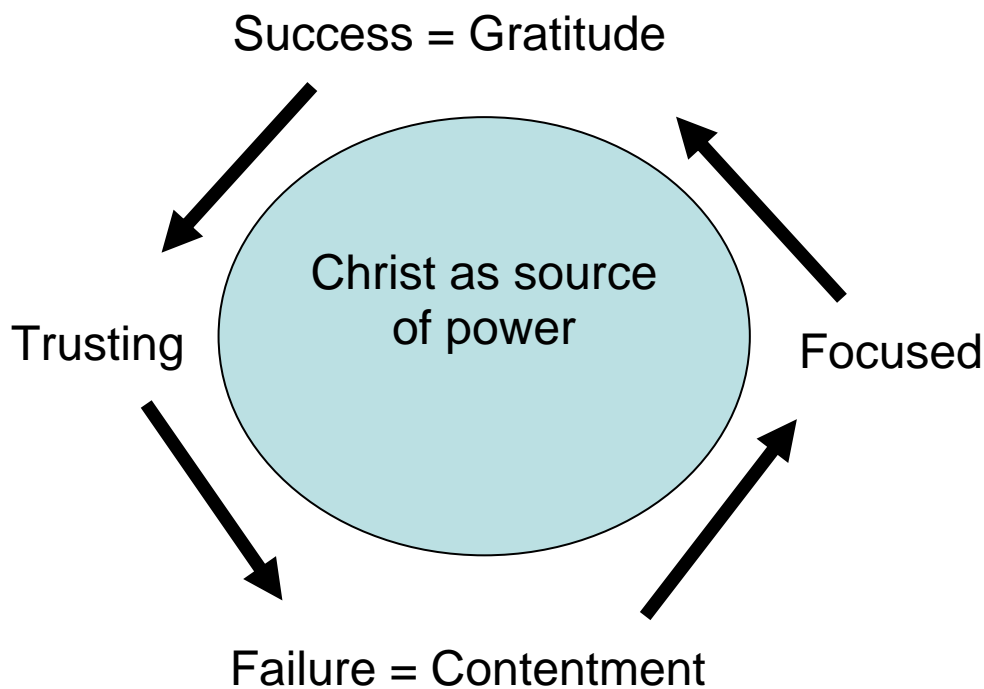
Emotional Cycle in Satan's Kingdom



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

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

Emotional Cycle in God’s Kingdom



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

We have briefly outlined the nature of these two kingdoms. In the rest of the book we will trace how these kingdoms have developed within the scope of human history and the struggles that we often face living between the two. Both kingdoms offer freedom,

both kingdoms promise much but which kingdom will leave you with a deep sense of significance and worth that is unshakable?

9. The Heart of Babylon

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

That heart broken cry has been uttered more times than we dare to imagine. Parents living with the shame and agony of a child that has fallen into a life of rebellion and wickedness. The source of this heartbroken cry can be traced to our first parents and the tragedy of their first son Cain. Parents will know the joy Adam and Eve felt when they first held little Cain in their arms. The fruit of their love was now theirs to hold and enjoy. As Eve cuddled her new precious bundle, she cried “I have gotten a man, the Lord!”³¹ Eve believed that Cain would be the promised seed mentioned in Genesis 3:15 that would bring healing and blessing to all nations. Oh if only that were true for the bitter irony for Eve was that Cain’s legacy would bring misery, destruction and death to millions. Cain became the head of a class of worshipers that conduct their spiritual experience on their own terms. This group of people make up the greater portion of the world’s population. A group of people that the Bible would later code name “Babylon.” In this chapter we will trace the driving spirit behind this group of people and how it affects you and I.

“Daddy, Why do we have to kill that poor innocent lamb?” The slaying of a lamb was designed to keep before the human family the price that would have to be paid for their salvation and the love of God in giving such a gift. It was a ritual that both pointed forward to hope but also backward to shame. It was a comforting reminder of the amazing love of God while at the same time a painful reminder of human ingratitude and selfishness. Participating in this service would always generate mixed feelings. Staring into the face of the innocent lamb embraced by its silent agony would forcefully drive home the cost of salvation. For all who look into the face of the true Lamb of God, hope must always be mingled with the soul agony that comes with comprehending salvation’s price. Failure to do this will either drive the soul to despair or to step back from the vivid horror of such a price and rewrite human origins by denying that any such fall occurred in the first place. If we begin to doubt the love of God in giving His son to die, the cross is transformed from light to darkness, from a symbol of hope to a symbol of shame.

After many years of watching his parents slay the lamb and see their tears and grief coupled with hope, patience and confidence in the coming seed, Cain decided he could no longer endure the sense of shame and the need for humility. By focusing on the human failure that the slain lamb exposes, Cain chose not to remember the great love of God in such a gift. To Cain, the lamb only stirred up his insecurity, part of the birthright he had received from his father who had received it from Satan. To Cain, the lamb only told him that he was unacceptable to God in his own right and that his behaviour was disapproved of by God. Obviously Satan encouraged Cain to take the bold step of removing the slaying of the lamb from his worship. The Bible tells us that

³¹ Literal reading of Genesis 4:1

Cain brought an offering of fruit to the Lord.³² We are also told that Cain was a farmer who produced food as part of his work. Cain's offering was a symbol of his efforts to earn God's respect by the works of his hands. He transformed his worship experience from one of humble faith to one of prideful display; from intimate trusting relationship to contractual appeasement. Such a religion ignores the fact that we have no bargaining power with God, we have no life of our own to rest upon and meet God on our own terms. Sadly Cain forgot this. Satan promised him freedom in releasing himself from the shame of the lamb, but by removing the lamb Cain's religion changed from a faith relationship with the true God to a performance based set of rituals made to a god of his own devising. In this shift, Cain embraced the poison of the Duracell tree, he took a leap of works on the Duracell bungy rope and while he initially experienced the exhilarating sense of freedom it was only a matter of time before the rope reached its limit and poison began to bite.

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

- Constantly seeking approval
- Judge themselves too strictly
- Overact to situations over which they have no control – i.e. they are often very controlling.
- have trouble with relationships³³

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

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

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

³² Genesis 4:3

³³ Conway, 31

Cain is nearing the point of no return. Having embraced the kingdom of Satan where his worth is determined by his efforts and performance, his ability to be guided and corrected diminishes rapidly. Cain knows that he has done the wrong thing, but the human mind can easily deceive itself and rather than humbly submit to God he becomes angry. Gently God seeks to help and correct him and point him back to the promised gift of His son, but Cain does not heed the warning. His feelings of rebellion grow and the kingdom of darkness has almost completed its most successful human experiment.

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

Satan shakes off the horror of this event and to make sure of his slave he pressed the sense of guilt so deep into Cain that he could never believe that God could forgive him. This is the madness of Satan, he promises us freedom and joy in following his course of rebellion and when we transgress, it is his voice that loudly demands from God our destruction. At the same time it is his voice that whispers to our soul that we are too evil and wicked to ever be accepted by God again, it is his voice that increases our sense of guilt to the point where we want to die. Wretched foe of the human race – you shall have your reward for your cowardly and spineless tactics! Now that Cain has stepped over the line completely he has no defence for his soul and Satan drives him to cry "My iniquity is greater than can be forgiven"³⁴ These are the saddest words imaginable. God came to Cain not to cut him off, but to seek to reclaim him. He asked Cain where his brother was not to accuse him but to give Cain an opportunity to repent and turn back to God. Sadly Cain uttered those mournful words; "my iniquity is greater than can be forgiven." He believed the lies of Satan rather than the word of God. He had sown and now he has reaped.

In Verse 11 of Chapter 4 God pronounces a curse. In the latter part of the curse, God tells Cain that he will be a fugitive and a vagabond. These words speak of one who shakes and staggers; it gives the sense of a man with no hope and no future. This curse was not applied by God by the waving of some celestial wand, but the curse was

³⁴ Genesis 4:13 – Marginal reading

inherent in the rejection of God's family kingdom, inherent in the rejection of intimate relationships. His soul was tortured because he was created for intimacy but his heart had chosen a different path. Ever longing for love yet always repelling those who got close to him. Wanting closeness yet never able to let people come to the secret chamber of his heart where his worthlessness abode. Wanting to have friends but ever wary of a rival to his prowess. Here lies the truth of the proverb "There is no rest for the wicked"

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

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

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

³⁵ Genesis 4:16

Section 2 – One Destiny, Identity Reclaimed

10. Breaking the Chains of the Duracell

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

For a brief moment, the Father and Son look into the future and watch the mission unfold. The scorn, the rejection, the hatred, the spitting, the kicking, the lash, the nails all pale into nothingness compared to that one horrid moment in time when heaven and earth stand still and behold the separation of Father and Son. The Son sees millennia of guilt, suffering, rebellion and worthlessness rolled upon Him and watches himself shake like a leaf, ripped and torn by the sense of His Father's backward steps, as He abandons Him to the horrors of THE death.³⁶

The embrace tightens – How can the Father give Him up to this fate? At a deeper level they both wrestle with the possibility of failure and loss to the power of sin. The Son of God would take human nature upon himself providing a window of opportunity for His arch rival Satan, to overpower Him. There were no guarantees of success. How could they plan together such madness, such risk? How could they even entertain such an absurd plan? Yet love drives them on.

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

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

A deep sense of foreboding must have gripped the heart of Satan as he watched the angels sing the anthem of joy to the shepherds that the Messiah had come. The shining star that guided the wise men to the lowly stable would have added little comfort either. You can imagine as he gazed upon this noble infant that he knew he was in for a fight. He was unable to break the peaceful calm that rested over the child, that he had always been able to do with every previous child. It was a puzzle, the child was made of flesh and blood but deep in the heart of this child lay some sort of peaceful confidence in the invisible hand of the infinite God. Satan knew he was in trouble.

³⁶ Hebrews 2:9

This troubled spirit rested upon the heart of Herod and we are given a window into the turmoil that stirs the dark spirit world. The deep sense of insecurity that ruled Herod made him easy bane for Satan's "shock and awe" campaign against the kingdom of heaven. He would take him out before the real contest would begin. But the peaceful confidence of the infant king was not misplaced and providence provided a way of escape for him, so that he may do battle with the ruler of darkness and in human flesh repulse his chains of insecurity that enslaved the doomed human race.

The life of Jesus can be summed up in the words of John 8:29 NIV. "The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him". It did not matter what Satan did, he could not break that sense of dignity and confidence. Christ clung to his Sonship with a tenacity that even awed the prince of darkness. Satan must have been enraged at his futile efforts to move Christ to sin. At last, someone who could resist Satan. After four thousand years of success with every single person, Satan slams into the rock solid wall of a human soul that is confident in his sonship to God. Sonship was the key to victory, Sonship was the surest fortification against that torrent of worthlessness that was drowning the human race and therefore sonship must be the focal point of the war between the two rivals.

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

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

The battle in the wilderness was foundational to the work of the cross. What use is the offer of pardon if the human soul cannot break the chains of his nothingness? What use the most powerful demonstration of love if no man, woman or child had the power to embrace that gift – NO! The worthlessness and nothingness of the Duracell must first be overcome and the spoils of victory placed in the hands of the human race so that all can be empowered to embrace the matchless gift of the cross.

The Father knows what is coming and he will strengthen the hand of His Son for the battle, not by a powerful display, not by some supernatural force or weapon, because none of these things would meet the coming foe. God offers His best weapon – the empowerment that comes from their relationship to one another. As Jesus comes up out of the water and the dove descends, the heavens open and Jesus hears audibly the voice of His Father. "THIS IS MY BELOVED SON IN WHOM I AM WELL PLEASED" These words are the sharpest sword that the Father could have handed to his Son to do battle. Safe in the WORD of His father, he will battle the wily foe and break those chains on our behalf that we could never break.

The significance of this statement goes far deeper than most would imagine. The fact that God is accepting a member of the human race offers incredible hope to the rest of

us. Through Jesus, God reaches out to each one of us and tells us that we are His beloved children. If we ever hope to accept the gift of the cross we must first hear those precious words “You are my beloved child in whom I am well pleased” It is impossible to accept a gift from an enemy without wondering if it is booby trapped or has strings attached, but a gift from a loving family member can be accepted for what it is – a gift, pure and simple. There is no way to approach the cross other than across the bridge of a solid belief in our sonship or daughtership to God. Any other path will lead to legalism or license to sin.

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

The Bible record says that Jesus “was in the desert forty days, being tempted by Satan”.³⁷ I think most people would find 10 minutes of constant temptation overpowering let alone 40 days! Satan had had 4000 years of testing practise to get it right and you can be assured that Jesus was made the mark of every weapon of hell. Who can comprehend the depth of this conflict? The whole universe held their collective breath as Satan laid blow after blow upon the Son of God. As for us, we were fast asleep, oblivious to the heroic stand made by Jesus to set us free. If Jesus failed here we would have all been crushed by the chains of our nothingness. Jesus was our one and only hope to pierce the darkness.

You know, I get to a point like this and I just have to stop and think about Him. I mean what can I say? My heart just brims with grateful joy at the determined unrelenting attacks of this God-man upon our helpless situation. Just like a father or mother who would run through a burning house to save their child. He was mentally bashed senseless by Satan, but he would not let go. This man causes something deep inside me to cry out – “I must be worth something” Nobody would do this unless they really cared! I tell you this love draws me in a way I find irresistible. I do resist Him, but thank God He is more determined than I am!

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

Satan was using the medium of appetite to try and break the faith of Jesus in His Father’s word. Forty days earlier, God said “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased”. If Jesus turns stones into bread then he is effectively doubting the word of God and that doubt would be enough to confuse his identity. Beyond this Jesus is being asked to perform something to prove his identity. Asking Jesus to turn stones

³⁷ Mark 1:13

³⁸ Matthew 4:3 NIV

into bread to prove who He is, was a direct door into the kingdom of Satan; identity by performance and achievement.

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

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

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

1. Satan, as a spirit being, had many advantages over Jesus who was cumbered with human nature. I Sam 17:33
2. Jesus represented the entire human race and a victory for Christ meant freedom for us just as Satan represented all of the forces of hell and a victory for him meant we would forever remain the slaves of the powers of darkness. I Sam 17:9
3. Jesus was 40 days in the wilderness facing the taunts and temptations of Satan just as Goliath taunted Israel for 40 days. I Sam 17:16
4. Satan came in his own power but Jesus came in the name of the Lord to destroy him who had defied the army of the living God. I Sam 17:45

5. The weapons that Jesus used seemed paltry by worldly standards – He trusted in the words of God and he used them with precision to strike the mind of Satan.

The parallels are breath taking and I can't help but place myself as one of those Israelite soldiers standing on the hillside, listening to Goliath insulting my God, my religion and myself personally. "Where is your God?" "Why won't you fight me if you are so strong?" "You are weak and useless and a shame to your God?" Listening to this type of abuse for 40 days would really get you down. Just look at the size of him! His armour glistens in the sunlight as his monstrous voice bellows insults across the valley. The situation seems hopeless and there is a sinking feeling of resignation to slavery. Is it any different today? We have the taunts of Satan about our inabilities and weaknesses. His temptations seem so strong and overwhelming and we fall to them again and again and there is that sinking feeling of resignation to slavery. There are even those who preach that our slavery can never be vanquished that sin will always get the better of us. Away with such thoughts, the Son of David is in our camp and He has emancipated us from the chains of the devil. His victory in the wilderness of temptation is a victory for the entire human family. You can choose to think that you must still face your Goliath or you can watch in awe on the hillside as Jesus severs the head of your temptation. If you believe you already have the victory because of Jesus rather than hoping he will deliver you, then you have found the very crux of faith.

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

11. Opening the Gates of Heaven by Passing Through the Gates of Hell

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

“Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love and go to the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell you about”³⁹

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

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

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

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

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

³⁹ Genesis 22:2

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

To grasp the horror and sacrifice of Jesus on the cross you need to glimpse the depth of the relationship between the Father and the Son. The very essence of their kingdom is modelled between them, the kernel of their approach to life is revealed in the love that they have for each other. If you do not add this relational dimension to the cross then you really have missed the point.

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

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

Someone may respond, “Yes, but Jesus knew he would rise again and be reunited with His Father, so it was not that bad.” If you have entertained these thoughts, then I suggest you ask Jesus how he felt when he screamed “My God, My God why have you forsaken me” When the guilt of a rebellious world was rolled upon him and His Father's love was enshrouded in His hatred for our sins, Jesus searched into the blackness to find the loving face that had always been His joy throughout eternity but all he found was separation and anger. His hope was swallowed up, death was all that awaited him, he sensed that he would be forever cut off from the one he loved and so he screamed “My God, my God why have you forsaken me.” Just think about that for a minute, it's awesome, simply awesome.

All of this begs the question, how serious is God about breaking down the barriers between Him and us? Try to picture God in the story of Abraham and Isaac and see that there was no one to step into the gap for Jesus, no one to release the Father from the heart rending task of sacrifice, no one to stay the divine hand from plunging the knife. In the earthquake and darkness of that fateful day when the greatest love that has ever been was severed because our sins, I hear the cry of the Father, My Son, My Son, how can I give you up? How can I let you go? Here is hell right here. Both Father and Son have been to hell in the severing of their relationship on our behalf. What else can the essence of hell be but the very opposite of what God's kingdom stands for; loving intimate relationship?

So what does this mean for us? It means that God has tasted the horror of separation from divine love on our behalf, so that we don't have to experience it. “Death where

is your sting and grave where is your victory?” Now nothing can separate us from the love of God because of what Jesus and His Father have done for us.

Heavens gate swings open for us because God went to hell to shut its gate, so that we need not ever enter there and experience the weeping and gnashing of teeth as will happen to those who reject what Jesus has done for us and enter the permanent severing from Divine love.

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

Section 3 – The Journey Back

12. Life Powered by the Duracell

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

The school was handing out awards to various students for their achievements through the year. During this event, I play a very interesting little mind game. “You have worked hard this year, you could get this next award... no, somebody else will win it...but you have a chance” As the fated moment arrives when the name is to be read out, my heart begins to beat faster in anticipation and then I hear the name, it is not mine but one of my friends. This is where it gets interesting. On the outside, I am clapping for my friend and their success but on the inside a very different scenario is going on “Why did he get it? I worked harder than him, I can’t believe they would give it to him. Ah I think I know why, he is related to one of the teachers and that’s why they picked him. It’s always rigged; it’s never what you know it’s who you know.” All the while I am clapping and smiling and trying to appear composed. The clouds begin to gather and for the next few hours I am feeling a bit depressed and a little bit angry. It’s just another day of life powered by the Duracell.

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

Most school curriculums seem to understand this need for comparison and attention seeking. Being herded together with a group of your peers away from the affections of the home environment provides the perfect culture to embed Duracell principles. The next 12 years will be a race to comparatively excel in one or more of a number of areas and thus secure a bright and happy future. Our western culture seems to favour the more intelligent. Comparative intelligence is an asset that will take you far. Have you ever wondered why children who have the ability to retain and regurgitate knowledge tend to be awarded more highly than the child that tends to be more gifted

with their hands?⁴⁰ Could you imagine gaining university entrance because you really knew how to look after a garden or fix a car engine? There are places for people with those skills but fortune tends to place the academic at the top of the pile.

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

But never fear, there are other ways to succeed. Every school system has a sports program that allows children to develop an athletic comparative guide. Children will spend 1000’s of hours developing an athletic skill that will hopefully one day bring them the power and glory they yearn for. We all know that sport is just a game right? Tell that to all the English soccer fans that rampage through the streets of Europe during the world cup. How about the man who was watching his beloved cricket team losing the world cup and as a result he had a heart seizure and died before the end of the game. And why is it that various sportsmen can be paid millions of dollars a year for kicking a piece of leather around, trying to get it between two sticks? Sport is serious business as it provides one of the simplest means of gaining worth by achievement and getting all the attention you could wish for. It is one of the best systems for feeding the Duracell. It is one of the best ways of killing the belief that we can be valued by relationship rather than achievement.

One of the most interesting things about sport is that even though you can perform at the highest level, if you come second, no one will remember your name. The emotional trauma of losing can be devastating. I remember watching a soccer player just crumpled on the ground sobbing like a baby because of his failed goal attempt in a penalty shoot out that lost his team the prized trophy. I remember watching his coach assisting him off the field and wondering how much he felt he was worth at that moment. But of course it’s only a game. Yes, but it’s a game that is a life and death struggle for value and acceptance.

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

What about the realm of wealth creation or job status or even suburb status. I have worked in the white collar corporate world for some years and it is quite interesting to observe the pecking order. You can tell a persons position by the type and quality of their office furniture. The top boss has a separate room for his office with a window view to the streets below. He has the leather high backed chair with the arm rests. He

⁴⁰ Western culture is based very much on Greek culture which tended to be more academic than practical. It is no accident that the beast in Revelation 13 described as leading the whole world was primarily a leopard which represents the kingdom of Greece.

has the big stained wood desk with the latest computer sitting on it. The next guy down also has his own office but his window view is not quite as good and his chair not quite as fancy and his computer not quite as fast. The next guy down just has his office partitioned and his chair has no arm rests, Oh and he does not have a hands free phone and he can't even see out the window. It's laughable when you think about it, but it is very serious business in the corporate world. Office furniture is an important part of effective comparison with your peers.

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

1. Education Level
2. Athletic Ability
3. Job Status/Income level
4. Physical Appearance
5. Possessions/Assets
6. Nationality

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

13. Stairway to Heaven

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

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

When I was seven my family moved to a new place and I was soon feeling my way into a new group of children. I made friends quickly but also encountered some nasty fellows. I was a fairly solid build as a child and a couple of skinny kids decided they would get some mileage out of the fact that I was slightly better padded than they were. “Fatso”, “Fat Albert” and “Slob” are some of the names I remember. It was a horrid experience which many of us have encountered in childhood. This happened day after day. The enemy of souls was using these boys to destroy my sense of worth. On the way to school one morning I decided I had had enough. “Mum, I am not getting out of the car, I am not going to school.” “Of course you are my boy” “No I’m not!” As we drove in, I saw that menacing pair watching like vultures to attack their prey. Mum opened the door and tried to dislodge me. The next few minutes were quite intense. I kicked and screamed and yelled and clung to my chair. Just a typically bad behaved boy, maybe, but when your sense of identity as a person is being flattened; you are going to take some desperate measures to save yourself. I don’t actually remember what happened next but I remember that the bullying stopped. Here was a real taste of what lay ahead.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Many people struggle to discern the volatility and destructiveness often displayed by young people. Why many of them commit suicide or resort to binge drinking and drugs. I believe it is often because they realise that they will never achieve their dreams through the methods they have been taught. They will never be great in the eyes of others and so they self destruct.

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

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

It is interesting the different ways that God can get to you. Many of my friends referred to their mother as the "Old bag" or other equally delightful terms. Somehow my father managed to teach me some sense of respect for my parents and I vowed I would never speak about my mother the way some of my friends did. When I uttered those words about my mother it was like the last piece of dignity that I had was stripped away. I was shocked that I would say such things and my depression deepened. I was getting to the point of not caring any more and that is a very dangerous place to be. I had this real sense that I had come to a cross roads. The broad path beckoned me with its yawning jaws full of its wine, women and song. On the other side was the narrow path as laid out by the Bible. Would I follow the religion my parents had taught me or would I go like a blazing comet into the broad path. I could see no point in pretending to be a Christian any more. It was now plain to me that I was not a Christian and never had been, even though I was brought up in a Christian environment. It was either Christ or the devil. Thankfully, I chose to try and find the real Jesus of the Bible.

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

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

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

14. Same Gods Different Names

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

My mind accelerated with possible scenarios. Up till now this had been my definition of fun and now I couldn't take it any more. Something had taken hold of my heart and made it impossible to maintain the status quo. Somewhere out of the abyss came the hideous thought that my life of fun was over and that I would never be able to enjoy myself any more. I raced out the front of the house and onto the front lawn and shook my fist in the air and yelled "You've wrecked my life".

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

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

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

I started attending a prayer meeting with my friends. On that first night as we knelt together I felt the sweet Spirit of God around us but there was another spirit from my old life that was harassing me. As we prayed around the circle, a thought struck me “I can’t pray like these people can pray, they are so eloquent”. My mind seemed locked into this thought and as the prayer circle moved closer to me my heart began to race faster. Soon I would be in the spot-light and everyone would be listening to me. But wait a minute, this was a prayer meeting about Jesus not me!

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

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

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

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

In the World	In the Church
Education	Bible Knowledge
Athletic Ability	Public Speaking Ability
Job Status	Church Office
Possessions	Spiritual Gifts
Physical Appearance	Church Fashion Parade
Nationality	Conservative/Liberal Theology

For many of us our walk with Jesus is hijacked by the insidious power of the Duracell. As I look around the church today I can see that the gods we sought to escape in the world have found us in the church. They have clothed themselves in garments of light and we have embraced them as good friends. The inevitable result is anger, bitterness and fighting in the church.

It's so easy to look pious in church, but what about the person sitting on the other side of the church that won't talk to you because you said something about them behind their back and it got back to them. What about the pianist that went to another church because she was told her playing was sub-standard? What about the doctrinal police that roam to and fro through the church seeking out those that don't subscribe to their definition of orthodoxy, so that they might expel them from the church? What about those "free spirits" that seek to hijack the worship committee and force their new worship style on everyone and too bad for those who don't like it? The list is endless and the great enemy of our souls knows that as long as he can keep us dancing to this tune, then we are essentially still subjects of his kingdom.

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

It is very interesting that this subtle transfer of gods from the world to the church in our personal experience has also occurred in the church's corporate experience. In the fourth century when the emperor Constantine "embraced" Christianity there was a whole range of changes that took place in the Christian church. One point that is particularly interesting is that many of the statues of the pagan gods that were in the Pantheon were transferred to the Christian church and the names were changed to Biblical characters like Moses and David and Peter. Same gods, different names! It does not matter how you dress it up, it is still pagan and what can we say today? It is one thing to attack the corporate church for its apostasy from apostolic truth. It is another thing to see the same principles at work in our own lives. Let us make sure that we deal with the log in our own eye before we seek to remove the speck from our brother's eye.

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

At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"⁴¹

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

⁴¹ Matthew 18:1

And James and John, the sons of Zeb'edee, came forward to him, and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." And he said to them, "What do you want me to do for you?" And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory."⁴²

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

And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John.⁴³

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

And Jesus called them to him and said to them, "You know that those who are supposed to rule over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."⁴⁴

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

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

⁴² Mark 10:35-37

⁴³ Mark 10:41

⁴⁴ Mark 10:42-45

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

In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you. But the hand of him who is going to betray me is with me on the table. The Son of Man will go as it has been decreed, but woe to that man who betrays him.” They began to question among themselves which of them it might be who would do this.²⁴ Also a dispute arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest.⁴⁵

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

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

⁴⁵ Luke 22:20-24

15. How Do You Read?

Today is going to be a special day. You are full of anticipation and excitement at the potential prospects that lie ahead. The head of a large manufacturing company is interested in a special design you have worked on and is seriously contemplating manufacturing it and exporting it around the globe. You both decide to meet for lunch at a nice little local restaurant. Having never met before, you nervously look around trying to identify this person who is going to transform your dream into reality. At last he arrives and you shake his hand vigorously and then you both move into the restaurant and find your place. To get acquainted your dining partner asks you a bit about your family and where you live and how your children are going in school. Everything is going along nicely except for the fact that just behind you there is a guy who has developed a real art of slurping his soup. At first you brush it off, but after a while it gets a little annoying. “Some people need to learn a few manners” you think to yourself, but brush it off so you don’t get distracted. The conversation with your potential business partner is going well and you are right in the middle of discussing some of the extra benefits of your design when all of a sudden the guy behind you let’s go a horrendous burp that nearly rattles the cutlery on your table. All eyes are suddenly transfixed on this unusual individual that seems to have no manners at all. The room fills with sounds of snickers and muffled laughter combined with horror and disgust. Finally the owner of the restaurant comes out and asks the man to leave, saying that his types aren’t welcome in the restaurant.

The thing that is really amazing is that if this same man was sitting in a restaurant that reflected a Chinese culture, no one would blink an eye lid. In fact the host and hostess might be disappointed if you did not make these gestures. Also in Chinese culture if you sought to shake the hand of someone you had not met before or talked about family issues over dinner you would be considered quite rude.⁴⁶

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

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

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

⁴⁶ <http://www.chinawestexchange.com/Chinese/Culture/customs.htm>

reading the Bible with a Duracell context rather than in the context of heaven which focuses on legitimate and intimate relationships.

Jesus drives at this point in His discussion with a lawyer in Luke chapter 10. The lawyer asks Jesus “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus answers “What is written in the law?” and to get to the deeper issue he asks “How do you read it?”⁴⁷ Jesus does not ask *what* do you read, he asks *how* do you read or how do you interpret what you read. This is the key question for anyone wishing to take the journey from the earthly Duracell to heavenly relationships – How do you read?

The question that the lawyer asked Jesus is one of the most critical questions of the Christian walk. The position you occupy and the people you mix with are a strong indicator of your value in this world. By contrast, in the kingdom of heaven, every person is a child of God and is worthy of respect and dignity. As we follow the discussion we notice that the lawyer wants to interpret scripture by the former rather than the latter. He gives Jesus the right answer by saying “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your strength and with all your mind and love your neighbour as yourself.”⁴⁸ Jesus says in effect “exactly, do this and live” but the lawyer realising the full implications of what was involved seeks to twist the meaning by asking “Who is my neighbour?” The meaning of the scripture is simple but the human heart under the influence of the Duracell, acts like it is hard to understand because it is unwilling to release the old and fully embrace the new. Here lies the reason for so many half baked and withered Christians, they believe in Christ’s kingdom but live according to Satan’s kingdom and the result is confusion, frustration and evil.

The entire Christian faith is confused on the issue of salvation because the Bible clearly teaches that a Christian empowered by grace will live in harmony with the Ten Commandments. However, many of us approach the Ten Commandments in the context of the Duracell – we seek to perform them in order to obtain the goal of salvation, rather than seeing the Ten Commandments as a description of the promised relationship that *will* occur between God and His children.

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

For the group of Christians who adopt the anti-performance stance and the impossibility of victory in the Christian walk, it soon follows that the god they serve is also unable to perform. Combine this trend with the worldly desire for recognition and it is no surprise to find Christian scholars, teachers and believers who reject the ability of God to create the world in six literal days. Just as the lawyer gives the answer that he is to love his neighbour but then questions “who is my neighbour” so

⁴⁷ Luke 10:25,26

⁴⁸ Luke 10:27

many scholars today smugly say “Yes we believe in a six day creation – but what sought of days are they?” Wickedness always seeks to find a way to twist the scriptures to suit itself – to belief in Christ and yet live according to the world. The demons also believe in Christ and live according to this world.

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

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

16. No Longer a Servant

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

“But why do you have to tell me what to do all the time?”

“Well son, Jesus has asked me to teach you how to be a strong young man for Him and because he is my boss I think I had better do what he tells me to do.”

Parenting is a real learning curve. “Son, please sit down while you are eating.” “Auugh, not fair!”

“Sweetie, please pick up your toys and put them away.” “Augh Mum, I want to go outside and play.”

“Son it’s time to go to bed.” Cry, whinge, howl, “but you are not going to bed now, why do I have to?” All these rules and regulations you would think that parents are Ogres all the time. Why can’t children understand that you want them to sit still and eat slowly at the table so they don’t upset their digestion? You want them to learn to be neat and tidy so they learn to be organised and more efficient when they get older? And why don’t children appreciate that you want to prevent them from getting sick by getting plenty of sleep? Why – because they just don’t know pit the falls and dangers of life.

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

Now I say that the heir, as long as he is a child, does not
differ at all from a servant, though he is master of all.
Galatians 4:1

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

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

Paul explains to us how we can be released from many of the perplexities of life and questions about God's dealings with us. When we truly comprehend that God is our Father and that He is preparing us to enter His kingdom and that He loves us intensely, then our relationship to God starts to make sense. The rules and regulations are no longer seen as restrictions and boundaries to stop us having fun, instead they become doors of freedom that reveal God's tender regard for us and His yearning desire for us to receive our full inheritance as children of God. Paul explains it this way

So also, when we were children, we were in slavery under the basic principles of the world. But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir. Galatians 4:3-8 NIV

These are some of the most beautiful words in scripture. As we recognise the sacrifice of Jesus in securing our adoption as God's children, we are released from the slavery of Satan's kingdom. We break free from the tyranny of the Duracell and we stand strong and noble as sons and daughters of God, knowing that because of Jesus we will always be His beloved children. Has the spirit of God cried out in your heart "Abba Father" – Daddy, Daddy? Do you feel so secure in His love that you can run into His arms and know you are not only welcome but deeply desired by Him? Have you returned to the childish adoration of your Father that beams when He is near? Until you experience this freedom, you will always remain a servant that lives with the uncertainty that tomorrow you will be issued your severance pay.

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

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

1. A means of giving the human race the wisdom to truly recognise their desperate situation correctly along with a way for them to

be influenced in the right direction without violating their freedom of choice.

2. A way of showing them that they had a wrong perception of his character and kingdom and to somehow show them that He really loved them.
3. A way to remove their guilt and insecurity, restoring their true identity and value as children of God.
4. A way to reclaim their sense of purpose, their reason for existence or their destiny.
5. All of the above needed time. Adam and Eve had forfeited their own life, so they needed a life support system to give them time to choose and decide.
6. While doing all this, God must maintain a sense of justice. He can't ignore their rebellion and say it is ok. There must be a penalty for rebellion. This penalty is completely separate from the consequences of sin. Being removed from the Garden of Eden was not a punishment for sin it was a consequence of their choice.

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

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

17. The Fall of Babylon

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

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

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

They called it “Crazy Tuesday”, the day when the allied forces came. The Germans retreated, blowing bridges, destroying munitions and leaving as much destruction as possible. My father remembers everyone dancing in the streets and the allied soldiers handing out food rations. It was almost too hard to believe it was over – freedom at last!

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

Then I stood on the sand of the sea. And I saw a beast rising up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and on his horns ten crowns, and on his heads a blasphemous name.⁴⁹

This beast is given great power and authority over all the nations of the earth and all the world worship and submit themselves to the power of the beast.⁵⁰ This beastly power stands against our relationship with the God who made the heavens and the earth. It seeks to draw worship to itself.

The reason why this beast can so easily convince the whole world to follow it is because it runs on Duracell batteries. It speaks the language that we all naturally speak. It encourages us to seek our identity by what we achieve and perform and it encourages us to meet God on our own terms, bringing our own bloodless sacrifice and expecting God to comply and accept our worship. Most of the world is already

⁴⁹ Revelation 13:1

⁵⁰ Ibid versus 2 and 7

under the power of this beast but doesn't realise it. When the world rejects the principles of freedom and returns to global control through fear and force, it will simply be an outward manifestation of what lurks deep in the heart of every one of us.

God is not sitting idly by and doing nothing. He sends a desperate final message to warn the world not to surrender to this beastly power. It comes in the form of three messages. The first message calls the human race to attention and reminds us that we should worship the God who made the heavens and the earth. It points us to the sacrifice of Jesus and reminds us that Cain's offering can never be accepted by God. We can never earn favour with God, it was purchased for us through the blood of the lamb.⁵¹

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

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

Why does God use the term Babylon? As we look through the Bible we find that it was Nimrod that built the city of Babylon. Nimrod was an interesting character. The Bible tells us that “The first centres of his kingdom were Babylon, Erech, Akkad and Calneh, in Shinar.”⁵² Nimrod is the first recorded human being to establish his own kingdom. It is also interesting to note that Nimrod at some point married his mother, a dysfunctional family indeed! There are also some suggestions that Nimrod killed his father to marry his Mother. Whatever the case, Nimrod's home was not founded on the principles of the kingdom of God, where family relationships are sacred.

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

He was a mighty hunter before (against)⁵³ the LORD ; that is why it is said, "Like Nimrod, a mighty hunter before (against) the LORD ." The first centres of his kingdom were Babylon, Erech, Akkad and Calneh, in Shinar. From that land he went to Assyria, where he built Nineveh, Rehoboth Ir, Calah and Resen, which is between Nineveh and Calah; that is the great city.⁵⁴

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

⁵¹ Revelation 14:6,7

⁵² Genesis 10:10

⁵³ The word before also can be read against

⁵⁴ Genesis 10:9-12

“The authority of former rulers has rested upon the feeling of kindred, and the ascendancy of the chief was an image of parental control. Nimrod on the contrary, was a sovereign of territory, and men just so far as they were its inhabitants and irrespective of personal ties. Hitherto there had been enlarged tribes – families – Society; now there was a nation, a political community – the state.⁵⁵

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

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

1. It starts in a child who has been estranged from his/her father.
2. Then, because of his/her insecurity, he/she is constantly seeking approval.
3. This craving for approval often drives a person to desperate measures to off set his or her emptiness and worthlessness.

This is the secret ingredient that makes the wine of Babylon so addictive. How many of us have not been plagued by feelings of uselessness or determination to prove to others that we have what it takes? How many of us have felt that our efforts to please God have just been a total failure and there is no point trying any more? How many of us have been caught up in a power struggle at work or school or church and heard or spoken angry or cutting words as a means of self defence or in attempt to enlarge our own little kingdoms? Does not the whole world drink from this cup? If we act in such a way then are we not truly slaves of Babylon?

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

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

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

Thus says the LORD of hosts: “The children of Israel were oppressed, Along with the children of Judah; All who took them captive have held them fast; They have refused to let them go. Their Redeemer is strong; The LORD of hosts is His name. He will thoroughly plead their case, That He may give rest to the land, And disquiet the inhabitants of Babylon. Jer 50:33,34

Then in Chapter 51 we read the following:

⁵⁵ A.T Jones, *Empires of the Bible*, page 51.

Flee from the midst of Babylon, And every one save his life! Do not be cut off in her iniquity, For this is the time of the LORD'S vengeance; He shall recompense her...Babylon was a golden cup in the LORD'S hand, That made all the earth drunk. The nations drank her wine; Therefore the nations are deranged. Babylon has suddenly fallen and been destroyed. Wail for her! Take balm for her pain; Perhaps she may be healed. We would have healed Babylon, But she is not healed. Forsake her, and let us go everyone to his own country; For her judgment reaches to heaven and is lifted up to the skies. The LORD has revealed our righteousness. Come and let us declare in Zion the work of the LORD our God. Jer 51:3-12

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

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

The Fall of Babylon contained in the second angel's message releases spiritual Israel from insecurity, worthlessness and the controlling spirit that compels us to sin. When we recognise that we are accepted in the beloved, that we are indeed God's children through the sacrifice of Jesus, all our insecurity and worthlessness is swept away and we stand free as the children of God.

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

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