

MORE THAN STANDARD

A Stressed Student's Revolutionary Guide to

Conquering your College Entrance Tests

Becoming Confidently Awesome

And Experiencing God's Dream for Your Future

MATT HALLOCK

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To Jesus, my king. You've been asking me to do this for a while. I apologize for not taking you seriously until now. Thanks for teaching me to hear you and follow you.

To my wife, Corrie. May this book be the first of many that bless you. As I write and live in who God made me to be, I will become more the man who is best suited to lead, cover, and love you.

To my girls, Rebecca and Darcy, and to the third little warrior who we don't know yet. As I write the principles in this book, I'm discovering more how to parent you well. Get ready, here it comes!

To every one of my past and present students. I do what I do because I love you and I want you to experience a full, abundant, and surrendered life in Jesus. It's what you were meant for.

To you, whether you are a parent or a high school student or someone else entirely. My heart and soul and years of experience, God's truth and prodding, and all of the angels assigned to this project—have gone into helping you experience true gospel victory and transformation. You are not here by accident. You are loved.

You are more than a conqueror.

You are More Than Standard.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface.....	1
Introduction: Encouragement for Parents and Students Alike.....	7
Part 1.....	11
The SAT Doesn't Matter Compared to This.....	13
Why Jesus is in an SAT Book.....	17
Fearful and Insecure.....	21
Part 2.....	27
Intro to Part 2.....	29
The Enemy Dragging Down Your Score: The Victim Mentality.....	31
Why You Definitely Don't Want to Be a Victim: The (too) Tall and (too) Steep Slide.....	35
How a Victim Views Life (and the SAT).....	39
Signs that Something's Gotta Change: Your Inner Collateral Damage.....	43
Signs that Something's Gotta Change, Volume 2:	

Your Toxic Perspectives	49
How We Become Victims:	
We Believe the Wrong Things	55
Giving Up on the Promised Land	61
Part 3	65
Intro to Part 3	67
Jimmy	71
The Real Gospel, From Outcast to Mighty	75
You Are Worthy. Believe it. Live Like It.	85
How a Conqueror Views Life (and the SAT)	93
Becoming a Conqueror, Part 1:	
Around the Campfire	99
Becoming a Conqueror, Part 2:	
On the Battleground	111
How to Win the War for Your Thoughts	121
Part 4	131
Intro to Part 4	133
Weapon #1: Attack and Take Charge	135
Weapon #2: Think For Yourself	139

Weapon #3: Prepare Like a Conqueror.....	143
Weapon #4: Write All the Heck Over the Test.....	147
Weapon #5: Remember, You're Dealing with a Standardized Test.....	151
Weapon #6: Don't Be A Good Student.....	155
Weapon #7: Use Systems.....	161
Conclusion.....	163
Preview of Old School.....	169

PREFACE

THIS IS NOT an ordinary SAT book. In fact, I don't know of any others like it. So, to help you avoid any confusion, let me tell you what to expect and what not to expect in these powerful pages you're holding.

Do not expect a comprehensive guide to the SAT, which you probably already knew judging by the fact that this book is minuscule compared to the sheer "massivity" of most standard SAT prep books. Similarly, do not expect an SAT workbook with practice problems. I will gladly assure you that those books are valuable. I've used them myself as a student looking to ace the test, and as an SAT mentor wanting to learn the best techniques from the best teachers so that I can give my students all the instruction they need to raise their scores.

But that is proudly and unashamedly not the goal of this book. I humbly leave that to academics who have more patience for math problems and reading passages than I do.

More Than Standard is a book about you and how you think. It's about laying the foundation on which your SAT practice and strategy-learning absolutely must be built, if you're going to succeed. It's about Jesus and how he transforms you from a victim into a Conqueror. And it's about how and why that matters for you as you take the SAT.

This book is meant both to raise your SAT score and also to completely turn your life upside down. When I started tutoring students on the SAT years ago, I realized that I was doing them a disservice by just pushing and driving and equipping them to be always aiming for a higher and higher score. Behind the curtains of their kind face and ruffled eyebrows, they were hiding a hurting heart. They were crumbling under the pressure of having to perform in order

Preface

to find happiness, approval, worth, or any of the other elusive prizes all of us are searching for.

So I refuse to talk solely about the test. I will only talk about it after I have done everything I can to love your heart. To show you Jesus. To open your eyes to the power of his gospel and how incredibly valuable you are to him and to this world. If you can learn the full extent of the potential and worth that he plunked inside of you before you were born, you can live life in power and confidence and joy. And you can also do way better on the SAT.

To that end, this book has four parts. The first is the shortest. It will inspire you as it begins to open your eyes to a new way of thinking. And it will show you how and why Jesus is an integral part of your taking the SAT.

Part two will lay out for you the standard way of thinking that nearly all high schoolers inadvertently adhere to, which is tragic. This mentality is toxic, drains the life from you, and keeps you living small and downcast.

Part three is where the good stuff comes in. After you've had the bittersweet opportunity to identify the lies that are at the root of the way you've been thinking about God, about yourself, and about your future, you'll now see exactly how Jesus changes all of that. He can free you from discouragement while infusing you with world-changing power. And you'll learn exactly how to get to know him in such a way where he becomes more than merely the right dogma or doctrine or worldview to believe. He becomes a real person who really affects your real circumstances.

And finally, in part four, I'll give you seven SAT-specific strategies or mindsets, which I teach in all of my Conquer the Test classes, that act as somewhat of a liaison between the heart and mind and Gospel content that is the majority of this book and the more in-depth SAT specific techniques that you find in your typical SAT prep books. These seven strategies flow most effectively out of someone who has had their mind completely rocked by Jesus and who is now becoming a Conqueror in life. And I assure you, even if you never picked up another prep book, these principles would definitely raise your score.

More Than Standard

Thank you friend, for joining me. You are awesome. You are an atmosphere-changer. You are loved by God. You were meant for more than just yourself. You were meant for him.

Much love,

Matt Hallock

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CORRIE, AS WITH every one of my endeavors, you call me higher. Your constant companionship helps me to keep going when those discouraging voices come knocking. Your love makes monotonous days of writing into an exciting adventure. Your faith in me and where God is leading us is stunning. And more practically, your insight into the message on these pages and the one that you know I intended to write (they don't always match perfectly) is the most valuable. You know my heart, my audience, and God's plan for how the two can match. You know better than anyone else. Thank you for helping me get them all together in a book.

Laramie, you completely threw yourself into editing this book with everything you've got. Thank you for taking precious time from your already jammed-full life to help a friend. You single handedly cranked up the quality of this book by 37 notches with your mastery of both the English language and the art of communicating well to high schoolers. Without your all-day-long "commitment to Matt and his project" session, I would not have had the wherewithal and determination to develop this thing into its full potential. Thank you for changing my life, like you do so many others, young and old.

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inspire the thoughts in this book. You all have left your legacy in my life, and I owe you more than you think.

INTRODUCTION

As I sit here to write this morning, it's as if all of the years of writing experience, the years of good powerful messages flowing out of me, the consistent positive feedback from readers—it's as if they are all gone. Poof. Vanished. They're out the window. A writer? Who am I to be called a writer? Who am I to think that I can piece together something of value and effectively present it to any kind of audience? How dare I think that what I have to say will change the world? Actually, forget the world. How could what I have to say change even one life?

So I sit and I craft. Meaning, I sit and I plot and scheme and try to formulate. I look up articles on rites of passage and initiation ceremonies. I read commentaries on passages from the Bible. All the while, I'm hoping to put together the winning formula. The string of words that will resonate with you and move you to life-change.

But do you know what this is that's happening in me? Do you know what's motivating this approach to getting my message out there?

Unworthiness.

That might sound strange, but hear me out.

Most of us, as we enter into the world, are quickly faced with this sneaky and faceless enemy of our souls. This nagging, never-giving-up and never-going-away sense that we are plain and simply unworthy. We are not worth someone's love. We are not worth someone's attention. We are not worth someone's time. Or so we think.

We are men or women of little value. What we have inside of us—our thoughts, our opinions, our dreams, our feelings—should not be let out because they are messed up. They aren't deserving of any kind of respect, consideration, or honor.

If we were a car in a used car lot, we'd be the junk heap in the corner gathering cobwebs around the wheel wells and bursting with weeds that have,

Introduction

by some strange miracle of nature, started sprouting out of its engine block. No sale sticker. No interested buyers. Simply spiders, weeds, and possibly a rogue rat or two.

Is that how you feel about you?

So back to my writing. My sitting and crafting and trying to form the perfect message so as not to make any mistakes—that's my own fight where, this morning, I've faced this nagging enemy of unworthiness. Your fight might be the SAT, or friends, or the deep and dark inner world of your emotions.

See, when we operate out of a place of security, high self-worth, and confidence, we become free. We become free to simply be. We become free to be ourselves unedited and unashamed. We begin to bravely move forward in life, not worrying about whether what we are doing is the absolute most perfect, most well-crafted, most mistake-free piece of work that we could possibly produce. We trust that the opinions that drive us are actually valuable and worth the world's attention. So we say them. We put them out there. We expose them to the elements of potential praise or criticism and we take whatever may come...happily.

For those of us who are free, the goal is not the outcome. The goal is not to receive affirmation and acceptance from the world as a result of what we've done. Free people don't need that. Free people are already affirmed and accepted, and they know it. No, free people put themselves out into the world in the face of fear and the possibility of rejection simply because they must. Like Jeremiah the prophet said, God's word burned inside of him like a fire, and he couldn't hold it back.

Free people understand that what's inside of them was never meant to be contained.

Do you know that?

Do you know that what's inside of you was meant to be unleashed on the world? Do you know that he planted his very words into the soil of your soul and that only you can release them to bring their life-giving power into the world?

Do you know that when God made you, he didn't have any regrets?

He still doesn't.

More Than Standard

That's right. When God made you he didn't step back and say, "Well, shoot. I meant to give her blonde hair, but it turns out that it's more brown. And I wanted her to be a bit softer-spoken, but I think she's becoming quite the loud-mouth. Hey! I thought I gave her a brain just like everyone else, so why the heck is she flopping on her tests?! Where did I go wrong in my blueprint for her? Oh well, I guess I'll just put her over here in the Second-Rate pile. I love her, but I don't really like her that much."

This is not your God. This is not your Father. This is not how he sees you. If you don't believe this yet, and you find yourself responding with several "Yeah, rights," that is absolutely okay. I want you to be honest with me and with yourself as you make your way through this book.

But I ask that you at least trust me enough to explore the possibility with me. The possibility that maybe God does like you after all. The possibility that maybe who you are and what you have to offer the world does actually matter. If you do, it will utterly change your life. It will pull you up and out of the swamp crud that keeps wrapping itself around your calves and pulling you flat on your face. It will give you the strength to lift your feet out of the muddy suction-y-ness that keeps you stuck and still. And it will propel you to finally run with all your might towards the future and destiny that your amazingly good Dad already has dreamed up for you.

When God looks at you, he sees his prized possession. He sees his precious kid.

PART ONE

FINDING OUR BEARINGS

CHAPTER ONE

THE SAT DOESN'T MATTER COMPARED TO THIS

LET'S BE HONEST. A book about SAT strategy—how to unlock the reading, writing, and math sections of this beast of a test—is pretty worthless in light of your life as a whole. You are made up of so much more than your ability to answer questions correctly. So if I were to only care about how you can boost your score without caring about how you can live awesome I would be doing you a huge disservice, leaving you wondering who you are, where you belong, and if you have what it takes to survive in this world, let alone to thrive. Does the SAT truly matter compared to those questions?

But that's the standard way of preparing for the SAT: obsessively focus on and prepare for the mechanics of the test. Leave the touchy-feely heart and mind stuff for another time. But you are not standard, and you shouldn't settle for what most standard students do.

You are more than standard. So much more. And your life is not about this test score, a grade on your GPA record, or any other number that somehow measures how you stack up against the millions of other students who are also secretly wondering whether or not they have what it takes to make it in this life.

* * *

STANDARD THINKING

I cannot and will not teach you how to do well on the SAT unless I teach you first who you are, who God is, and how you can think in the way that he has designed for you to think. God's way will free you from the poisonous thinking that keeps killing you, literally and spiritually. This standard approach to life breeds discouragement and depression. It keeps you feeling like you're worthless and like your future is most definitely going to suck. You are therefore destined to live small and without meaning.

This poisonous thinking tells you that you've blown it too many times. It tells you that you're not smart enough. It tells you that you don't have the right pedigree, the right upbringing, the right amount of money. You don't have the right friends. You don't go to the right school. You don't have the right build or looks or brains.

But I'm telling you, God is for you. He is your most ardent advocate. He fights on your behalf and even calls himself your Dread Champion—one who strikes fear into the hearts of your enemies. God hates this poisonous thinking because it kills your soul, and he loves you so freaking much. Why then, do we so often think that God is full of regret for having even made us? Why do we think that he probably isn't too stoked about what we've become and that we are just constantly disappointing him? That's the standard subconscious belief, even for Christians.

But that's crap. Satan, the enemy of your soul, is the one who wants you to think that you are worthless, powerless, and hopeless. Not God.

Think about it. God had the choice to create this world either with you in it or without you. And being God, he probably isn't going to settle for less than the best. No. He always wants, and always gets, more than standard. So the fact that he put you here means that you are amazing. Nobody else sees the world exactly as you see it; nobody else feels the world exactly as you feel it. Because of your unique position, God needs you here. This world needs you. We are better off because you are here with us. So stop thinking that God is disappointed in you!

YOUR MORE THAN STANDARD FOUNDATION

If I'm going to empower you to do well on the SAT then we need to start here. We need to establish an unshakeable foundation that we can build our SAT strategy on. So together, you and I are going to rebuild those ancient ruins of your heart. We're going to completely transform how your mind thinks and introduce you to the more than standard way of living. Once we've done that, then we'll jump into the test. But no sooner.

I assume you've seen the table of contents and that you, being a person, are more than capable of skipping ahead to read about the SAT-specific section. And that's fine. I'm sure there are going to be many people who do that. But I challenge you to not.

If the test is looming and coming soon, and you want to get through this book as fast as you can so that you can conquer the test sooner rather than later, I challenge you to muster up the strength and the grit to make the **powerful** decision to read the entire book. Just read it faster.

Commit to it. Don't cheapen it and sell yourself short by thinking that the SAT is the only part of this book that is applicable to you.

See, you need to go to war. Your life depends on it. Your very survival depends on it.

THE STANDARD ACTION PLAN (DON'T DO IT)

- 1) Worry about the SAT.
- 2) Stress out about the SAT.
- 3) In order to alleviate those feelings, adopt tunnel-vision and obsessively overfocus on SAT strategy.
- 4) Skip ahead to the SAT section.

THE MORE THAN STANDARD ACTION PLAN (DO THIS ONE)

- 1) Embrace the fact that the best way for you to conquer the SAT is to start with your foundation: your heart and your mind.
- 2) Be willing to let go of your normal way of thinking about yourself and your future.
- 3) DON'T skip ahead to the SAT section.

CHAPTER TWO

WHY JESUS IS IN AN SAT BOOK

IT MIGHT SEEM like a strange combination: working on your heart and mastering the SAT together in the same book. But even more strange is when we bring Jesus into the discussion. You don't see a whole lot out there about Jesus wanting you to do well on the SAT. Then again, we're not doing things the normal way, right?

I'm telling you, Jesus does want you to crush the SAT. He's for you. Whether you have had people who believe in you in the past or not, it doesn't matter now. Jesus is for you. God, the Father in Heaven, is for you. The Holy Spirit, walking with you throughout each day, is for you.

His thoughts and his plans for you are good. He says in Jeremiah 29, "I know the thoughts that I have for you. I know the plans, I know the vision that I have for you. It is to give you an amazing wide open future and to give you hope. It is not to bring you harm. It's not to hurt you. It's not to steal good out of your life. It is to benefit you. To help you" (my paraphrase).

WILL YOU ACCEPT THIS?

Will you accept the fact that God has a good dream for you? Will you accept the fact that even though you haven't believed him, he has never left you? He loves you with an unending, undying love. You can't explain it away. You can't sin it away. And you sure can't run away from it. He will continue coming after you over and over and over again. And that's true whether you

currently know him or don't. His love for you is not influenced by what you do or how you think.

Your *experience* of his love, however, is massively influenced by how you think. Your *experience* of powerful, awesome living is likewise massively influenced by how you think. Whether or not you get to live in the benefit and the blessing that the God of the universe offers to you in his open hand—that is definitely influenced by you. But on his end, his thoughts for you will never change.

You can live above the standards of what most people accept as normal. Normal is insecure and worried. You can be secure. Normal is living at the mercy of life circumstances. You can be unshaken. You can be unshakeable. Jesus did all the work needed for that more than standard kind of existence. And he wants to be involved—I mean really involved like a physical dad would be—in every single piece of your life. He wants to be involved not just in your church, if you go to one. He wants to be involved not just in getting you to obey all the rules, to do all the right things, to not sin all the wrong sins, and to follow all ten of the Ten Commandments.

WHAT JESUS WANTS FOR YOU, YOUR LIFE, AND YOUR SAT

No. He wants to join you in the real nitty gritty of your life. He wants to talk to you while you brush your teeth to get rid of your morning breath. He wants to give you pointers on how to talk to that crush who makes you nervous. He wants to help you remember what you studied for your chemistry test on electron shells and orbitals.

And he wants to bring his presence in when your parents are fighting at home again, and you don't know whether they are going to stay together. He wants to walk in step with you at school as you walk by that one kid who has no friends.

He wants to rescue you out of the habits that you've started. When you hurt yourself. When you give in to that addiction yet again. He wants to literally and actually and powerfully set you free so that you don't need things to help you cope anymore; so that you can live unshaken and above the noise of the

storm; so that the only thing that matters to you is him and your connection with him.

And you won't need to medicate because he medicated once and for all with his very blood. Do you understand how powerful and real he is? Do you understand how this is not just church? This is war. And Jesus is in it with you. And he won it already.

That's why Jesus is in an SAT book. He takes the standard method of stressing and overworking and cramming and he throws it out the window. He then takes your heart, soul, strength, and mind and injects you with his *better* way. He will help you with the SAT, sure. But he'll cause your soul to prosper in the process. That's more than standard.

See, he is involved in everything. He wants to be a part of your future. He wants to be a part of your studying. He wants to be a part of your classes. He wants to be a part of your test-taking. He wants to be a part of your college application.

Actually—You know what? That's wrong.

He doesn't want to just be a part of anything.

He wants to be everything. He wants you to give it all to him, no matter how scary that may be. He wants you to say, "This dream, this need, this expectation has been my security. It is the thing that has mattered most to me. But now I'm laying it down before you so that you can have all of me."

So let me correct myself and say that Jesus doesn't want to be a part of your test-taking. He wants you to completely give it to him in surrender.

This kind of living—this kind of surrender of yourself to him is not just for your parents. It's not just for when you've put a few more years under your belt. It's for you right now.

You need this. You need it big time.

THE STANDARD ACTION PLAN (DON'T DO IT)

- 1) Continue thinking that God doesn't like you and isn't proud of you.
- 2) Let the past and other people tell you what God thinks about you.
- 3) Accept your insecurity and worry as normal.
- 4) Keep Jesus out of the process.

THE MORE THAN STANDARD ACTION PLAN (DO THIS ONE)

- 1) Be open to the idea that God might actually like you. Of course he loves you. That one's easy. But he actually **likes** you too.
- 2) Get a journal or a notebook that is only for working through this book.
- 3) Write down this simple prayer (if you want to call it that) to Jesus. "If you want to be involved in all of my life, then I'm yours. I'm giving you full access to everything: the boring stuff, the dark stuff, the sin, the pain, the happy stuff, the SAT, and my future. I don't know what it fully means or looks like, but I want you to know, I'm in."
- 4) When you write it, do it with intention and meaning. Put your emotion behind it. Do not just make it an empty going-through-the-motions exercise.

TRUTH TO CHANGE YOUR LIFE

Jeremiah 29:11

CHAPTER THREE

FEARFUL AND INSECURE

THERE'S A STORY of a guy in the book of Judges. His name is Gideon. Gideon was alive at a time in history when God's people, the nation of Israel, were overrun by an enemy nation called Midian. And these people of Midian had quite literally eaten the Israelites' lunch for a long time. Judges chapter 6 says that the people of Israel had been "doing evil in the sight of the Lord" for many years, and as a result, God allowed the Midianites to overpower them for seven years.

The situation was hopeless. God's people—God's **chosen people**—were running for their lives, hiding all over the country in caves in the mountains. But the Israelites weren't supposed to be running scared. Of all the people on the earth, these were the ones that God decided to live with, to fight for, to do miracles for. And these were the ones who were running scared like babies, like wimps.

Every time Israel would plant crops, the Midianites would get their allies and "devour" all the produce of the land. Israel would do their best to work hard and make a living, but then Midian would steal it all. So you can imagine God's people starving, losing their strength, losing their hope, losing their future, losing their potential to thrive.

They started losing their confidence, their power to bring change into the world. And they started living small, hoping just to make it another day. Judges

says that the Midianites left the countryside as a wasteland. Consequently, the Israelites were running out of strength.

ARE YOU GETTING BULLIED BY LIFE?

Does that sound like you? Does it feel like there's an unstoppable invisible force that lays you out? It wastes you away and drains the life out of you. What makes it even worse is that as soon as you start to see some good progress—something springing up that gives you hope—it's gone. It gets stolen.

Maybe this is your experience in the very realm of life that we're dealing with here: school, taking the test, applying to college. In fact, the majority of students that I work with are in this exact place. They don't feel hopeful. They don't feel confident. They feel like whatever they're going to put out into the world—whether it's applications, SAT tests, opinions, or just themselves—it's all going to be trampled. And they have no future. This is common...standard.

If this is you, then you feel like nothing is ever going to be enough. You're going to starve. So you live in fear. You get overcome and paralyzed by the fear that the world is stronger than you and that you are all alone. Again...standard.

GIDEON, THE HERO?

Next in the story, Gideon enters. Gideon, too, was afraid. He hid. He had no confidence. He did not value who he was. And he had just about had it with God. He felt like God had pretty much abandoned him, his family, and his whole nation. And now he didn't have any hope that God would do anything for him or his people.

On the outside, Gideon was nothing impressive (which may be exactly how you feel). He, like the rest of his nation, was getting overrun by the Midianites, and as a result he decided to do his job of threshing wheat while hiding in a winepress. But if you're like most young western teenagers, that's a bunch of gobbly goop, so let's get a clearer picture.

Threshing wheat was where the farmer would lay the newly harvested wheat stalks out on a big flat floor, usually outdoors, usually in a high and windy place. They would then throw the stalks up in the air and let the wind

carry away the “chaff” while the wheat berries or kernels would fall back down to the floor. This threshing floor was open, visible, and in other words vulnerable to attack.

Conversely, winepresses were big stone pools or vats that were usually sunken into the ground, meaning they were also less visible to any lurking enemies. So Gideon was doing his job in hiding.

We can look at this two ways. One, we can see Gideon as full of grit, resilience, resourcefulness and never-give-up-ness, since he was still pressing on, still working to provide sustenance for his people even while under threat from the enemy. He didn’t give up.

Or two, we can see him as fearful and insecure. Instead of confidently doing his work out in the open and being willing to confront the enemy if need be, he hid and was willing to probably do a less than stellar job in order to avoid detection.

I’ll bet that it was a mixture of both. He hadn’t fully given up. He wasn’t just sitting around on his butt waiting to die and wallowing in self pity. He was moving. He must have had at least a small glimmer of hope. A small vision of what the future could be. But then there’s also the fact that, later in the chapter, we see him acting in fear when God tells him to pull down the statue of Baal, a false god, that was standing in his family’s land. The story says that Gideon was “too afraid of his family and the men of the town to do” the job in the daytime, so he waited for the cover of night to do it.

Nonetheless, he did it.

YOU, THE HERO—JUST AS YOU ARE

Fear mixed with action. Is that you? You are here reading this book, and you aren’t giving up. You have fire and fight inside of you, but you are afraid. You are afraid you don’t have what it takes in this world. You are afraid that all your hard work will be for nothing and the good in life will just be stolen from you. You are afraid that you’re alone. So you have to hide in self-protection and fight to hold on to what little you have.

If this is how you move through life, then you'll approach the SAT from a stance of "I hope I do okay" instead of from a place of strength, courage, and confidence.

But you know what? God doesn't care how unimpressive you may look from the outside or how inadequate you feel on the inside. While Gideon was hiding, the story says that God showed up, appearing right there in the winepress with him, in the middle of his fear, unworthiness, and doubt.

God tells him, "I am with you. And you are a mighty man of valor." And he is telling you the same thing today. Right now. It's up to you whether you're going to believe it or not, but you do hear him saying it. He is with you, and he sees you as a mighty woman or man of valor.

You are not an unworthy, hiding, shivering poor soul. You are mighty and precious to him.

As God showed up, Gideon actually said all the things you may want to say but aren't sure whether you can or not. He questioned God. He blamed him. "Oh yeah?! If you're with me, then where the heck have you been?! Where are all the supposed miracles everyone says you did?"

When God is unfazed and just repeats his high opinion of Gideon by telling him to go in his strength and save Israel, Gideon replies with, "Who the heck am I to do anything? I'm small. I'm worthless. You've got the wrong guy."

So let me encourage you: tell God how you feel. If you want to heal your thinking and become strong and confident, you'll have to work through this stuff.

So tell him how you're feeling. He can take it. He'll listen. Then he will build you into the mighty man or woman that he dreamed you to be. He'll turn you around and call you into an identity that you didn't realize was even there. Just like God saved Israel through Gideon, he'll push back darkness and bring his presence to the world through you.

THE STANDARD ACTION PLAN (DON'T DO IT)

- 1) Continue hiding from life and its challenges.
- 2) Settle for being overrun by discouragement, doubt, insecurity, and fear.
- 3) Don't be honest with God about how you feel.

THE MORE THAN STANDARD ACTION PLAN (DO THIS ONE)

- 1) Open your new notebook or journal that has your exercise from last chapter's Action Plan in it.
- 2) Good. Now write out everything you are feeling right now as a prayer to God. This is not supposed to be proper or fancy or "religious." Tell him your honest feelings as if you were sitting across from him at a picnic table.
- 3) Kindle the fire and the fight that are inside of you, even if they are small. To do this, write about them. Acknowledge them. Say something like, "Yes, I do want change. I do want to live free from fear and insecurity. I can do it. I just don't know how to. Will you help me?"

TRUTH TO CHANGE YOUR LIFE

Judges 6:12

All of Judges chapter 6 through 8: the full story of Gideon.

PART TWO

HOW THE STANDARD WAY OF THINKING DRAINS YOUR LIFE

INTRO TO PART 2

AWESOME! YOU’VE MADE it to part two where we will attack head-on the enemy that has been so fiercely and stealthily coming against you, sabotaging your SAT performance, your life, and your future.

This enemy is, believe it or not, the standard way of doing life for most people—students and adults alike. But remember, you are more than standard. You are not settling for the experience of most people.

Here’s how we are going to engage the enemy in part two:

CHAPTER BREAKDOWN

Chapter 4

We identify “what.” What exactly is this enemy that has to be dealt with?

Chapter 5

A light-hearted story from my childhood to illustrate for you “why.” Why do you want to get this enemy out of your life? What kinds of effects can it have on you?

Chapter 6

We diagram your life (with a whiteboard and dry-erase markers) from a bird’s eye perspective, and we begin to see the very familiar and pervasive ways that this enemy influences you from day to day—especially when it comes to you pursuing your future.

Chapters 7 and 8

These chapters give you *more* motivation to pursue change. They show you the emotional damage that comes from living as a victim and also the broken lenses through which victims view the world.

Chapter 9

We ask the question: How did you get to this point? You don't just wake up one day to find that you've let an enemy in and your life is fully under its sway. There are steps—building blocks—that contribute piece by piece to this current, standard way of living. You need to know what those building blocks are so that you can remove them.

Chapter 10

The complete loss that we go through when we let our victimhood create fear and unbelief in us. Don't be like the people of Israel! Unless you're being Joshua or Caleb...but we'll get to them later in part three.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE ENEMY DRAGGING DOWN YOUR SCORE: THE VICTIM MENTALITY

LIKE GIDEON, YOU and I are at war. The stakes are far higher than just an SAT score, a college acceptance letter, or a career with a sweet-sauce salary. Consequently, we absolutely must learn to live in victory—in conqueror-ship. We need to learn how to be unshakeable, unstoppable, and awesome. This is exactly what Jesus has for us. To get there, we're going to start exposing the enemy.

When it comes to the SAT and all it represents about your future, there is a certain weapon in hell's arsenal that is sneaky, dark, and life-draining. The insidious danger of this weapon, though, is that it actually feels very normal and justified. In fact, it feels like the truth and that God himself must agree with it. This weapon—that wants to sneakily cut you to pieces—is what we're going to call a victim mentality.

If that term, victim mentality, doesn't mean anything to you yet, don't worry. We're going to expose all of its parts, and you'll soon see how it has sabotaged you as you fight desperately to succeed.

There are some very familiar perspectives, or thought-patterns, that are actually lies designed to ruin you and keep you living small and just barely surviving. When you take the bait and believe these lies—again, that seem very true—you feel defeated and discouraged with very little hope. You sell yourself short. You sell God short, and you sell the world short.

The Enemy Dragging Down Your Score: The Victim Mentality

Moreover, and maybe more pertinent to where you are at right now, you sell your future short. And I don't want you to do that.

To be a truly good test taker, you've got to kill this victim mentality and completely reframe how you see the world. This will, by default, reframe how you see the test and will naturally remove the roadblocks that damage your performance.

THE STANDARD ACTION PLAN (DON'T DO IT)

- 1) Do nothing.

THE MORE THAN STANDARD ACTION PLAN (DO THIS ONE)

- 1) Again, open your new notebook or journal.
- 2) Look up and write down the definition of "victim." Ask Jesus how you've been living life according to this definition. Write down what comes to mind.
- 3) Look up the following verses in the Bible and write them down. Then write down your response to them. What questions do they raise? What objections? Do they stir any desires in you? Tell God what you think of them.

TRUTH TO CHANGE YOUR LIFE

Romans 8:37

Philippians 4:13

Romans 5:17

Revelation 12:9-11

CHAPTER FIVE

WHY YOU DEFINITELY DON'T WANT TO BE A VICTIM: THE (TOO) TALL AND (TOO) STEEP SLIDE

THE SUMMER AFTER my fourth grade year, I was one of the elite few (three to be exact) to be invited to my best friend, Damian's (not his real name), birthday party: a day trip to the mythical Manteca Waterslides Water Park. I was a whopping sub-90-pound babe magnet—shirtless—sporting my bright yellow, orange, and red mosaic-looking swim shorts.

Oh yeah.

And lucky me, the other two kids invited were girls, one of whom was Madge (not her real name), the desire of all fifth grade boys at the school. I liked her. And she liked me. This was a dream come true. Not only did I get to spend an epic day with my best friends at an epic waterpark full of all the water-filled magic you can imagine, but I got to show off for Madge. She would surely fall even more madly in love with me.

Or so I thought.

Everything was great all day. I got to show her how fun and funny I could be and also how ripped I was in my fifth grade self. But then, the end came.

Our day was winding down, and we were heading for the exit. I thought I had totally owned this day and impressed Madge. But suddenly, as if in some

nightmare, my friends saw the one slide we hadn't touched all day: the tallest one in the park that plummeted straight down. Right alongside my confidence.

I was terrified. I would have been able to go home a happy "man" had we never given the slide a second thought. But the other three in our group, including Madge, wanted to conquer it.

How could this happen? How could I get out of it? Could I conveniently have to go to the bathroom? Could I please get a phone call from my stock broker in New York? How about a Major League Baseball scout needing to talk over my future contract with the Giants?

Nope. No magical rescue came. They wanted to go on it. I didn't. But I told them I did because, let's face it, fear is not sexy. I vaguely remember climbing to the top, waiting in line, and letting the three of them go in front of me because maybe if I delayed I wouldn't have to do it.

But, I did.

I went down that slide and could feel my bright mosaic-tiled shorts riding up my thighs, exposing who-knows-what. I remember feeling the seams in the slide rushing past me over my bony back. I remember feeling like, for a time, I was floating, not even being supported by the slide. Oh! And the water stung my feet as it whooshed past.

I got to the bottom though, feeling lucky to be alive. I was so thankful that I would never have to do it again. I had won. Reputation saved, girl wooed, best friend impressed.

But as I rushed to get off that dang slide, I heard my friends, including Madge, say they wanted to do it again.

Shortest. Victory. Ever.

I was crushed. I didn't go again. I was too afraid. So I chose to sit it out and wait on the side with Damien's parents, watching the others bask in their confidence.

Meanwhile, here I am—a "mama's boy" watching in fear.

And you know what happened? Madge didn't like me from that point forward. Even on the ride home, she was clearly not interested. I lost the girl that I had worked so hard to win. How could I blame her? Who's attracted to a coward?

WE SELL OURSELVES SHORT

You see, we have this persistent belief that whispers to us how we can't overcome. We're not meant for great things like conquering evil waterslides. So we are destined to lose the things that we really desire. The only possible chance that we have at doing something great is if someone or something forces us into it while we are, all along, searching for a way of escape.

We sell ourselves short in the same way I sold myself short on that waterslide. I could have ridden it countless times and not have anything happen to me. I could have enjoyed it. But I listened to the thoughts that said that I was a victim. I listened to the doubt, the fear, and the "poor me." Consequently, I lost the respect of some good friends. I lost the girl who liked me. And I lost my own joy and confidence.

The slide stole my mojo.

Thankfully I've made a full recovery since then and have a wife who I am completely convinced is way more awesome than any other woman on the planet. So, thanks for your momentary pity, but I assure you, you can stop feeling bad for me now. I'm good.

THE STANDARD ACTION PLAN (DON'T DO IT)

- 1) Live in fear of things that are out of your comfort zone.
- 2) Settle for less by saying things like, "That's just how I am."

THE MORE THAN STANDARD ACTION PLAN (DO THIS ONE)

- 1) Open your new notebook or journal.
- 2) Write about three things that you think you are unable to do or to do well. They can be school-related or not. Why do you think you are unable to do them? What emotions do they make you feel? What do you think God would say?
- 3) Read Jeremiah chapter one where God first calls Jeremiah a prophet and Exodus chapter three where God speaks to Moses from the burning bush. What do you notice about how each of the two men responded to God? Did they respond in confidence or inadequacy?

TRUTH TO CHANGE YOUR LIFE

Jeremiah 1:5-10

Jeremiah 1:17-19

Joshua 1:1-9

Isaiah 41:10

CHAPTER SIX

HOW A VICTIM VIEWS LIFE (AND THE SAT)

LET ME SHOW you how the victim mentality poisons the way most students view their lives, their futures, the SAT, etc. I'm going to have you imagine that you and I are in a classroom with a nice big whiteboard, and I'm showcasing my lackluster art skills for the class with the available dry-erase markers.

Ready?

Good.

On the left side of the board, there is a beautiful little black stick figure. This is you. And the stick figure has, not a smile or a frown, but a squiggly line for a mouth. You're not happy, but you're not necessarily unhappy either. However, we do know that you frequently feel worried, stressed, overwhelmed, and under a lot of pressure. The reason for this is on the other side of the board.

Over on the right, I've drawn a basic mountain, much taller than stick-figure-you. At the top of the mountain is the word "Happiness" floating above the peak with some shine and sparkle dancing all around it.

The truth is, many words would work here.

Happiness.

Purpose.

Meaning.

Fulfillment.

How a Victim Views Life (and the SAT)

These are the things that, when you strip away the tangible goods we're also searching for (money, a house, a spouse, a secure job, friends), every person on the planet wants and needs in order to truly thrive. These are every person's goals.

All of those physical goods that we work to amass in life are for the end goal of happiness—or purpose, or meaning, or fulfillment.

The tangible things are the actual mountain itself. If you can amass enough of those good tangible blessings, then soon the mountain will be tall enough to reach that floating shiny “Happiness” zone.

Imagine heavenly choirs singing.

So. You are on the left side of the whiteboard, squiggly line for a mouth. A mountain made of the things of life and with the word “Happiness” floating above it is on the right.

Now for the middle. This is where the different challenges or requirements or checkpoints that we must pass will go. For you, imagine a nice big booklet, definitely taller than you, with a big angry face on. And on this booklet are the three dreaded letters: S-A-T.

In order for you to reach your mountain of happiness, you've got to make it past the SAT, this giant that's standing in your way. It holds the key to your admission into a good college—no, the **right** college. And it therefore holds the key to your landing the best job you can, making the most money you can, achieving the most success possible, and building your best life.

If you get an amazing score, congratulations you get to move on to the bigger and better things of life. In fact, if we're honest, that's when your **real** life will actually begin. But if you bomb the SAT—well. You don't want to bomb it. Then you'll be relegated to a crappy school, low-end job, no money, no spouse, and you'll be living in your parents' basement with potato chip crumbs on your shirt.

Do you want that? No!

So you'd darn well better boost your SAT score!

Geez!

* * *

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

It's extreme and cartoonish, I know, but this is how most students, and maybe even you, approach the test. In fact, this is how most students also approach their school grades, and their college essays, and...

This standard perspective is life-draining. No wonder you're worried, stressed, and overwhelmed. The very core of your existence is all hanging on this obstacle, the SAT. Of course you're going to freak out. Of course you're going to feel inadequate. Of course you'll raise your hand when I ask, "Who here would say that you deal with test anxiety?"

In this too common approach to life, notice the role that time plays. The important things in life are all in the future. They are on a mountain that you are not yet on. But hopefully you'll get there...someday. Consequently, instead of living in this moment as if this day is the most precious gift in the world, you live always looking down the road wishing that you could be just a little farther, just around the next bend.

Once you get (fill in the blank), then you'll finally be happy. Then you'll finally be living in your calling and purpose. But not yet. This is currently the necessary drudgery that you have to plow through until the good stuff comes. You are a victim of time.

Also take note of the direction of the flow of energy in this scenario. Everything is moving from the outside in. From external factors toward you. Consequently, you are constantly on guard, protecting yourself from attack. If things on the outside have the ability to influence and hurt you so much, then you start to feel like the world is dangerous and out to get you.

You walk through life fearful and unsure rather than confident and joyful.

Since the stream of well-being-ness is flowing in from the outside, to fill your soul, then all of those external circumstances have become the source of your happiness. Your well-being is utterly dependent on them, which sets you up to be one of their prime victims.

THE STANDARD ACTION PLAN (DON'T DO IT)

- 1) Focus on your goals and desires too much until they become obsessions that your very well-being depends on.

THE MORE THAN STANDARD ACTION PLAN (DO THIS ONE)

- 1) Open your new notebook or journal. Draw the picture I described for you above. In the mountain on the right, write whatever physical, tangible things you want to pursue (a house, a spouse, a job, a good school, etc.). Remember these things are good, they are okay to desire, but in a healthy perspective. Above that mountain of things write the word "Happiness" and other intangible core values that matter to you, like "fulfillment" or "purpose."
- 2) In big bold letters, label this picture "Garbage: the Victim Mentality," and put an *X* through it.
- 3) Ask Jesus to show you how to have a healthy and powerful perspective on your life. Ask him to be the King and Lord over you. Tell him you don't want to be your own king and lord.
- 4) Look up the following verses and journal about them. Write whatever prayer to God they happen to stir up inside of you.

TRUTH TO CHANGE YOUR LIFE

Psalm 37:4

Matthew 16:24-26

CHAPTER SEVEN

SIGNS THAT SOMETHING'S GOTTA CHANGE: YOUR INNER COLLATERAL DAMAGE

WHAT FOLLOWS IS the basic rundown on the inner collateral damage you incur when you live as a victim. Let this fuel your fire to be free of the victim mentality.

DEPRESSION

When you live as a victim, depression is not far away. You constantly feel discouraged and are usually battling to stave off a dark, nebulous feeling of down-ness. You feel powerless and unable to do anything of value in life. When you live in this powerless place where you are simply the product of your environment, you are living outside of the power-FULL identity that God created in you.

As a product of your environment, like a tennis ball floating around the huge Pacific Ocean with absolutely no ability to do anything except wait and see where the next wind or wave will send you, you are not actually representing your Father well. If his DNA runs through you, and he is a powerful creator, one who shows up in a chaotic environment and brings order, purpose, meaning, and life—then you are meant to be the same.

When you live in the lie that you are not a creator, but are instead simply a consumer who is shaped and limited by whatever comes your way, then the

disharmony and conflict between how you are living and how you are supposed to live will absolutely cause depression and discouragement.

This is made worse when you say you believe in Jesus and his saving power, but still live as though it's not true. It creates this war inside of you where you feel broken and anxious. You end up living in a low-grade, underlying depression from day to day. It might ebb and flow, but it's always coming back. It's always lurking, and you never get to experience consistent, and powerful joy.

MOTIVATION

Depression almost always beckons low or altogether lacking motivation to come and join the fun going on inside of you. As you dream about how amazing life could possibly be after high school when you step onto that mythical college quad and enter into the ranks of the truly happy people who have gone before you, you quickly realize that, in order to see that dream come to pass, you've got to first conquer the challenges in front of you.

Thus, the existence of this book: to help you with the SAT, a major portion of those challenges.

As you formulate your plan for handling the SAT, applying to schools, writing your essays, etc. within a victim mentality, it will be much more difficult for you to work up the motivation to actually put in the hard work that's needed to do well. Especially on something so boring and mundane as the SAT.

If you're just a victim, and your success on the test is out of your hands anyway, then what's the point of working hard? If you weren't already born smart and able to conquer an entrance test, then you'll just be spinning your wheels and wasting energy as you half-heartedly prepare to go and march to your death on the battlefield. Frankly, that's a stupid approach and a stupid attitude to have. It's full of defeat and self-pity and won't get you anywhere.

I'll be the first to say, by the way, that you're not stupid. But this—this thinking you're engaging in—it is indeed stupid. It gets me angry because I've seen it steal the joy and power out of so many of my students. If it's all out of your hands, and your future is just up to chance, or up to God's good or bad

mood, then the best you can do on test day is just show up and see what happens.

But that does not work. And it has never worked. For the Israelites searching out the Promised Land, this approach didn't work. They hadn't settled in their minds who they were going to be ahead of time. They hadn't based their thinking on the unshakeable promise and character of God. They hadn't founded their estimation of their own worth and potential in what God said about them. Instead, they wanted to just wait and see and let whatever they encountered in that foreign land determine who they were going to be, how they were going to think, and, sadly, the type of future they were going to experience.

The test might look intimidating to you. The path of getting to your future might look impossible. But if you are a victim of these impossible things lacking the motivation to rise and go, to conquer, to fight, then the impossible will always remain impossible. You'll never experience the life of Jesus, who said that "with God, all things are possible."

ANGER

As a victim, your well-being is out of your control and is instead influenced by nearly everyone else around you. In fact, you can start to live as though your well-being is actually not even your own responsibility. Instead, it's the job of other people to make you happy. So any unhappiness and dissatisfaction you feel, and any failure on your part to live in your full potential is actually their fault.

Consequently, you put up walls of anger and bitterness, meanwhile listening to the lie that you're only protecting yourself from their mistreatment, and you become unable to truly connect in meaningful relationship. This makes you feel alone and even more angry because nobody wants to be close to you, to help you, and to make you happy. You blame them in anger, when the problem is actually your own fault.

If you're not careful, this anger and bitterness toward others can persist through your whole life. I'm sure you've met that person who only ever complains about what has gone wrong, what is going wrong right now during

your conversation with them, and what's about to go wrong as soon as they go on their not-so-merry way. They talk about how the system has failed them, and if only a certain someone out there had done something differently, then they'd be able to finally live their life happily.

Not good. Don't be that person. Live in your God-given identity as a conqueror.

LACK OF AUTHENTICITY

One of the most tragic effects of living in a victim mentality is that you live as less than your true self, afraid to be who you are made to be. You feel like you should be seen and not heard. You shouldn't speak up. Your opinion doesn't count for anything, and if anyone gets to know the real you, they'll discover what a moron you really are.

So you blend in. You are very good at observing social situations and conversations among your groups of friends, not because you love listening, but because you need to know how to talk and behave in the way that everyone will like the most.

And maybe it works! Maybe everyone really does like you! Maybe they all think you're the nicest girl or guy in the world, but it's not because you're walking in confidence and pouring out the love of Jesus to everyone. It's because you don't rock the boat or stand up for what you actually think. Instead you know how to manage your words and actions in order to manipulate people into liking you.

When you never live authentically, you never get to truly connect with the world around you because you're not truly present. You are not connecting because the real you is buried under what you think everyone else wants from you. But Jesus made you to be real. I want you to be real. It's time to start peeling off the layers of inauthenticity, anger, lack of drive, and depression that have begun to form. It's time to see true freedom, true conqueror-ship, true SAT dominance.

THE STANDARD ACTION PLAN (DON'T DO IT)

- 1) Think that things like depression, low motivation, anger, and lack of authenticity are simply parts of who you are, facets of your life that you'll always be stuck with. You may not like them, but you've got to deal with them.

THE MORE THAN STANDARD ACTION PLAN (DO THIS ONE)

- 1) Consider something new. Consider that it just might be possible for Jesus to heal you of those things. Be willing to step out and risk disappointment by daring to believe that you can change—that Jesus can change you.
- 2) Open your new notebook or journal. Write an honest prayer to God, asking him to free you of these negative emotions and any others that come up.
- 3) In your prayer, ask him to show you how you can change your actions, choices, thoughts so that you can pave the way for his transforming power in you.
- 4) Ask him to tell you who you are instead of those things. What kind of person has he intended for you to be? Write down his answers.

TRUTH TO CHANGE YOUR LIFE

Philippians 2:13

2 Corinthians 5:17

CHAPTER EIGHT

SIGNS THAT SOMETHING'S GOTTA CHANGE, VOLUME 2: YOUR TOXIC PERSPECTIVES

YOUR PERSPECTIVE ON GOD

How do you view God? When we live as victims, then we see him as far less than he actually is. We see him in a way that incriminates him. When you believe the lies of victimhood, you start to see God as somebody who has not been true to his word. And that causes you to live in a place of insecurity. Do you know how important it is to my kids that I live as a man of my word? Dad following through on what he says gives them a place of safety. No matter what happens in the world around them, they can trust Dad.

If I were to try a cruel experiment where, for seven days, I made promises to them but never actually fulfilled those promises, I would rock their world... in a bad way. I could say, "Okay girls, I'm going to make you breakfast right now, and it's going to be amazing. It's going to be eggs and bacon and hot chocolate." Actually let's up the ante, they would love even more to have sourdough pancakes from mommy's homemade sourdough starter, thick-cut, crunchy, grease drenched bacon, and hot chocolate to go with. I'd also promise them homemade blueberry syrup to pour over their pancakes along with the normal hot maple syrup.

Alright, so I promise them basically the most amazing breakfast they can conceive of, and then I just proceed to leave their room where I greeted them

with this glorious announcement, and I go sit on the couch, pull out my phone, and zone out for the next hour. They get up, come out of their room, and say, “Daddy, what about breakfast?”

“Yeah, I know. I’m making it.” But I just sit there, eyes on phone, tuning out my girls.

Thirty minutes pass and my increasingly hurt and disheartened girls remind me, “Daddy, you never made us breakfast.”

“Oh yeah, you’re right. Well, it’s okay. Just go ahead and grab some crackers.”

This scenario sounds so stupid, and is so out of character that it seems ridiculous to even imagine. If I did this, my girls would be confused, hurt, and disappointed, absolutely. But now imagine that I did it again that afternoon.

I announce to my girls, “Okay, I’m going to come outside and play with you. We’re going to have so much fun together with your Barbies, and your Calico Critters, and my remote control car. I’m even going to color with you.”

They get so excited that they are already tripping over themselves gathering all of the necessary toys and supplies. And then, everything ready, they eagerly wait for me to come out the door to the yard. And they wait. And they wait.

Then they see me grab my car keys, kiss my wife goodbye, and head out to the car to go to the gym. “But Daddy said he was going to play with us!!!”

How heartbreakingly cruel does this scenario sound? What kind of a horrible dad would I be if this is how I engaged with my kids? And yet, our actions, thoughts, and beliefs declare that God is exactly this kind of Father: one who says one thing but has no intention of following through.

The spies of Israel had heard from God. “Hey. Guys. I’m giving you this land.” But their unbelief made the statement to the world that he probably wouldn’t follow through. He was going to say one thing but do something entirely different. What a bad parent they made him out to be. What a bad parent you and I make him out to be when we live as victims. Honestly, if he’s as bad as we act like he is, we’re better off just saying “goodbye” to him and doing life on our own. Being our own master. Better than living in the insecurity and lack of safety that an untrustworthy Father creates.

And trust me, I know. I know that there may be things in life that have happened to you, that have really made it seem like God is a bad Father. Like he's not even there. And I'm sorry for those heartbreaking places of pain in your life. I'm sorry that your life has hurt you, and that all the evidence has shown you that God does not, in fact, care. I don't know how to give you a satisfactory explanation for your pain right now. But I do know that God actually does care.

We often make God out to be the villain in our lives, but Jesus said, "Hey guys. It's the enemy, Satan, who steals from you. Who kills and takes life away. Who destroys things that are good. He's the culprit. But I, Jesus...I came to undo it all, to give you life, to bring you restoration." We tend to think, however, that it is God who steals, kills, and destroys while his enemies are actually the good, exciting, thrilling things of life.

Now all of a sudden we are living in complete insecurity with no point of reference, no anchor in a good and safe Dad. Because the word of our Dad gives us boundaries to thrive in. Something to rely on when everything else is shaky.

YOUR PERSPECTIVE ON YOURSELF

The victim mentality also gives you a bad perspective on yourself. We won't go into huge detail here, as we've been talking about this quite a bit already. But this mentality basically says to you, "You are worthless." It tells you that you're not worth anyone's time or energy or investment. It says that you should definitely not be arrogant enough to think that what you have to say could benefit the people around you: your friends, your teachers, your parents. "You don't have the power to make someone's day better. Who do you think you are?"

It makes you devalue yourself. And you definitely don't love yourself. That sounds wrong and weird anyway...right? As a victim, you think that you are darn lucky to have barely been saved. If Jesus could have chosen, he probably would have chosen a whole lot of other people to save before getting to you. You just aren't that desirable or important to him.

As a victim you don't like who you are. You wish you were someone else, any number of the other kids at school who are more put together, happier, smarter, more well-loved, "most likely to make girls faint just by a smile," etc. This creates the pattern in you of not presenting yourself as strong and confident to the world. And, duh! You're not! Confidence is the last thing that you feel most of the time.

Want to know how all this is relevant to your college entrance tests? That's it right there! Confidence. To do your absolute best and raise your score, you need to have confidence. So stop seeing yourself this way. Pull out of it. Ask Jesus for help. You were created to be confident. Humble, yes. Dependent on Jesus for your everything, yes. But yes, still confident. You were meant to walk into a test room with your head held high knowing that you are going to conquer whatever comes your way.

YOUR PERSPECTIVE ON YOUR FUTURE

When you view God as a terrible parent who never follows through, and you see yourself as worthless and unlikeable, the natural consequence is that you get a toxic set of beliefs about your future. You begin to believe that your future will most likely be bad, or so-so at best. After all, you're not able to make anything worthwhile of yourself or your passions.

And you have this sense that won't go away that good things happen to everyone but you. Every once in a while you get something that is somewhat good, but it's never completely fulfilling.

You'd better not try very hard to accomplish your goals, and you sure as heck better not dream too big. You need to settle for something less, something socially acceptable. Something that's actually within your short little reach.

But the Bible says that if you are choosing to run with Jesus and passionately desiring to know him better, while you grow in your love for him and in your experience of his love for you, then he will give you the desires of your heart.

That means that you'd better dream, my friend. Don't hold back. Don't explain away the things that you are passionate to do. Stop turning your heart's Plan B into your future's Plan A. Instead, start with this: delight

yourself in God, and say, “God, I love you. And I want more of you. I want you to have all of me and to form in me the man or woman that you saw in me before the world began. You are my joy and my highest priority.”

If you go there with him and choose to really abandon yourself to him, then he says in reply, “Yes! Okay! This is good! I’m so excited about you, son! I’m so excited about you, daughter! I’m proud of you! What else do you want? Because the other desires you have in you are good too. I want to give them to you.”

YOUR PERSPECTIVE ON THE SAT

And now we get down to it: your perspective on the SAT (and really, test-taking in general). When you’re stuck in the victim mentality, the SAT becomes a giant that stands in the way between you and your happiness, you and your purpose, you and your meaning, you and your destiny. You are at the mercy of this all-powerful gatekeeper that has the authority to either allow you to enjoy yourself, hopefully, or to completely ruin you.

As you are actually sitting in the test center on dreaded SAT day, you doubt yourself constantly. You are afraid that you’re screwing up without even knowing it. You have test anxiety. You feel like you can’t answer questions that you actually do know how to answer.

You find yourself hoping that this version of the test that happened to be published for this test date matches up well with you and your strengths. You are putting your success into the hands of chance and, of course, the test-makers.

Instead of going into the test with power, authority, and on the attack, you’re playing defense, just trying to survive the next four hours of hell.

But I don’t want this for you. And you obviously don’t want this for you. And hopefully you’re starting to believe by now that Jesus doesn’t want this for you.

THE MORE THAN STANDARD ACTION PLAN

- 1) Look up each of the following verses.
- 2) In your new journal, write how each one directly combats one of more of the toxic perspectives we talked about in this chapter.
- 3) Do these verses feel true to you? Or do they seem like just nice-sounding empty words? Be honest. Write about it. Tell God about it. Heck, go to my website and email me about it. Seriously. I mean it. I'll answer you.

TRUTH TO CHANGE YOUR LIFE

John 10:10

Matthew 7:7-11

Romans 8:31-38

Jeremiah 29:11-14

Isaiah 43:1-4

CHAPTER NINE

HOW WE BECOME VICTIMS: WE BELIEVE THE WRONG THINGS

IT'S TIME FOR us to expose the victim mentality in your life by pinpointing some specific thoughts that, until now, you've unknowingly allowed to eat your lunch. These lunchtime bullies have come and grabbed you by the ankles, turned you upside down, and shaken out all your lunch money from your pockets.

But no more! You're done with that. It's time to be free.

DO THIS EXERCISE

What follows is a list of lies. Most people go through life accepting these as true and even feeling like God thinks them too.

As you read this list, I want you to ask yourself, "Which of these are familiar to me? Which of these have I been believing?"

Write down, as you go, at least five lies that seem especially familiar to you, as if they have become an ingrained and "natural" way of looking at yourself and your world.

- I am not worthy of someone else's attention or consideration or love.
- I have to perform to earn love.
- I am dumb.
- I am not smart.

How We Become Victims: We Believe the Wrong Things

-I am not someone who people want to be friends with.

-My parents don't like me.

-If my friends knew the real me, they wouldn't like me.

-I'm not a good test-taker.

-I'll never succeed.

-I'm afraid of failure.

-What I think and have to say—my opinion—does not matter, and it's probably wrong.

-I am scum, worthless.

-My dreams are stupid and pointless.

-My desires are too much.

-I should be happy with what I have.

-I will never be free of (you fill in the blank).

-I'm not capable or able.

-I'm never going to change.

-I'm just messed up.

-That's just how I am.

-God is too busy for me.

-God likes other people more than he likes me.

-God only saved me because he had to. That's just who he is.

-He doesn't find me very valuable.

-I have to earn God's acceptance by my obedience.

-If I live like a Christian should, according to the Bible, then God will like me and love me.

-Other people are meant to change the world, but not me.

-It's best if I just keep my mouth shut and mind my own business.

-Wealth and success probably won't happen for me, and I can't go out and find them.

-God might use me but probably not. So I'll just find a job and make a living and go to church.

-God uses other people powerfully, but not me.

- I am not somebody who can change the world.
- I don't have much to offer.
- I cannot bless somebody else's day.
- They are not fortunate to know me.
- I have nothing of value to bring to the table.
- I can't make someone else's day better. I just hope my own is okay.

COMBAT THESE LIES WITH TRUTH

Each of these lies is a building block that constructs the bigger-picture victim mentality. For you to start to live differently, to live in the awesomeness that's available to you, you've got to attack these lies with truth. You've got to attack their fear and unbelief with faith.

The Bible says that you have armor available to you, and one of the pieces is the "shield of faith" with which you can guard yourself against the flaming arrows that are constantly getting shot at you. See, you don't change your perspective or suddenly live in a Conqueror's Mindset just by magically saying the word. You call out the lies and you go to war against them with the truth.

You may think I'm wrong here, but I know of no powerful source of truth other than what God himself, your Creator and Father, thinks about you. That's way more solid and powerful than your own conjured-up positive thinking self-help mantras. Then it's just you versus the world. But if you're discovering and aligning yourself with what God says, then nothing can stop you because nothing can stop God.

Romans chapter 8 asks the very good question, "If God is for you, then who the heck could possibly ever be against you? God himself stands in your defense, so tell me, who's going to accuse you with any amount of success?"

It's time we go to war and start to win the battle for our thinking. It's time for you to change the thoughts you allow in your mind. It's time that you cut them off and learn from where you've been. Then you've got to go in a completely new direction. Put your mind into a new way of living, a new paradigm, a new kingdom.

You have to get out of the kingdom of darkness. It sounds extreme, I know, but it is darkness that sucks the life out of you. And you've got to live in God's

How We Become Victims: We Believe the Wrong Things

kingdom overwhelmed by his truth and letting it saturate your mind so that you can be free. So that you can run after life with all your might, holding nothing back, and letting nothing hold you back.

THE STANDARD ACTION PLAN (DON'T DO IT)

- 1) Allow those lies that you found to continue to play through your mind unchecked and free to tear you down day after day, year after year.
- 2) As the lies create in you a victim mentality, allow yourself to become bitter and begin to blame God for not fixing you.

THE MORE THAN STANDARD ACTION PLAN (DO THIS ONE)

- 1) Either in your journal or not, repent. Apologize to Jesus for believing lies that are against his heart and what he has said. Say something like, "I renounce these lies and separate myself from them from now on. I give you permission, Holy Spirit, to uproot them and to heal me from all of the damage they have caused. Will you please show me what is true instead? And will you build my life in you, and build your kingdom in my life? Thank you that you have completely forgiven me and cleansed me and that I am free already. You are amazing, and I love you."

TRUTH TO CHANGE YOUR LIFE

1 John 1:9

James 4:7

1 Peter 5:6-11

Ephesians 6:10-18

CHAPTER TEN

GIVING UP ON THE PROMISED LAND

IN THE BOOK of Numbers (in the Bible), around 400 years before Gideon, God's people were trekking through the desert, having yet to arrive in the new homeland that God had promised them.

God had recently set them free from being slaves in Egypt where they had been forced to do hard labor for hardly any sustenance. On at least one occasion their baby boys had all been murdered by the government. Life was not good.

But God told his people, "I am going to free you from Egypt, where you are slaves and where your life is crappy. And I'm going to bring you into a promised land. The land that I am promising to give you is full of all kinds of wonderful things. Fruit bigger than you can imagine. Milk and honey flowing freely. Abundant cropland, farmland, cattle-ranching land.

"This place is amazing. And you will be able to prosper and thrive there in freedom, no longer slaves. Everything you need will be provided for you. I will be with you, and you won't anyone to ever rule over you."

After God dramatically set his people free from Egypt with a huge display of miraculous signs, they traveled through the desert and arrived at the edge of the Promised Land, as it's called. Along the way, they complained, doubted, argued, and even betrayed God. Smart. But despite their lack of trust, God showed himself to be extremely real by giving them food from heaven, parting the Red Sea, and doing miracles in Egypt. And let's not forget that he was

constantly physically present with them as a miraculous pillar of cloud and fire.

Yet, they still doubted whether he'd show up for them or not.

When they got to the edge of the Promised Land, God asked for them to send a group of spies to scout it out. After 40 days, they came back lugging a huge cluster of grapes—a single cluster that took two men to carry— with an amazing report of how full the land is of all the good things.

But fear kicked in. The victim mentality took hold. And all of a sudden, the external circumstances became too powerful for them. They said, “However, the people who are living there are strong, and they live in impenetrable cities. And what’s more, we saw giants there: enemies ten feet tall.

We can't do it.

You see, these ten spies were looking around at all the threatening circumstances, and they were making a conclusion: It's too much for me.

LIE: IT'S ALL TOO MUCH FOR YOU

This is the core message of the lies that you've been believing: It's all too much for you. You are not able to go out and fulfill your destiny. You are too small, too weak, too dumb, too incapable of doing anything hard. You need an easy road because you won't survive a tough one.

The hidden danger in thinking this way is that it feels so true and even humble. It feels like you are doing nothing wrong by having such a low view of yourself and that you are simply thinking of yourself according to how God would see you.

After all, you are a sinner with nothing good in you. If God wants to do something amazing with you, then maybe it will eventually happen. But until then, you will merely struggle to survive.

Do you know what's actually happening here? You are slinging mud on God's masterpiece: you! You're saying, “Sorry God, but you did a crappy job with me. You made a piece of junk.” What sounds in your head like humility is actually a dangerous form of arrogance. The most incredible artist in the universe creates a masterpiece and knows it's his best work, and you come along and call it garbage.

More Than Standard

He says you have limitless potential to change the world and bless its people, but you say that you can't and that you'll just stay small. He says that you carry his power, character, and likeness in your DNA, but you say that you are worthless.

Believing these lies does not garner pity, sympathy, or compassion. It actually pits you against God, robbing you of his help, your confidence, and a bright future. And it will scuttle your SAT efforts—guaranteed.

We've spent a lot of time so far calling out the negative thinking, the detrimental effects that a victim mentality can have on every area of your life, including the SAT. But the question is, "How do I change? How do I break out of this way of living and experience more fully the life of a conqueror? The life of one who knows their God-given value and place of honor in the world?"

I'm glad you asked. That's exactly where we're going next.

THE MORE THAN STANDARD ACTION PLAN (DO THIS ONE)

- 1) Go outside for a walk with just you and Jesus. Don't take your phone—or at least turn it off. At the VERY least turn it on airplane mode and definitely don't listen to anything. Just be present in your surroundings and dream for a minute. What would you do with your life if you had no limits? What would Jesus do in you and through you if he had no limits? How is fear holding you back? How is inadequacy holding you back?

TRUTH TO CHANGE YOUR LIFE

John 11:40

Mark 9:23-24

Matthew 17:20-21

PART THREE

THE CONQUEROR'S MINDSET:
BECOMING MORE THAN
STANDARD

INTRO TO PART 3

PART THREE IS where things really get good. This is the beginning of the life transformation that you've been wanting for a long time. In this one section of this one out-of-the-box SAT book, you'll find the keys to breaking free from the standard life that many high schoolers are stuck in. Jesus offers you freedom from depression, addiction, self-doubt, test anxiety, poor performance, lack of confidence—you name it.

Granted, it will not always be easy to break free. As you'll see, God invites you to join him in the work of transformation. This requires grit and discipline.

But, on the other hand, you'll also discover that it's somehow quite easy because you'll be positioning yourself to see the power of God come into your circumstances and do miracles that you never could have done yourself. You'll finally receive the reality of Jesus, and you'll know him better than before.

Not to mention, you'll learn a brand new way of thinking that's going to set you up to obliterate the SAT. To that end, part three is setting the stage for the SAT-specific weapons I'll be giving you in part four.

HERE IS THE CHAPTER BREAKDOWN

Chapter 11

Here is a story about one of my former students that beautifully shows how God swoops in right where you are in your life and completely changes everything. Freedom from alcoholism. Miraculous.

Chapter 12

Here we see the complete turnaround that the men in David's army went through: from outcasts to mighty warriors. This is exactly what Jesus is offering you. This chapter is your opportunity to come to him and embrace it.

Chapter 13

Are you worthy? Do you have worth? Look past your feelings and think this through for a moment. This chapter will teach you that you are more than a sinner who is saved by grace. You have been made into a saint. As such, there is a way of life available to you where nothing can touch you. Nothing is a threat to you anymore.

Chapter 14

Ah! Here we go! Now we dive into the details of what a new, gospel-centered mindset looks like—the kind of mindset that you need if you want to be confident, motivated, joyful, and fulfilled. I'll draw you a brand new picture on the whiteboard that will show you how to put the SAT and all of the other things you're chasing after (college, career, money, family) in the right healthy perspective.

Chapter 15

How do you step into this new mindset and begin to make it a natural part of you? In this chapter we look in detail at the first piece of this puzzle, spending time around the campfire with Jesus. Curious? You should be.

Chapter 16

The campfire from chapter fifteen isn't enough though. You also have to join Jesus on the battleground. Only when you learn to live in both of these realms will you be able to truly transform from the old victim into the new Conqueror.

Chapter 17

More Than Standard

Because the battleground is such an immersive experience that requires your full effort and engagement, we need another chapter to fully learn the action steps you need to take. I'll tell you my own experience, give you truths to use on the battleground that will disarm the victim mentality lies you used to believe (from chapter six), and give you guidance on what exactly to do with those truths.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

JIMMY

I WAS VERY new at this, and the narrative playing in my head proved it. There was no way I could go through with it. It was far too risky and personal, and probably just plain old wrong. If I told him, he was going to certainly think that I was insane and maybe even creepy enough for his mom to call and fire me as his tutor.

What kind of person do you want to be, Matt?

Then there was **that** question—the one I couldn't argue with. The one that cut through all of the “what-if?” speculations.

What kind of person did I want to be? Did I want to be someone who puts actions to what I say I believe, or was I happy just settling for the standard way of life? Would I just carry on like everyone else too afraid to be authentic and too embarrassed to step out in faith?

What kind of person do you want to be, Matt?

I get it, God. You know the answer to that already.

I would do it. I would be more than standard.

I was on my way to a coffee shop downtown where I was scheduled to meet with one of my tutoring students, a high school junior. A good kid, though a bit rough around the edges. I decided that I would go for it, and I would tell him the specific message that God had given me for him.

Now, to be fair, I had gotten myself into this mess. I had prayed and asked God if he wanted to say anything specific to this kid. And I wasn't asking for a

generic kind of statement that anyone with a brain and a Bible could come up with. I was asking for something specific that only God himself would know that would cut right through to this kid's heart.

I wanted life-change for him, and I knew that only a word from God himself could bring that. Unfortunately, for my ego and comfort-zone, God answered. He said, "Matt, I want you to tell him that he is not destined to repeat the mistakes of his father."

Wait, what? I knew nothing about his dad. For all I knew, his dad could have been a faith-filled preacher whose most recent mistake was way back in his college days. This was way too personal and way too specific. But it kept going.

"I also want you to tell him that whenever anyone says to him, 'You're just like your father,' that it actually means he's just like me, his heavenly Father. That's how I see him. He's my boy."

Oh geez.

So I showed up at the coffee shop with my pulse now racing, and I fully chickened out. I didn't say a thing to him about what God had told me. And to make it worse, I didn't say anything the next week either, even though the thoughts from God were resounding in my head like a gong. I couldn't shake them, and yet I wasn't wanting to speak them either. God must have been planning on my procrastinating though, because the timing was perfect.

At the end of what was now the third tutoring session since I had heard God's word for him, as we were packing up and walking out to our cars, I said, "Hey, this might sound crazy to you, and that's okay. If what I have to say makes no sense and doesn't come close to resonating, just know that I'm wrong and don't worry about it."

I'm sure that was a very confidence-instilling preface to whatever the heck this crazy tutor guy was going to say.

"I've been praying for you and I feel like God wanted you to know..."

And I told him. He stood, listening respectfully with no clear look on his face that would have shown whether what I was saying was hitting anywhere near the target or not. When I was finished, I wrapped it up with even more confidence.

“I don’t know if that means anything or not, but...”

“No, yeah. It does. Just this week actually.”

And that was it. Other than “Goodbye,” that was all he said. And we parted ways planning to meet again next week.

A whole year went by, and we never talked about it once until, finally, I asked him one day, “Do you believe in God? Do you believe he’s real?”

He looked at me with more sincerity and more conviction than I had ever seen in him when we were only talking about math and his SAT tests. “I have to tell you a story. I have to tell you why I know without any hint of a doubt that God is real.

“A year ago, I had been seeing a counselor because my life was in bad shape. I was in his office one Wednesday afternoon, after school, and he told me, ‘Jimmy. You need help. You are an alcoholic.’

“I was devastated. I knew I needed help. I was drinking every day, depressed, all that. But to have him call me *an alcoholic*. That was absolutely crushing. I went home to my dad’s house that night, walked in the front door, and saw, first thing, my dad passed out drunk on the floor.

“Matt, in that moment I thought to myself, ‘Jimmy, you are just like your dad.’

“And I kid you not, Matt, it was the very next Saturday when you and I met that you told me the thing that God had spoken to you. You told me that he says I’m not destined to repeat my dad’s mistakes. You told me that he made me to be like him, and that I’m not trapped in being exactly like my dad. And I knew that there was no way you could have known any of that. The only way was if God was real, and if he told you.”

In one simple moment, with one brand new revelation of God’s truth and love, Jimmy’s whole life changed. In one simple moment, Jimmy began to shed the victim mentality that was suffocating him, exchanging it for a brand new Conqueror’s Mindset. While the world outside and the thoughts inside were calling him a broken alcoholic screw-up, God was calling him higher, into his real identity. He was calling him loved, honored, a son.

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE REAL GOSPEL, FROM OUTCAST TO MIGHTY

THINK FOR A moment about a scale from one to ten. If one is the lowest possible score where you feel like the absolute scum of the earth, and ten is the highest where you feel incredibly worthy and awesome, how worthy do you feel of God choosing you to do something amazing and life changing in the world? How worthy do you feel of God choosing you to do something powerful?

In other words, how likely is it in your mind that you are actually **more than standard**?

Most high schoolers like you fall in the lower half, if not the lower third of this scale. Most do not feel worthy at all even though they spend so much of their emotional energy putting on a facade to make everyone else believe that they think otherwise.

But under that facade, they are simply hiding this fact that they, plain and simple, don't feel worthy. As we transition out of the standard way of living, under the oppression of the victim mentality, and we move into God's way, which is where everything upgrades into more than standard, I want for you to take inventory of where you are in your own feeling of worthiness.

Okay, you good? Inventory taken?

Good.

Now, check out this amazing Bible snippet from the book of first Samuel chapter 22.

David departed from there and escaped to the cave of Adullam. And when his brothers and all his father's house heard it, they went down there to him. And everyone who was in distress, and everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was bitter in soul, gathered to him. And he became commander over them. And there were with him about four hundred men (vs. 1-2 ESV)

Years ago, this same David had been anointed to be king over God's people, Israel. There was another king currently reigning on the throne, Saul, who had disobeyed God. Not only did he disobey, but his heart kept growing harder and harder towards God and his goodness. He kept sinking further into his own arrogance and selfishness and was becoming increasingly dark.

So God told his prophet at the time, Samuel, "Hey, Sam. I want you to go to a certain dude's house. The dude's name is Jesse, and he has a bunch of sons. When you go there, I'll show you which one of his sons is supposed to be the next king, and then I want you to anoint him—meaning that I want you to pour a bunch of oil over his head and officially declare over him, 'You are my chosen king.'"

So Samuel went to Jesse's house, and Jesse brought out all of his oldest and best sons. But as Samuel worked his way through seven sons, one by one, examining and asking God about each of them, God kept saying, "Nope, not this one." Finally, Jesse called for his youngest son, David, who had been out in the field caring for the sheep, and immediately God told Samuel, "Yep. This is him, my chosen king. Anoint him."

From there, we see the young David courageously face the vicious giant, Goliath, when no one else in the entire Israelite army could work up the bravery to step out and fight. We see him kill the giant, declaring that God is with him and fights for him. We see him find favor in the kingdom as the people begin to honor him even above the current king, Saul.

But then his life takes a turn, Saul gets jealous and wants to kill him, and David runs away. And it seems that the boldness that overtook him when he walked in his noble identity as an awesome king, embracing the battlefield to

kill the giant—it seems that boldness is gone. When we find him in these first couple verses in first Samuel 22, he's running for his life.

It is during this time, when this man who is supposed to be king of Israel is actually running away from the fight, instead of standing in peace and in faith, when all of these other outcasts find him and join his unimpressive, no-chance-of-winning militia.

It says that everyone who was in distress, in debt, and who was bitter in their very soul all came to him. In other words, these men were not worthy. In fact they were the absolute bottom of the worthiness scale, and no one would be picking them first in the schoolyard for the next lunchtime kickball game.

These were the people that you wouldn't want to have anything to do with. Let's think about this. Distress. Someone in distress is usually someone who doesn't have any value to offer to the world around them. Instead they are usually looking to others to get something from them.

Debt. So not only are they probably looking for relief from their troubles, for someone to help rescue them, they also don't have any money to bring to the table, to fund any kind of military campaign—to buy food, clothes, weapons. Nothing. In fact, they could even be on the run from their debt collectors. So they are probably carrying some pretty dangerous baggage with them, and they're looking for a way out.

Bitter in soul. Downers. The kind of people who do not make your day better, but who drag you down with them.

These are the people who gathered to the future king David and who formed the beginning of his military. And these are the people who Jesus declares to be worthy.

RIGHT NOW IS WHEN YOU CHANGE

Do you feel anything like this? Do you feel like you are at the very bottom of everyone else's list? Like you're the annoying piece of gum that no one wants to step on?

It's time to come out of that, because Jesus says you're worthy. He says you are a king or a queen. And he's offering you a way out. Up until now, we've been focusing heavily on all of that negative, toxic, damaging baggage that

comes with your old standard way of thinking, as a victim. But this is your turning point. This is when your life changes, right now. This is when you get to see the power of exactly what Jesus has done for you in a way that you've never seen it before, even if you've been to church a thousand times.

Watch while your life turns around and you fill up with the power and confidence flowing from heaven into your soul. God, your Dad, who is so proud of you, has injected this new life of confident joy and boldness right into your veins through Jesus's blood.

Isaiah 60 says,

Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you. And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising. (vs. 1-3 ESV)

The very glory of God himself is shining like a spotlight on you. He's not trying to hide you backstage out of embarrassment over who you are and what you've become. He has no interest in covering you up. He's eager to showcase you because you are amazing and he's proud of you.

See, up until now, like these verses say, you've been covered by darkness, possibly in many different ways. Maybe you've had indescribable pain growing up from parents, non-parents, siblings, friends, teachers. Maybe you've made terrible choices and you've done things that you would be far too afraid to ever speak of. Maybe you're currently trapped by addictions.

Whatever the case, all of these things congeal to form this thick cloud of darkness over your soul and mind so that you have only been able to see yourself—like these people gathering to David—as worthless. And all of this has spoken those lies to you that you've embraced and allowed to construct the victim way of thinking in your mind.

So this darkness has kept you from the truth of God's favor over you, and you've thought that it was actually his own disdain of you. But you've been wrong! And it's time to see that right now. You are valuable, priceless, precious.

More Than Standard

In the story of Jimmy in the last chapter, it should have been obvious to you that he was not living “the good Christian” life. He was not deserving of anything from God. He was a high school alcoholic on his way to nowhere.

But did God care about that mess? No! That mattered nothing to him. He still chose to speak to Jimmy the truth about his identity: “You are my son. You are not destined to repeat the mistakes of your dad. You are just like me.”

Really, God? A kid struggling with alcohol addiction is just like you?! That feels wrong and inappropriate and insulting to you. How could I dare to think that?

God does not care about being appropriate. He does not care about you living up to some kind of ideal standard that you think you need to meet. He shattered all standards when he died for you. There is now nothing that you have to live up to. Don’t believe me? Still feel like you have to measure up, that you have to meet society’s, or college’s, or your high school’s standards in order to matter?

And you, being dead in your trespasses, He has made alive together with Him...**having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us**, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. (Colossians 2:13-14 NKJV)

He. Shattered. The. Standards.

You are more than standard. Nothing can touch you anymore, not your past, not your feelings, not the SAT.

In fact, you are now invited into a way of living that is so out of the ordinary, so far above the standards, that you will live out that verse I showed you in Isaiah. “Nations” and “kings” will be attracted to you and will come to the “brightness of your rising.” God is eager to show you off to the world. You are his daughter, his son. As such you follow in his footsteps. If God rises up and shines in glory, then you get to do the same in your life, present and future. In high school, and in college. At home, and in your dorm room.

It sounds crazy and arrogant, but it’s true. Believing it is true humility.

FROM OUTCAST TO MIGHTY

Back to David and the “scum of the earth” army that gathered to him. It says that there were about 400 men with him, all of whom were worthless. But I want you to see who these men became, because the transformation that they went through is the same one you are going through. Like them, you will be remembered as an epic hero.

In second Samuel chapter 23 and first Chronicles chapter 11, God gives us some pretty impressive details about what these “worthless” men were like.

The man, Josheb, killed 800 enemies at one time, by himself, with just a spear.

Eleazar killed a whole army of Philistine bad guys, also by himself, and fought so hard with the supernatural power of God that his hand clung to his sword, and he couldn't let go. All to simply defend a plot of land where they were growing some barley.

Shammah single handedly defended, not a plot of barley this time, but a plot of lentils.

Benaiah killed “two heroes,” willingly went down into a pit to kill a lion, and snuck up on an Egyptian giant, stole his spear, and killed him with it.

A group of three roused themselves from their comfortable camp where they had overheard David saying he was thirsty. They snuck out, raided an enemy camp so they could get through to the well where they filled a bucket of water and brought it back so David could have a drink.

These men who were covered in debt, full of distress, and bitter in soul—who needed some kind of rescue or handout from the world and who were in no place to offer strength of any kind—were suddenly transformed into fierce warriors. They were willing to go to battle to defend barley, to secure a drink of water for their outlaw king.

That's honor, valor, character. That is true laying down of one's needs and desires in order to defend what is right. You don't live this way if you're stuck in self-pity and worthlessness. You don't care to defend what is right when you, as a victim, are just trying to defend yourself from the world.

You only get to this place when you are made more than standard as Jesus cleans off your victimhood, self-pity, and worthlessness. Then you start to see

More Than Standard

yourself as the mighty warrior that you truly are, one who is full of power, strength, security, and confidence.

You are the mighty man, the mighty woman, of Jesus. He is gathering you to himself, and you don't have to have anything put together in order to respond. You don't have to be smart. You can have a crappy GPA. You don't have to have any friends. You don't have to have teachers that like you. You don't have the perfect relationship with your parents or have much chance of a future.

You don't have to be good at the SAT.

You just need to come to Jesus.

THE STANDARD ACTION PLAN (DON'T DO IT)

- 1) Allow your past experience, performance, or mistakes to define your present and your future.
- 2) Tell yourself, "Once a screw-up, always a screw-up."
- 3) Live up to the level of your words and stay a screw-up.

THE MORE THAN STANDARD ACTION PLAN (DO THIS ONE)

- 1) Ask the Holy Spirit to show you any of your past mistakes that haunt you still and cause you to see yourself as scum, that create bitterness in your soul. In your journal, write out anything that he brings to mind.
- 2) You do not need to ask for his forgiveness, it is freely and absolutely given to you. But he may show you things that you've never apologized for, broken your allegiance with, and turned away from. If that's the case, take some time to pray those things through. Confess and get right with Jesus.
- 3) Ask him to show you anything you are currently doing or thinking that is sin and is dishonoring to him. Write these things down as well.
- 4) If you want to experience the full power of God, you need to savagely get rid of anything that stands between you and him. Lay yourself bare before him, and give him everything. Ask him to cleanse you and free you and make you like him. Thank him that those sins are not who you are, and will not continue in your life.
- 5) Write across all of your sins and mistakes, past and present, the words, "Jesus's Blood: I Am Clean."

TRUTH TO CHANGE YOUR LIFE

Ephesians 1:4-7

Colossians 2:8-15

Hebrews 9:14

1 Peter 1:18-19

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

YOU ARE WORTHY. BELIEVE IT. LIVE LIKE IT.

LET'S GO OLD school and actually use a couple dictionary definitions. Look at the definition for worthy.

- worthy:** 1) having or showing qualities or abilities that merit recognition in a specified way.
2) deserving effort, attention, or respect
3) notable or important in a particular sphere
4) having worth or value

If you're anything like I used to be, then you don't feel like these definitions of "worthy" apply to you. They clearly describe someone who is more than standard, but as we already know, the default mode of existence for most of us is to believe that we are nothing special to anyone. However, I want to show you something. Let's hone in on that last definition that says, "having worth or value."

Okay, so if being worthy means to have worth or value, then it raises the question: What is "worth?"

- worth:** 1) the equivalent of a specified amount or figure
2) the value of something measured by its qualities or the esteem in which it is held
3) equivalent in value to a specified amount or figure

* * *

What if I were to present to you two cars. One is a brand new sports car, only one of 200 ever made. It goes faster than any human would ever need to drive, has all the latest computer technology in the dashboard, and most importantly, its doors open up instead of out. You can see how much I know about cars.

The other is a thirty year old station wagon whose coffee brown interior is torn, but at least partially covered by big fuzzy seat covers. It starts usually on the third try, sounds like a volley of gunshots when it climbs up the gentlest of slopes, and is rusting in more places than you can count. Its top speed is 85, downhill. And, oh yeah, it smokes out the back.

You are guaranteed to pay \$500,000 for one of these cars. Which one would you choose? This is a stupid question, obviously. One car is a prized possession. It's a car that most only dream about. And it's worth the money. The other is simply a piece of garbage. It may not even last a week once you drive it away. At best, it's probably only worth \$500.

You'd be foolish to give me your money, grab the keys for the station wagon, and then rattle your way down the road proud of your purchase. You'd be an absolute moron, right?

By that same reasoning, you've been calling Jesus a moron. You've been assuming that he decided to spend that \$500,000 on a piece of junk: you.

JESUS, SAVIOR OF GARBAGE

This is the detrimental common misunderstanding of the gospel, and it has absolutely got to change. The standard way of seeing the work of Jesus is that we are simply pieces of garbage. We are "sinners saved by grace." And, whew boy, even though we are saved, we are sinning left and right, up and down, in and out, every waking moment of the day. We are so wretched, it's ridiculous.

We so often envision ourselves as a trash heap lying on the ground. And we see Jesus coming along, pulling out some Elmer's glue and duct tape, and doing his best to shape the trash heap into something somewhat resembling a person. So, thank you, Jesus, now I'm a walking and breathing pile of trash. Cool. But thankfully someday I'll die, and then, finally, all the good things will happen. Until then, though, I'm stuck being a piece of junk.

I used to feel this way: I can't do anything of value. I am terrible and worthless, and there's nothing good about me.

I suppose there is an element of truth to this kind of thinking. But only a small element. Yes, I was all those things. But not anymore. Jesus didn't die and resurrect so that I could stay the same. He said that the old things are done. They're gone. Forgotten. Dead. And now I am totally different. New. A brand new type of species. I'm not a regular human anymore. I'm superhuman: more than standard.

You're not garbage. In fact, you never were. And you're not waiting until you die to finally be set free from all the darkness that has dogged you. The true gospel says that you are completely new and awesome right now. You are stepping into eternal life right now, not when you die. And instead of being a pile of garbage you are a royal son or daughter. You are a precious treasure that was covered over by the garbage of sin and brokenness.

When Jesus came along, it was not so he could just fix up a trash heap. He had no intention of displaying how bad you are for the world to see. Instead, with the same fury that overtook him as he flipped tables in the temple when the people were using it as a corrupt marketplace, he furiously swept away the garbage that had been covering your true identity and worth. He wanted to reveal you as the precious son or daughter that you are.

You carry the image of God. You represent him. You look like him. Just as God spoke to my student, Jimmy, you are just like your Dad. When God looks at he, you does not see you in your sin but in the righteousness of Jesus.

2 Corinthians 5:21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

This is the gospel, the unbelievably good news. Heaven decided to pay its highest price for you: Jesus. You are worth that price. Take a moment and let that sink in. You are worth the price of Jesus's very life. That's a huge deal.

That alone should be enough to kickstart you out of the standard victim thinking. You need to embrace this gospel message because when you don't—when you consider yourself as less, as unworthy and value-less—you're saying

that Jesus himself was only worth the station wagon. At least give him more credit than that.

YOU, ENDORSED BY GOD

In John chapter 1, God says that everyone who embraces Jesus is given the right, the authority to become a child of God. Not eventually, but right now. This is not just getting forgiven so that you can stay the same as you always were. This is getting forgiven so that you can undergo transformation and step into who you were always destined to be. You are to come out the other side completely new, walking in the powerful presence of God, awesome in his eyes.

You are meant to go forward and boldly kick out darkness. You are meant to take ground and conquer every single thing that stands in your way, because whatever is standing in your way is actually in God's way. His enemies are your enemies, and likewise, his victory is your victory.

You are a superhero far beyond the Avengers. You are no longer bound by anything, especially the SAT, a difficult class in school, a teacher who just doesn't "get you." And you are not bound by the college that you do or don't get into.

You are not bound by the career you choose or the salary you make. You are not bound by the expectations of others. You are not bound by your past or the countless ways you've screwed up. The only thing that you are bound by and bound to is Jesus. That's it. And even then, you will find true freedom in him.

In this place, you will absolutely conquer the SAT. All of the best strategy available is not going to equip you as thoroughly as grasping, embracing, and living in this powerful gospel. I want you to go into the test center on test day completely covered by his presence—hidden under his wings, to use a Bible picture.

Psalm 34:7 The angel of the Lord encamps all around those who fear Him, and delivers them.

He is a force field encircling you, and nothing can get through. And as you move forward through life, you move freely because everything has to get out of his way. Your future, then—even if you happen to be faced with a low SAT score, and even if you feel like it's keeping you out of good colleges—is wide open in front of you. The test has no power over you.

THE SAT CAN NO LONGER THREATEN YOU

Test anxiety comes from putting too much weight on the outcome of whichever test happens to be staring back at you. You embrace the standard mode of thinking that says it has power to determine whether your life is going to be successful or a dreadful dead end. It says that you'll end up living in your parents' basement, sitting on a smelly old couch, eating potato chip crumbs off your belly.

See how much power you've given this thing? When you go down this mental road, you declare to anyone who can hear that you are subject to this test. You declare that you are not covered by the presence of God and that he may be powerful, but not more powerful than this.

So you've got to be more than standard.

You've got to embrace the gospel and your transformation by its power. I guarantee that if you start, in faith, to see yourself and God in this new way—where he is so madly devoted to you that he encamps around you, going before you, behind you, to your side, moving with you—you will find that the SAT loses its grip on your emotions. It will become just another enemy that has to bow in front of Jesus.

So why worry? Why get stressed?

Yes, of course I want you to work hard to do well. I want you to put 100% of the effort that you can into rocking this test. But I don't want you to do it under the pressure of circumstance, or of panic, or of expectations and standards. I don't want you to work really hard because if you don't, and you fail, then your life is over. That's not going to get you anywhere.

I want you to work hard at conquering the SAT because that's just who you are. That's the kind of person that God made you to be—someone who gives everything they've got in every circumstance because you know you are

valuable and you carry the potential to leave an impact. But your well-being is not dependent on the test score.

So you can give a high level of diligence, but from a place of peace and rest. You know that you will be okay, no matter what.

PEACE IN THE STORM

When Jesus was walking the earth, there was a really bad storm that hit while he was riding in a boat with his closest disciples. The storm was so violent that the disciples began to panic, thinking they were going to die. Picture it. Huge waves. Rocking boat. Fishermen flying and tumbling in all directions. Utter madness.

But Jesus was so connected with the peace of his Father—he was so enveloped in the truth that God encamps around those who fear him—that he was simply sleeping. On the boat. Right through the chaos.

So his disciples came to him saying, “Jesus! Don’t you care?! Wake up! We’re all about to die and you’re doing literally nothing. Do something!”

His response was simple and powerful. He told them that they have no faith. And he spoke three words to the storm, “Peace, be still.”

Done.

You can walk in that same way. You don’t have to be a panicking disciple, worrying that everything you have is about to be stripped away from you. Instead, you can walk in peace. Instead, you are unshakeable. You can’t be touched by the storm of the SAT because, like Jesus, you are now more than standard.

This is the gospel. It is not a free ticket to heaven someday. It’s not a way to cheat and get an A plus when you really should get a D. That’s weak and powerless and doesn’t do a thing to change you.

The true gospel rushes in and transforms your history, your present, your future, your mind, and your identity right from the start. It makes you and God, together, an unstoppable force in the earth that is now kicking out darkness and bringing in the kingdom of God. You now walk in peace because you are fixed on Jesus.

More Than Standard

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Romans 8:31-32 So, what does all this mean? If God has determined to stand with us, tell me, who then could ever stand against us? For God has proved his love by giving us his greatest treasure, the gift of his Son. And since God freely offered him up as the sacrifice for us all, he certainly won't withhold from us anything else he has to give. (TPT)

He is determined to stand with you. Nothing can stop you. I wish that my telling you this in a book would completely guarantee that you get this and, like a light switch, you would automatically be transformed. But you have to choose it.

Choose it.

THE MORE THAN STANDARD ACTION PLAN (DO THIS ONE)

- 1) Respond in your journal: What about the SAT has felt threatening to you? What power has it had over your thoughts? What power have you assumed it has over your future?
- 2) Respond in your journal: What else in your life have you seen as a threat? Why?
- 3) As Jesus to show you your worth. It's one thing for me to tell you in a book, it's another for him to emblazon it on your heart so that it becomes a part of you.

TRUTH TO CHANGE YOUR LIFE

Philippians 4:11-12

Romans 8:1

Romans 8:12-17

Genesis 1:26-27

Psalms 34:7

Ephesians 2:10 (The word "workmanship" means "masterpiece."
Think about it.)

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

HOW A CONQUEROR VIEWS LIFE (AND THE SAT)

NOW THAT YOU understand the true nature of the gospel and the true nature of who you are actually made to be, it's time to flesh this out in your real life. We're going to give your new mindset a name, just like we're calling the old one the victim mentality. And we're going to literally go back to the drawing board (or a whiteboard with dry-erase markers) to see how this new, God-ordained mindset empowers you to approach your life from a completely new perspective.

Congratulations. As one who is living in the power of Jesus, you get to forever leave behind that old stinky victim mentality and instead adopt the powerfully life-giving Conqueror's Mindset. Over the last two chapters, I told you who you are according to the gospel: a superhero, more than standard.

Now I'm going to show you how someone like this new version of you actually thinks. If you can learn how to think differently, you will revolutionize how you act, which will bring you new results in your life that you've never seen before. Don't believe me, that learning a new way to think can actually be so powerful? Check this out:

Romans 12:2 Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, **but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think.** Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect. (NLT)

Stop thinking like everyone else does according to the same old standard victim mentality. Instead, learn this Conqueror's Mindset. Learn it and begin to practice it before you even begin getting ready for the SAT. In fact, practice it before you take your next test in school, before you write your next paper, before you have that difficult conversation you need to have.

Enough said. Let's dive in.

THE CONQUEROR'S MINDSET: A NEW PICTURE OF YOUR LIFE

Go back to the whiteboard we were using in Part 2. Erase that old drawing of stick-figure-you on the one side and the mountain on the other. Now envision me drawing a new stick-figure-you, this time with a true smiley face, slightly above the exact center of the whiteboard.

Remember, in the last picture, you weren't so happy. You were suffering from a squiggly-lined-mouth because of all the worry and anxiety that victimhood was keeping you trapped under. And you were putting your happiness and fulfillment off into the future somewhere and making them dependent completely on outside circumstances and your ability to make it past certain obstacles, like the SAT.

But in this picture, you see me write above the stick figure, the words "happiness, fulfillment, meaning, PURPOSE." There's a little billowy cloud encircling all of them to show that they are all coming from the heart of heaven. And there's a thick arrow coming from this cloud right down into your mind and heart. It's a thick arrow to show that this stream is strong, unable to be dammed up, dried up, or diverted.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN OLD AND NEW

Remember, there were three primary realms, if you will, of the victim mentality that were particularly central to its attack on your life: time, direction, and source. Victims are stuck living in the future, hoping that their happiness will come someday. They are at the mercy of everything and everyone around them because the flow of energy is toward them...from the

outside in. Consequently, they are worried about protecting themselves from outside attack. And the source of their happiness is those very circumstances.

But look at this new picture, the way you, a Conqueror being transformed by Jesus, now see your life. First of all, you are not waiting for someday in the future to climb the mountain, achieve happiness, and find your purpose. For you, the Conqueror, those gifts of life are present, right now. You don't live in "someday."

This means that you can live in the moment, connecting wholly with what is taking place right around you. You are not reserving part of yourself for the future. So you connect better with the people in your life. You have deeper, more meaningful relationships.

Also, you don't have a cap on your current happiness level. There is not a part of you that is constantly knowing you're not as happy yet as you hopefully will be later. You are not as fulfilled yet as you could be in the future. You don't mean as much to the world as you hope to when you start your career.

These thoughts are not part of your experience anymore. Instead you are excited to get to be you today.

We are not even finished drawing the new Conqueror's Mindset picture (we haven't added the outside circumstances of your life), yet we can see enough to know without question what your source of happiness and purpose is. And the correct answer is...(we all say together like in Sunday school) God!

As a Conqueror fully embracing the gospel of Jesus in your soul, you can connect in a real way with your Father, the one who gives you your definition, identity, and purpose. You can experience God in such a real way that this connection to him gives you life and is not at all dependent on anything else that may attack you. Just as Jesus slept peacefully through the life-threatening storm, you can walk peacefully unshaken through storms that would otherwise seem threatening.

COMPLETING THE PICTURE

This leads us right into the discussion on which direction energy now flows in your life, but first we've got to complete the picture. As you pay such fervent attention to the whiteboard, you see me write down, "SAT, College, GPA,

How a Conqueror Views Life (and the SAT)

Family, Friends, \$\$\$, House,” in the shape of a semi-circle around your lower half. To clarify, it’s as if you are the center of a wheel and these words are the tread around the outside. I draw lines between you and the words, like spokes connecting you to each of these areas of your life.

In the old victim picture, you were looking to these good and desirable gifts of life in order to get your happiness from them. The direction of energy was from them (on the outside) in to you (on the inside). But you can see here that the energy flow has already started in your connection with God. You are receiving everything you need from him. So as you are filled with purpose and joy and meaning from him, you are able to overflow in to these things like your school and your future and your family.

You become a giver. A contributor. One who offers value rather than one who is always looking to take and get and scrounge for yourself. When your needs are eternally and unshakably met in Jesus, then you are free to look outside of yourself and become a blessing. This is when you begin to “happen to the world.” You are now an atmosphere-changer, a storm-calmer rather than one, like Jesus’s disciples in the boat, who is threatened by the storm.

So the SAT is not an obstacle in your way, but an opportunity. It is a chance for you to display who you are. It is an opportunity for you to become stronger, to bring heaven’s presence, and to leave your impact.

If you can make this shift, to where all of these external circumstances no longer carry any potential to harm you, you will experience incredible freedom and confidence. You will draw others to you. And you will attract the favor of heaven.

THE STANDARD ACTION PLAN (DON'T DO IT)

- 1) Keep living according to the old picture, where the SAT was the gatekeeper that held the power to either grant you your future or to strip it away from you.
- 2) Live in the world of “someday.”
- 3) Allow external circumstances to influence you.
- 4) Make external circumstances your source of happiness and fulfillment.

THE MORE THAN STANDARD ACTION PLAN (DO THIS ONE)

- 1) Live according to the new picture, the Conqueror's Mindset where the SAT is not an obstacle, but merely an opportunity for you to show the world your identity as a Conqueror, a child of God.
- 2) Follow my description of the whiteboard picture and draw it in your journal or on a different piece of paper.
- 3) Look up Romans 8:37, and write it on your picture.
- 4) Put it somewhere easily visible: on your nightstand, your bathroom mirror, in your car, your forehead, your sister's forehead. Anywhere that will stay in front of your eyes.
- 5) Ask Jesus to make this your new way of seeing and doing life. He'll answer you.

TRUTH TO CHANGE YOUR LIFE

Romans 8:37

Philippians 4:13

Philippians 4:19

Luke 10:19

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

BECOMING A CONQUEROR, PART 1: AROUND THE CAMPFIRE

NOW THAT WE have this understanding of what a Conqueror’s mindset looks like, you are able to see on the whiteboard this brand new picture of your life. You are standing there nice and happy, receiving your happiness and fulfillment and joy and purpose from the cloud of heaven above you. You are letting all of who you are—your identity, your awesomeness that God created you with—play out in the different avenues of your life.

Those different circumstances that arise—whether it be in class, in your SAT test, in your college applications and essays, in sports, your job, your friends, your family—now become opportunities for you rather than obstacles. They become places for you to display the glory that Isaiah says is rising upon you and within you from Jesus Himself.

They are no longer threats that are happening to you or against you. In fact, you happen to them. The atmosphere around you is not changing you or even influencing you. You are changing and influencing it.

So we’ve seen this new version of life that is yours to run with. We’ve seen the gospel and how Jesus declares that you are worthy. It all looks fantastic right? And you’re saying, “Yes! I’m in! I want this!”

So...“How do I get it?”

If you’re anything like me, that’s exactly what you’re wondering. *How?* How do you actually change your life? How do you change what has been

hardwired into you over the last sixteen or so years? How do you start to live and operate totally differently when the old way is so easy, so habitual?

I admit, this all would be worthless if I gave you the target and never told you how to hit it. That would be cruel.

So here we go. These next sections are absolute gold. Take them in. There is new and powerful life waiting for you here.

HOW TO CHANGE YOUR LIFE: THE TWO-EDGED SWORD

What I've come to learn in my thirty something years of life is that life-change in the kingdom of God happens primarily through two avenues that we must cultivate together. We do not choose one over the other, we embrace both. Like the two edges of a single sword.

Keep in mind, while it sounds simple, each of those two sword-edges has infinite possible variations and total potential for adventure. God does not operate in a system or a box. He is creative, different, weird, and not limited by our explanations. However, what I'm about to lay out for you is concrete enough to actually give you some tangible footholds while still being open and free enough to allow God to completely overturn the whole thing and do his own thing.

Life-change—the transformation from a victim to a Conqueror—happens both with the supernatural power of God operating in you apart from any effort and strength that you'd ever be able to muster on your own, and also with you going to battle and fighting with all your strength. If you can get this, you'll see that you can connect with Jesus in a way that actually affects you—for real. Not just up in your head with a bunch of feel-good fluff that isn't actually substantive and powerful.

See, you are a warrior. This applies to guys and girls alike, men and women alike. In case that sounds weird to you and like I'm using a metaphor that only works for the males among us, let me present to you...my wife. She is a fierce warrior, full of fire, strength, grit, passion, leadership. She has a podcast, has written a book, leads dozens of parents, and takes care of our home. My daughters also. Powerhouses.

Anyway, back to the point at hand.

When you come to Jesus and do life in his kingdom, you are enlisted as a warrior under his captain-ship to go to war against the works of darkness and enforce the victory that Jesus has won. Imagine yourself as one who both fights on the battlefield and also returns from that battlefield to the camp. Your transformation and experience of God's power happens in both places: around the campfire and also on the battleground.

FIRST, THE CAMPFIRE

The first avenue that you must pursue in order to become a Conqueror is the one in which you completely tap into the power of the Holy Spirit to come in and change you. He does the work, and you position yourself to receive it.

This is the campfire.

When you are sitting at the campfire, resting from the day, you're not fighting. You've set your weapons down and let down your guard. You are peacefully resting in the presence of Jesus, your captain, who is eager and excited to join you as he too rests by the fire. You eat together, tell stories back and forth, and possibly even let him clean your wounds and put you back together.

You are just being with him, experiencing the thoughts on his mind and the goodness in his heart. You look into his eyes, share with him your own deep thoughts, and connect meaningfully with him—taking the risk of letting him truly know all of you, pleasant and ugly alike.

This campfire scenario is your first and most important step to abandoning the victim mentality and living as a Conqueror. This is where you powerfully decide to make your life about Jesus on a practical level. You actually separate time out of your day to be with him...and that's all. You don't multitask. You don't check your phone every three minutes. You just connect with Jesus.

This is so important, and it's a tragedy that we have moved away from this as disciples of Jesus. It is impossible to experience all of his life-changing power without actually taking this time to connect with him. There's simply no way around it. It may sound religious and stuffy to say, "Well, you have to put in 'x' amount of time praying and reading the Bible in order to get something

out of this Christianity thing.” But it’s not. Not at all. It’s just the reality of relationship.

As a husband, if I never spend time with my wife just to be with her and enjoy her company, I will have zero connection with her. It actually damages our marriage if I only ever talk with her when I need something from her, or I have to simply go over the dry details of our family schedule, etc. “Babe, could you pick up the girls today? Could you grab groceries? What’s for dinner? By the way, we need to go over the week’s schedule. Where’d you put the keys?”

If we never walk and talk together, sharing our dreams and fears, laughing together, holding each other, then I’m not going to experience the benefits that she has to offer. Our relationship will dry out and she’ll feel like I’m only with her to get the job done.

You’d never say that it is religious of me to go on a date with her and enjoy her company. That’s just a healthy marriage.

WHAT THE CAMPFIRE LOOKS LIKE IN REAL LIFE

It’s the same with Jesus. If you want to experience all of who he is and position yourself to receive the full benefit of life with him, then you need to spend time with him just for the sake of enjoying him and letting him enjoy you. Not while driving or doing homework. Sacrifice some time and commit to doing nothing else, despite all of the busy-ness of life that pulls at your attention.

Maybe this looks like going out on a walk and talking with him. Maybe you find somewhere alone to sit and spill your heart out. Maybe you just stay in your room, open the Bible and a journal, and write down what you are reading. Whatever it looks like, it’s not just about your list of requests that you’d like to present to him, those things you’d love for him to change for you. To really know him as a real person, your praying must go beyond, “God please help me with x, y, and z.”

Please don’t misunderstand me, we can absolutely pray that way. But those prayers become far more effective when they are built on a foundation of, “God, no matter what is happening in my life—no matter what desires I have

—I’m going to set it all down right now because my main desire is to know you and let you know me.”

In the book of Jeremiah in the Bible God says, “Let whoever boasts, boast that they know and understand me.” And later he says, “You will seek me and also find me...when you come after me with your entire heart.” So choose to set aside those things that tug at your heart, just for a time. Let him take over.

LEAD YOUR FEELINGS

The amazing thing about Jesus is that he has no intention of leading us into a dull and dry life. He has no intention of being stingy with us and never helping to bring us joy and happiness by actually seeing some of those other dreams and desires come to pass. In fact Psalm 37:4 says,

Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.

Do you see? He wants to give you those good desires that I’m urging you to lay down before him. If you lay them down, you give him the opportunity to bring them about far more effectively than you can do by yourself.

But I understand, this can be a hard thing, because, “I just don’t *feel* delight in God. I don’t feel excited or passionate or (dare I say) in love with him.” So what then? How are you supposed to connect with God and sacrifice your time and energy to spend time with him when you don’t feel anything, really? When you’re not drawn to him, how do you get yourself to a place where you do start to feel excited and passionate and on fire for him?

Discipline.

I know. Yuck!

But the sooner you learn this lesson, the better off you’re going to be in all of life. All good things that you want out of life come not from you feeling fuzzy about them, but from you making a powerful decision—no matter how you feel—to go after the things you want. And it takes discipline to both make that decision and to follow through on the steps needed to carry it out.

So you say, “Even though I don’t feel the passion, I will put in the action. I will choose to display my love for God and to connect with him as much as possible by communicating to him that he is first.” It sounds backwards, but your feelings will actually follow the lead of your actions. We so often think that our feelings need to first be there so that we can act accordingly, but this simply isn’t true.

So engage in the action of spending time with God. Stick with it. Engage in the action of speaking words with your mouth or writing them on paper—words of love, admiration, worship, devotion to him. And be honest. Tell him you’re not feeling it, but that you want to.

For me, it sounds like this: “God, will you work this into me? I know there’s more here than what I’m experiencing. I want you to have all of me. I’ve lived as a victim, but I want to live as a Conqueror in the power of what you’ve done for me. I don’t feel it, but I believe you’ve made me worthy and that I am worth far more than what I’ve ever thought or felt. I believe I’m not worthless in spite of my feelings, because you say so. Will you prove it? Will you make it real?”

TRULY POWERFUL PRAYER

If this is your focus during your time with him, then you’re not praying about the SAT or school or college. Those things can definitely enter the picture of your praying, but if they become your sole fixation then you’ll find that you never get anywhere and you’ll always feel like a beggar desperately hoping that God finally stops to notice you. Then the life-change and the true transformation into a Conqueror’s Mindset and the answered prayers will continue to be evasive.

Answered prayer flows freely from true deep connection with his presence around the campfire. Test this. Test my words to you. I dare you to put this into practice and to watch while your life changes almost without effort. You’ll notice yourself becoming different, in a very good and welcome way. You’ll be positioning yourself to allow the Holy Spirit to change you and set you free. Your depression will fall away. Your doubt and fear will fall away. Your mind will clear and you’ll start to have more and more waves of—what’s that?—joy!

God promises to show himself strong on behalf of those whose hearts are loyal to him. So as you do these actions of loyalty, you literally attract his affection and his attention, and you stir within him a strong desire to show up in your life. You move him to even be eager to answer your prayers, your deepest needs and cries. Do not give up.

Do you see the potential here? The potential you have? This is so much bigger than the SAT. It is so far beyond simply excelling on any given test. This is about you becoming like Jesus himself so that the way you conquer and tackle the test is just a part of a bigger picture of the awesome glory of God shining into you and through you.

This is how you become a conqueror. The Spirit causes you to behold his glory, and as you do, he does this work in you. As you pray and spend time with him and connect with his heart—as you open the Bible and watch while the real Jesus steps off of the pages and into your room to meet and speak with you face to face—as you engage in this, you become a Conqueror as he is a Conqueror.

Do you understand how powerful this is? Do this. Be with Jesus. You want to know how to conquer the SAT? You want to know how to undo the history of poor test-taking? How to beat test anxiety?

Be with Jesus. Then be transformed. Become new, superhuman. Become more than standard.

THE TWO CONQUERORS WHO BELIEVED

Do you remember how the spies who went to scope out the Promised Land were completely lost in their victim mentality? They were fearful and full of doubts. They said, “The people—all those giants in that land—are far too strong for us. We can’t handle this. We’re not cut out for it.” And true to their own doubts and fears, they did not get to go in.

But there were two—two out of the twelve—who were different. Joshua and Caleb said, “No, you guys! We can do this!” They believed God. And they were the only two out of millions of God’s people who lived to enter into the good land that he would have been willing to give to everyone—had they kicked their victim mentality to the curb and only believed.

Joshua and Caleb developed into mighty warriors, champions of God. Caleb, at eighty something years old invaded the hill country and drove out the giants that had been living there, because he knew what God had promised him: a home. So he took it.

Joshua took Moses's place as the leader of the nation, and he's the dude who conquered Jericho. Not to mention all of the other cities in the Promised Land.

But in the book of Exodus, chapter 33, we get crucial insight, at least regarding Joshua, into how this Conqueror's Mindset took root. We see exactly how Joshua grew into a man of faith, strength, leadership, and powerful authority.

Exodus 33:11 Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. When Moses turned again into the camp, his assistant Joshua the son of Nun, a young man, would not depart from the tent. (ESV)

Boom.

This is the key to Joshua's awesomeness. This is where he became a conqueror. Long before he was leader of the people of Israel—at least forty years before—he was building a history, a relationship, a pattern of doing life with God.

He had decided to sacrifice his time to stay longer in the tent so that he could be with God. He even stayed longer than Moses because he was driven by a deep hunger to know God better than he did at present. This is what allowed God to very tangible become his life source that would shape him into his unbelievable destiny.

TIME WITH GOD, THE SOURCE OF POWER

So Joshua made it a habit, a perpetual discipline to put in more time doing nothing but being with God. I know that it can feel—in this day of phones, computers, tablets, Snapchat, Instagram, and everything else that keeps you inoculated—like you have countless other things to do. A dozen people all calling for your attention through different devices and networks all day long.

More Than Standard

But please do not miss this. Please do not relegate time with God to the dusty old archives of ancient relics. You have to go old school like Joshua did and shut everything down except for Jesus. And you have to do it regularly. When you do, you realize that you were living life in black and white, but now, all of a sudden, you see in color. Look what happened to Joshua. God honored his friendship by promoting him with tons of favor. He became leader of the nation. He got to go into the promised land. He conquered giants. He had high-ranking angels visit him. Literally, the angel identified as the Commander of the Lord's Army came to him.

To me, that is way cooler than social media and texting. To me, conquering giants, talking to angels, and hearing God's voice is way better than the distracting knick knacks of life.

Be like Joshua. Stay in the tent. Spend time with Jesus.

THE STANDARD ACTION PLAN (DON'T DO IT)

- 1) Allow yourself to believe that you're too busy to spend time with Jesus, the king of everything, even though you have time to mindlessly scroll through social media commenting on your friend's dog's sweater.
- 2) Believe the lie that spending time with Jesus is an irresponsible waste of time and that you should be doing something "productive" instead.
- 3) Whatever you do, make sure that you do not spend time praying and reading the Bible until you feel like it. Yes, only spend time with him when you feel like doing it. Do not by any means discipline yourself to do it consistently, rain or shine.
- 4) Believe that reading the Bible is stuffy and prudish and legalistic.
- 5) Believe that reading the Bible like a textbook to get principles and knowledge is your chief goal.

THE MORE THAN STANDARD ACTION PLAN (DO THIS ONE)

- 1) Choose a certain time each day (I like the morning before I do anything else) to spend time alone with Jesus. Whether that's in your room, at your desk, in the yard, on a walk through the neighborhood—I don't care. If it helps, put in on your calendar or to-do list. Be intentional.
- 2) Treat it like you would an appointment with your doctor, or a teacher, or a coffee date with your friend. Oh! Or treat it like you would baseball (or your sport of choice) practice. Would you shrug those off and just not go? Probably not. You'd prioritize them enough to stick to them...whether you felt like it or not.

- 3) For me there are two to three elements of this time that are especially powerful: praying, getting in the Bible, and journaling. Sometimes I throw some instrumental music on, sometimes I play a couple worship songs to sing to (if that feels dorky, remember you find God with you seek him with ALL your heart). But no matter what, I focus my time on getting to know God and on surrendering more and more of myself to him.
- 4) Only after I feel like I've connected with him as a friend, or a son, do I begin to ask him about the things in life I'm concerned about, i.e. prayer requests. But I want to make sure that my time with him is not revolving solely around what he can do to make my life better. This won't actually help me grow as a Conqueror, grow in miraculous living, or grow in knowing him and seeing cool life things like the people in the Bible.
- 5) Stick with this. If you don't feel anything at first, that's completely alright. Do not do it in order to get a result. Do it because he is worth it and it's what you were created for. In time, you'll find that it becomes way less of a discipline and more of a desire. In the Psalms, David says that his soul thirsts for God like a deer pants for water. The way to get there is this path I'm giving you. Sometimes you have to breakthrough the dryness in order to reach the oasis. But God is waiting. And he is with you.
- 6) Head to my website and access the free Conqueror's Training Library. You'll find a lot of help in learning how to build your real connection with Jesus and begin actually experiencing his actual power, beyond just going to church and believing all the right things.

TRUTH TO CHANGE YOUR LIFE

Jeremiah 29:11

Luke 10:38-42

Psalms 42:1

Exodus 33:11

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

BECOMING A CONQUEROR, PART 2: ON THE BATTLEGROUND

THERE ONCE LIVED a poor crippled beggar who spent his entire life going through the same daily routine. For as long as he could remember, even as far back as his early childhood, he would every day wake up, drag himself with his hands from his mat to his morning meal, eat breakfast, drag himself back to his mat, roll it up, and have one of his parents carry him out to his regular spot along the busy street. There he would call out, asking for money from any and all who walked by.

He didn't know all the technical details, but as an infant he had been attacked by a terribly aggressive neurological infection that badly damaged his brain's ability to communicate with his legs. As a result, his legs were now perpetually twisted, shriveled, and paralyzed, leaving him a life-long beggar on the roadside.

Now a grown adult still just as crippled and just as poor, the man had settled into life as a beggar. He knew no other way, and it was his identity. But one day, Jesus came by, and the man not knowing who he was simply asked if he could spare any money.

Jesus dropped several coins into his cup before kneeling down next to him and asking him, "Would you also like to be healed? I'd be happy to give you your legs back."

“Absolutely! I’d love that! I’ve been stuck this way my whole life and have never known what normal, healthy life would feel like. Would you, please?”

So Jesus reached out both hands and grabbed each knobby knee. The beggar felt warmth and electricity flow through his legs as Jesus spoke, “Legs, be healed.” When Jesus took his hands off, to the beggar’s dismay, the heat and electricity left, and everything felt normal like it always had.

“Get up and walk,” Jesus suggested.

But instead of trying out his newly healed legs, the man listened to the louder voice in his head, the voice of his experience. “No, you’re not healed. Your legs have always been broken and will always be broken. They don’t feel any different than before, do they? What makes you think you’ll be able to use them? Is Jesus crazy?! You can’t stand up on your own! If he really were going to heal you, he’d lift you up and make you stand without you having to use your poor weak legs.”

“Go ahead,” Jesus encouraged him. “Try them. Believe. Agree with me instead of your past.”

But the beggar wouldn’t do it. Instead he replied, “No, I’m not healed. My legs won’t work.” He didn’t even bother to look at them, where he would have seen healthy muscle that had never been there before. So even though Jesus had come and radically transformed his entire existence, the man refused to believe it. Instead he continued seeing himself as a crippled beggar with broken paralyzed legs.

Over time, even though Jesus had injected the man’s legs with new life and strength and muscle, they withered away again from lack of use. And they returned to their weak and shriveled state. And so, the man who was healed and whole, continued the rest of his life as a crippled beggar because he chose to agree with the wrong narrative in his mind.

THE POWER OF YOUR THOUGHTS, WORDS, AND BELIEFS

This story, which I made up myself, thank you very much, illustrates the incredible power that our thoughts, words, and beliefs have. They are so powerful that they can completely nullify the miraculous touch of God in our

experienced reality. Think about it, with one simple word, we can remove ourselves from the eternal redemption that Jesus won on our behalf.

Just a simple, “No.”

See, Jesus can do the work of healing, of transformation, of deliverance from addiction—whatever it is you’re needing in your own life—but if you keep yourself locked in your own bubble of denial, despair, and unbelief, it will be as if he never did anything. Even though the beggar was technically healed, he lived in bondage and brokenness because of the thoughts in his own mind that went against the power and good news of Jesus.

He had experienced, even for those few brief moments on the side of the road, the campfire, the first element needed for life-change, which we discussed last chapter. This crippled beggar had been in the presence of Jesus, where Jesus reached out and miraculously transformed him by healing his legs.

But when it came time to actually act on and agree with the truth that Jesus had transformed his entire life, he froze—just as trapped as before. His mental paralysis enabled his false physical paralysis, which became more real than the power of Jesus. He failed to believe that Jesus healed him. He failed to act on that reality. Consequently, it did not become his reality. In essence, he failed on the battleground.

WHAT IS THE BATTLEGROUND?

When we talk about the battleground, we’re talking about the second element of our life-change process that requires something more from us. Here we don’t only receive from Jesus as he pours in his transformation. On the battleground, we are tasked with taking what we have received and are currently receiving from God, and we then exert our own will and strength to actually start believing it. On the battleground, we go to war and engage our loyalty and agreement either with Jesus and truth or against him in favor of the lies of hell.

It can be easy to think of “war” in terms of changing the world, feeding the hungry, healing the sick, and all of those good, grand-scale, external things. But they are not the war you need to fight in order to become a Conqueror.

No, your initial battleground as you enter into the new, gospel-transformed you is in your mind. The war is for your thoughts, words, and beliefs.

This is vital. As we've seen, it's possible for you to spend time around the campfire with Jesus, only to step out onto the battlefield and to continue agreeing with all of the old toxic thoughts and principles of darkness that kept you living as a victim. It's possible for you to spend time with Jesus but to keep living according to the old narrative. And you can let thoughts from satan consume your mind, take over your beliefs, and direct the course of your life—even though you're saved.

THE KEY TO FREEDOM

In the book of Romans, chapter twelve, God tells us to not be conformed to the old way of doing things, the old way of thinking, the way that is standard in the world. See for yourself:

Romans 12:2 Stop imitating the ideals and opinions of the culture around you, but be inwardly transformed by the Holy Spirit through a total reformation of how you think. (TPT)

Put that on hold and look at this next verse for a minute.

John 8:31-32 So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

Now, follow this trail with me. This verse says that your transformation, brought by the power of the Holy Spirit, comes through a "total reformation" of your thought life. Put another way, the narrative—the endless string of words that runs through your mind daily—telling you how valueless and embarrassing you are, needs to change. In fact, every single thought you have is now up for re-evaluation and subject to the trash pile if it doesn't align with God's heart.

Then, in the verse from the book of John, Jesus tells us that abiding, or continuing, or basically immersing ourselves in his word will cause us to know the truth, which will then set us free.

Isn't that what you're looking for here? Freedom? Isn't that the end goal of your exodus out of the land of your victim mentality? Isn't that the mythical reward of entering into the promised land where you live as a conqueror with a Conqueror's mindset?

Absolutely. Your goal is to finally—after a lifetime of living under despair and worthlessness and sadness and feeling like you just don't measure up—be free to be happy, strong, confident. To just be you, as God originally made you to be.

BUT WHAT DO YOU ACTUALLY DO?

So, if your transformation from victimhood to Conqueror-ship comes by completely changing your mind and all of the thoughts that you allow to influence you, and your freedom comes by knowing the truth and immersing yourself in God's words (which stem from his thoughts), then it looks like your job on the battleground—your key to victory—is to begin familiarizing yourself with truth.

Literal words and sentences and paragraphs that convey life-giving truth instead of death-inducing lies. And you're not stopping there, at merely familiarizing. You are then going deeper, into meditating on them, speaking them, wrestling them into your thinking even when all of your feelings are pulling you the other direction, back to the old way. I'm telling you, if you want to transform your feelings, your persona, your countenance, your external circumstances, it absolutely must start in these small potent seeds that are your thoughts and words.

Jesus compared his kingdom—which is the realm of living where his power becomes tangible to us, where we see him do things that we never dreamed of—to a tiny little mustard seed. He said that when you put that thing in the ground, it's smaller than most other seeds that farmers deal with. In fact, it is so small that it seems powerless, lifeless, boring. And if you told me that it carried within itself the power to grow into a tree, I'd laugh at you.

And yet, as the mustard seed is given time and water, it does grow. This little kernel of truth that had pretty much zero effect on anything around it all of a sudden begins to sprout up. It gets strong. It grows tall—taller than the

other garden plants, Jesus says. And over time, this little unobtrusive meager seed becomes a strong tree that cannot be shaken. It's powerful. It has transformed.

So as crazy and stupid as it may seem to you, that the key to you changing your life is to just start thinking differently, it's the absolute truth.

The Bible also says, in Proverbs, that the power of life and death resides in your tongue. The words you speak, which spring up from the thoughts you think, can literally lead to either life or death. It's a sobering reality—the fact that your words can lead to death—even though Jesus's power has already opened the way for you to experience his miraculous supernatural life.

Isn't that crazy?! Your thoughts are powerful enough to revolutionize your life. If they align with lies, then they enlist the power of hell to come and wreak havoc both in you and in your circumstances. But if they align with truth, then you are proactively inviting the explosive power of the Holy Spirit to supercharge you and take you farther than you can get on your own.

Yes, he does transform you in his own strength. But also—he transforms you through your thinking in accordance with his eternal truth. Freedom comes through truth. So you have to figure out how to access and appropriate that truth into your experience. Just like Jesus was the Truth, the Word become flesh, so too God's words of truth will take on physical reality in your life.

YOU MUST HAVE BOTH

The reason this is a battleground and not a cake walk is that this process is not easy. Not at all. But it is good. And it is certainly far easier when you are spending time around the campfire as well. Let me tell you from my own experience, when I spend time in stillness and alone with Jesus just to be his friend and to know him, it's as though I am seeing life in full vivid color. But if I am simply fighting battle after battle and I neglect that campfire time, everything is difficult and a boring black and white.

Do you remember the short little snippet from the gospel of Luke (in chapter 10) where Jesus is at the house of two sisters named Mary and Martha?

More Than Standard

He's there hanging out and teaching while Mary eagerly sits at his feet, just listening and being with him. Martha, on the other hand, was running around the house, cooking, cleaning, fluffing pillows, sweeping, etc. But it says that Martha was "distracted" with all of her serving. And Jesus even tells her that Mary, by being quiet, still, and putting everything else on hold, was actually choosing the better way.

You cannot fight and win a battle apart from intimate connection with Jesus. And that only comes as you form your own history of time and relationship with him. So as we look in the next chapter at exactly how to fight the battle for your thoughts and to live in a Conqueror's Mindset, please do not neglect the campfire. If you first develop connection, God won't be able to help but honor you with more power, more authority, and more victory. He will show himself strong on behalf of those whose hearts are loyal.

Okay, let's figure out how to step out onto the battleground and win.

THE STANDARD ACTION PLAN (DON'T DO IT)

- 1) Allow your past experience, performance, or mistakes to define your present and your future.
- 2) Tell yourself, "Once a screw-up, always a screw-up."
- 3) Live up to the level of your words and stay a screw-up.

THE MORE THAN STANDARD ACTION PLAN (DO THIS ONE)

- 1) Ask the Holy Spirit to show you any of your past mistakes that haunt you still and cause you to see yourself as scum, that create bitterness in your soul. In your journal, write out anything that he brings to mind.
- 2) The Holy Spirit may show you things that you've never apologized for, broken your allegiance with, and turned away from. If that's the case, take some time to pray those things through. Confess and get right with Jesus. Ask him to forgive you, but do not beg for it. Choose to fully believe that he forgives you freely and eagerly.
- 3) Ask him to show you anything you are currently doing or thinking that is sin and is dishonoring to him. Write these things down as well.
- 4) If you want to experience the full power of God, you need to savagely get rid of anything that stands between you and him. Lay yourself bare before him, and give him everything. Ask him to cleanse you and free you and make you like him. Thank him that those sins are not who you are, and will not continue in your life.
- 5) Write across all of your sins and mistakes, past and present, the words, "Jesus's Blood: I Am Clean."

TRUTH TO CHANGE YOUR LIFE

Romans 12:2

John 8:31-32

John 15:7-11

James 3:2-5

Proverbs 18:21

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

HOW TO WIN THE WAR FOR YOUR THOUGHTS

IT WOULD CERTAINLY be nice if all you had to do was quote one Bible verse and then you'd see your life get turned upside down, in a good way. Imagine, you're feeling depressed because you feel unloved. So you quote everyone's favorite go-to verse, "For God so loved the world..." All of a sudden, your feelings are completely different. You're not depressed at all now. Magically, you've become overwhelmed with joy and excitement that just stay—forever.

Wouldn't that be nice?

Yeah, but that's not how it works. That mustard seed doesn't flash and quake and rumble and in a moment of time turn into a tree. It goes through process. It grows. It matures. It fights to become what it was destined to be. So it often is with us. And it is good. And God is in it. He is in the sudden miracle and in the miraculous process. We need both.

So if the miracle doesn't happen for you when you want it to, it means nothing about your worth or God's power. Do not give up or get discouraged. You fight. Just like an athlete commits to training consistently no matter how they feel, you must one hundred percent commit to your freedom from a victim mentality and your growth into a Conqueror.

Your feelings—the ones that feed the old standard way of thinking like a victim, the ones that discourage you from trying on the SAT or from fully

pursuing what you are called to—may not change automatically. Even if you decide, “I will live in a Conqueror’s Mindset,” your feelings likely won’t get the memo. Choosing to see yourself as a more than standard child of God must often be done before you ever feel it.

So the question is, how do you change then? How do you step onto the battleground while still feeling the standard victim feelings, and yet come out on top?

The answer is that you must discipline yourself to choose to literally speak, write, and think God’s life giving truth instead of all of the thoughts that your feelings want to agree with. It’s a simple, non-sexy answer. But it works.

MY BATTLEGROUND EXPERIENCE

There was a very difficult period of my life when nearly everything was a struggle in some way. My health was suffering under fresh waves of pain and inflammation due to a body-wide autoimmune disease that, at the time, I had been fighting against for about ten years. As a result, my wife and I had very little money with two little girls and not a lot of visible hope for things ever changing. To add even more pain, she and I were going through a season of a lot of fighting and not connecting well. And the one last piece to the puzzle: we were living in my mom’s house.

I felt like scum. I felt like a terrible husband always fighting with my wife and unable to meet her needs and be strong emotionally. I felt like a lazy dad who couldn’t provide a house for his kids. I felt like a failure in the world—a husband and father who had yet to make anything of himself and was still living under his mom’s roof.

I’d look around at my peers and feel a deep and intense sense of shame for what I had made of my life. Granted, I also was battling a crippling disease that had gotten me bedridden once before. But that was little consolation in the face of this intense shame and worthlessness that dogged me daily.

In my utter lack of faith and lack of confidence and almost empty will power, I would wake up every single morning with fresh feelings of despair rushing at me as soon as my eyes opened. As soon as my brain logged on for

the day, it would wish that it hadn't. It would want to run and hide from the shame.

I blamed God.

If he really was so good and powerful, why was my life this way? If the gospel was such good news, why was I not getting transformed? No one would have looked at me and said to themselves, "Man! Look at what Jesus has done in his life! I want that!"

This opened up a whole other avenue of self-defeating thinking. I started feeling like God simply didn't care about me. I never questioned his existence or his power or how good he is in certain people's lives. But I would get so angry and depressed because he didn't seem to want to extend all of that goodness quite far enough to reach me. Other people got to be utterly mind-blown by his power, but I must have done something or become someone inherently repelling to him. So I was on my own, left to wallow and rot, because I certainly wouldn't be able to get out of this.

But thank Jesus I found help from two sources: a preacher I'd watch on Youtube named Dan Mohler, and a counselor I started seeing. Both showed me the same thing, and confirmed in my spirit that what I'm sharing with you now is truth. It is how God's kingdom works.

They both talked about taking charge of my thoughts and declaring what's true according to God's word rather than what is fact according to what I see or feel in my experience. I had a choice: I could worship my experience as having the highest authority, or I could worship God as having the highest authority. I could doubt and explain away his word to come up with rational reasons why my life didn't reflect the promises he has given us, thereby making his word match my life, or I could pick myself up off the boxing mat time after time after getting knocked down and doggedly cling to his word as true until my life experience began to match it.

Would my experience be the standard? Or would his truth be the standard?

You have the same choice.

So I started a new habit. Every morning when I woke up, I forced myself to get out of bed immediately, often before dawn. If I was going to go to war in my mind, physically getting my body engaged in the process was going to

prove to be a powerful tool to that end. In fact, you need to do the same. God says we'll seek him and find him when we seek him with all our heart. Seeking him with all our heart quite often entails our entire being, physical, emotional, mental.

Don't believe me? It's no different than a rabid football fan jumping out of his seat when his team pulls a fourth-quarter-come-from-behind upset. He doesn't just sit there and quietly nod his approval. He jumps around, yells, throws popcorn through his living room, kisses his wife, runs circles in his yard. You get it.

It's no different with seeking Jesus. You must not be passive and so-so with him. Go all in.

Anyway, I'd get out of my bed, get my dog, and go for a walk where I would have time all by myself to immerse my mind in his truth. I would, as I walked, say out loud verses from the Bible and statements that I knew were consistent with the Bible even if they weren't exact verses. And you know what? At first, none of it felt true. I felt like a fake and a liar, and quite honestly, it was emotionally exhausting. It's a lot easier to be lazy in our thoughts and just let the negative victim thinking roll on through like a freight train.

Stopping that freight train is a whole different endeavor.

But over time, and not even very much time—in a matter of weeks, I saw myself change. I watched as my emotions calmed down and my anger at my wife lessened. I watched as depression lifted and I started to have hope again. I watched the confidence in me grow. All of this happened almost without effort. Yes, I was putting in time on the mental battlefield, but then these changes in my feelings and default outlook happened easily, without effort. It was exactly as that verse in Romans says: the Holy Spirit was powerfully transforming those parts of me that I had been powerless to change. All I had to do was switch my allegiance and to side with his truth by an act of my choice.

When I put his words on my tongue, he, like the blood through my veins, carried the power of truth through the rest of my being while it infected me from the inside out.

This is the battleground. You do your part in actively choosing him. He does his part in miraculously changing you.

And when you combine this with intimate time spent getting to know him around the campfire, you have an unstoppable force that will absolutely take you from a victim to a Conqueror.

And forget the SAT. That's child's play compared to the far-reaching effects this transformation will have on your entire life.

DO THIS EXERCISE (AS A LIFELONG HABIT)

Remember the list of lies I had you go through way back in chapter nine? Your job there was to identify the many sneaky little thoughts that you'd been allowing to poison your thinking and damage your life. Here, we're going to do something similar. However, this time your job is to gather, both from this list and from your own time with Jesus, a list of truths straight from the heart of God that are in direct opposition to the lies from before.

And this must not be merely a one-time homework assignment. If you want to establish a lifestyle of victory, then living by faith in the truth of God absolutely must become a continual, persistent, never-giving-up practice.

The way you've been taught to do life is to let your feelings guide you—feelings that slowly kill you because they have been molded by the victim mentality lies. Don't feel too bad though. This is the standard, natural, common way of life for most people. But, as you now know, you are not any of those things. Therefore, this way of life is off-limits to you from now on. You are more than standard. You are supernatural. You are uncommon. Your new "normal" is to live by faith, faith in what God says, no matter how crazy and too-good-to-be-true it may sound.

Romans 1:16-17 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."

* * *

And the way to get more faith, to let faith take over you so that it becomes a powerful force in your life is by reading, dwelling on, never letting go of God's words to you.

Romans 10:17 So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

As you go through the following list of truths, and as you begin to speak them out daily, to write them out daily, to silently pray them into the spiritual world daily, remember that this is not an empty powerless homework assignment to check off your list. This is the epicenter of your battle, my friend. What is won or lost in your mind will be won or lost in your reality.

1 Timothy 6:12 Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called...

See, your fight is the fight to build up your faith, to stay in your faith, to live your life and determine your course of action based on your faith. This is how you actually bring into your possession the "eternal life" of Jesus. In other words, living by faith is how you begin to experience the life-changing abundant blessings that God your Father, and Jesus your King have designed you for. Jesus himself said, in Matthew 9:29, "According to your faith be it done to you." And the Passion Translation makes it even more plain for us: "You will have what your faith expects!"

If this is the case, then we'd better make absolutely certain that we are building our faith in the right things, or thing: the Word of God.

TRUTHS THAT CREATE THE CONQUEROR'S MINDSET

- I am precious to God and honored by him. (Isaiah 43:4)
- I am loved even at my worst. I don't need to perform at all. (Romans 5:8)
- I am smart. My mind is good. (1 Corinthians 2:16)
- I am wise because of Jesus. (1 Corinthians 1:30)
- I am proud to be me. (Psalm 139:14)
- My Father adores me. (Zephaniah 3:17, Romans 8:15-17)

More Than Standard

-As I follow and yield to God, I will succeed. I will prosper. (Jeremiah 29:11, Psalm 1:1-3, Deuteronomy 29:9, Joshua 1:7, Deuteronomy 30:8-10)

-Even if I fail, I will bounce back stronger. (Proverbs 24:16, Psalm 91:11-12, Psalm 37:23-24)

-I can do literally anything. (Philippians 4:13)

-My opinion is valuable. The world is blessed by the message I have to give. (Revelation 12:11, Jeremiah 20:9, Jeremiah 1, Exodus 3)

-I am priceless. (Isaiah 62:3, 1 Peter 1:18-19)

-My dreams, when my heart is connected with God, are good and from him. (Psalm 37:4)

-My desires are possible. (Mark 9:23, Psalm 43:5)

-I will not settle for the way things are, I continue always into more. (Matthew 11:12)

-I am free from every chain, every addiction, every thing that has kept me stuck. (John 8:36, Galatians 5:1)

-I am changing and have been changed. (2 Corinthians 5:17, Philippians 2:13)

-I am good. I am not messed up at all. (Psalm 139:14, Genesis 1:26-27, Galatians 2:20)

-God is not too busy for me. He happily invests his time and attention in me. (Psalm 121)

-God and Jesus were eager to save me. They like me. (John 17)

-I will change the world. It is in my DNA. (Matthew 5:14-16, Matthew 28:18-20, Mark 16:15-18)

GOING FORWARD

Like I've already said, I want you to make this your new normal. Practice renewing your mind daily, and you will see yourself transform into a real Conqueror. You will see yourself rise above the standard life you've known into real life with Jesus. The life in his Kingdom that you were designed for. A life of miracles, of surrender, of holiness, of love, of power, of authority, of kicking the SAT's butt.

How to Win the War for Your Thoughts

Use my own battleground experience to guide you. Follow my example.

A word of advice for you. The verses that I've given you here are only meant to be a starting place. Verses on their own only carry limited power. Jesus actually scolded the Pharisees because they obsessively searched the Scriptures thinking that life would come from the words themselves. But they missed the whole point. The words of the Bible carry power when we connect with the person of Jesus through them.

That being the case, I want you to go and find your own promises. You spend time getting to know Jesus through his word. You let him bring it to life for you. You sit and be and think and cry out and just plain old cry as you discover more of God and as he makes himself known to you.

THE MORE THAN STANDARD ACTION PLAN

- 1) In addition to everything we've already discussed in this chapter, make sure you download the additional resources I've put together for you in the Conqueror's Training Library. You'll find a very detailed, helpful guide on how to really do this, step by step. You'll find even more verses as well.
- 2) If you need help, if you need someone to talk to, if you have questions—head to the back of the book to find out how to get in touch with me. I'm here for you.

PART FOUR

SEVEN INDISPENSABLE WEAPONS FOR CONQUERING THE TEST

INTRO TO PART 4

NOW THAT YOU are becoming a Conqueror, who operates according to the truth and power of the gospel, who thinks in a manner that is way more than the standard victim mentality, who both connects with Jesus around the campfire and fights alongside him on the battlefield—how do you go about conquering the SAT? What are the specific principles, or strategies, or weapons that will form the foundation for your battle plan?

Keep in mind, this book isn't a comprehensive SAT strategy guide. For more of that, go check out my online Conquer the Test course, which you can find out more about at the end of the book. The course super comprehensive and covers everything you'll need for the test. But for our purpose right now, part four is going to lay your SAT foundation. And even if you were to implement only these principles, and you never pursued any further SAT instruction, you'd be far more prepared than you were before.

In this next section, I'm going to familiarize you with seven powerful SAT-conquering mindsets that you need to adopt in order to turn the tables on the SAT and come out on top. These mindsets are your weapons against the biblical giant, Goliath. They are the tools of a Conqueror. Wield them well.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

WEAPON #1: ATTACK AND TAKE CHARGE

I WANT YOU to stop being nice. Be mean. Get ruthless. Send politeness to the trash can. When it comes to the SAT sitting on the desk in front of you, I want you to attack and take charge.

A victim approaches the SAT in timidity, careful not to step on any toes. (As if a booklet had toes in the first place!) “Here I am this morning, hoping to do okay on this test if that’s okay with you and if that happens to be what will work out well for everyone. I like all of you, including you College Board. You are my friends and I hope you like me. In fact, I’d like to give you a photo of myself and my life story so that we can be buddies. And I’ll also go ahead and take this test. Hopefully I do well and it all works out.”

Yeah, I know that sounds stupid and a little repulsive. But it’s an extreme version of what most standard students think. The standard approach to the SAT is this just-sneak-through attitude that will not get you the score that you’re looking for.

But if you want to be more than standard, you’ve got to get mean, like Jesus.

Wait, what?

Mean like Jesus? That doesn’t sound right.

I know. But it is. We have this mistaken perception that Jesus was always nice and did his best to make others comfortable; therefore, he must want for us to be nice as well. Two instances from his life will disprove this right away so

Weapon #1: Attack and Take Charge

we can move on. First, he called the Pharisees a bunch of snakes whose father was the devil himself. Wow! That doesn't sound like it was making anyone feel at ease and comfortable. He wasn't looking to make friends with that one. He saw injustice and wickedness and called it out.

Second, the temple. The people of the day had turned the temple into a marketplace for corruption and exploitation as those in power made way too much money off of those wanting to come and offer sacrifices to God. Jesus was furious. So he yelled, "What in the world?! What do you think you are doing? My Father's house is to be a house of prayer and connection with him—where his very presence dwells. But you all are turning it into a den of thieves!"

So Jesus stormed through the temple with his very own homemade whip, driving out people and animals alike as if they all were unruly cattle. He flipped over tables and sent money scattering everywhere. He was not nice at all. Instead he was consumed with zeal and fire for his Father and his mission.

Okay, fine. Here's a bonus third instance of Jesus being mean. There was a time when he was talking with his disciples about how he was soon going to be arrested and crucified. Peter, in his misguided enthusiasm, protested, "No! May it never be!" Jesus, instead of politely pulling him aside to protect him from the embarrassment of being corrected in front of the others, directly and openly confronted Peter, saying, "Get behind me Satan!"

How incredibly rude and insensitive is that?

So there you go. Three cases of Jesus not being nice. I want you to have the freedom to also not be nice. The SAT is no place for tiptoeing around. You are on a mission, and it's time for you to take charge and attack. It's time for you to look at the SAT as something for you to be mean and ruthless with and to take dominion over.

DAVID VS. THE SAT

Consider yourself as David, the young unimpressive boy, up against Goliath, the nine foot tall vicious giant whose armor weighed a few hundred pounds. David should have lost. But because he was connected to God's presence, he was more than standard. He was more than all the other bigger

and stronger men in the army. For him there was no amount of niceness or politeness that would be welcome on that battlefield.

I reiterate. You are David, and I want you to pretend that the College Board and the SAT are like Goliath. Now, let's pause for a moment because I want to be clear. The makers of the test are not evil and morally depraved enemies who stand against God. Not at all! They are doing their good and necessary job. However, for your purpose of getting into the right mindset, you need to think of them as if they are not your friends, and they do not want you to succeed. Like a boxer who, when training, gets angry at the trainer who's holding the punching bag. The anger is not real, but in the moment it serves to fuel the boxer to fight harder and perform at the top of their ability.

Take on this mindset. Let it sink in. Start thinking as if the test does not want you to succeed. If you aren't careful and you rely too much on it to help you along the way, you'll be terribly disappointed, and you'll get many more questions wrong. The questions are so well-crafted, the wrong answers are so tempting, that students who are not in attack mode more often than not follow the wrong path through each question.

So, stop considering the test as a potential ally, and realize that it is your job to take this thing down.

No matter how intimidating it is and how outmatched you feel, remember that Goliath is the one who died, not David. Not you, the underdog. You are going to be okay. You are far more powerful than the impotent little booklet on the desk in front of you. So act like it. You carry the image of God and the presence of Jesus. You are above all the standards. The test is just pieces of paper.

Yes, the SAT is intimidating, and it feels like the odds are completely stacked against you. But you have the upper hand nonetheless because you have Jesus and are now living from your Conqueror's Mindset. Therefore, you show up to every single one of your practice times, every one of your instruction times, every single testing date with this attitude: "Okay, SAT, it's time for you to go down. This is my time to show you who I really am. I am smart, strong, confident. I am more than standard."

CHAPTER NINETEEN

WEAPON #2: THINK FOR YOURSELF

THE MOST IMPORTANT in-the-moment, hands-on strategy you can implement on test day is to *think for yourself*. This is not just hyperbole. It is solid gold SAT strategy.

If you understand now that this test is not your friend and does not want you to succeed, then when you go into the test you can also know that nobody is going to hold your hand. But the standard approach for students is to carry in this underlying hope that maybe the test will help them out.

So they go into the reading section hoping that the passages just happen to be interesting, or easy to understand, or, at the very least, that they won't be the equivalent of a tranquilizer dart flying into their neck. Hopefully this month's version of the test will be a great match for them. Hopefully the test will coddle them. Hopefully the set of math questions won't be as difficult this time. Hopefully there won't be a trig question.

But the test will not help you. It will not do your thinking for you. You and God are all you've got. So it's time to think for yourself and to stop looking for handouts from the test.

WHAT THE TEST WANTS

Weapon #2: Think For Yourself

The test wants two things from you. First, and most obviously, it wants you to be standard. That's right. It wants you to not excel or even do well, to just be mediocre. It is not on your side.

Okay, we get that.

The second thing the test wants is to short-circuit your powerful thinking ability. It wants to cripple your brain. Sounds extreme, but think about it. If the test can pull you out of your place of being in charge and thinking calmly and clearly, then you'll start operating out of those anxiety-ridden triggered responses of "I can't do this" and "I don't know this." When you enter that standard victim way of thinking, your performance will live up—or actually live down to that low standard you've set for yourself.

The SAT has two primary methods of crippling your thinking. One is to lull you to sleep. The other is to intimidate you.

NAP TIME

If you want to take a good nap, there are few ways more effective than opening up a nice long SAT reading passage and letting its dull monotonous message sing you its lullaby. These passages are usually some of the least exciting bits of reading material you can imagine. They are not meant to entertain you. In fact, on the old version of the test, when it used to be scored out of 2400 points, there was a reading passage about the science behind yawning and why they are "contagious." It was the most ironic thing I worked with students through this passage dozens of times, and it never failed to make one or both of us yawn.

Now, you face passages about DNA replication, the motivation behind gift-giving, and how to decide whether economic ethics should be measured by outcomes or by character. Not to mention the hundreds-of-years-old passages using archaic language that many students have to read four times before finally understanding what the author is actually meaning. You have ninety line passages that are made up of only two illegally long paragraphs. Talk about hard to trudge through.

While everything on the page is tempting you to zone out, your job is to stay engaged.

DON'T BE INTIMIDATED

The second method the test wields in order to get you to stop thinking is intimidation. If you're not going to fall asleep in your desk, then the next best thing would be to have you in fight-or-flight mode. To have you running scared. To sap your confidence and get you to show up to a question thinking, "Oh shoot. I don't know this one. This is too hard for me. It's beyond me."

Math sections are notorious for producing these standard victim thoughts in test takers. While the other sections definitely have this ability as well, the math is painfully blatant in its intimidation tactics. Many of the questions at first glance, even before you read a word, look difficult. You'll see equations that are more complicated than you care to imagine, with four variables and complex fractions and seemingly missing information. You get graphs with too much going on visually and not enough explanation. You have yet other questions with long paragraphs of writing: the dreaded word problem. And when you finish reading the paragraph you realize that you have no clue what you just read. So you wonder, "How am I going to get this right if I can't even process the information first?"

STAY ENGAGED

The standard response to these sleep-inducing and intimidating tactics is to disengage from the battle in front of you. But you are more than standard. So you aren't going that route. You stay present. You don't let those initial responses carry you away. Instead, you change your thinking and give yourself a new more than standard Conqueror's way of thinking:

"Okay, this looks difficult. But I can do this. This looks difficult, but I am smarter than this test. I am smarter than I realize. I am smarter than I ever used to tell myself. I carry the mind of Christ, and he knows everything that I would ever need to know. He shaped me and put my brain together. I carry so much ability and potential, it's crazy.

"So this might look tough, and maybe the truth is that I don't know how to do it. Maybe I, in fact, will get this question wrong. But I'm going to trust him still and what he's put inside of me. Rather than getting swept away in toxic victim thinking, I'm going to stay in the battle."

Weapon #2: Think For Yourself

See what's happening here? You are not letting automatic feelings that get triggered by difficult circumstances be your guide. Instead you are discovering discipline. Armed with your new Conqueror's Mindset built on God's truth, you are leading yourself to stay in the battle. You are taking charge and thinking for yourself.

What successful warrior runs away when the fight gets hard? None. Remember the mighty men of David. They stood and fought against hundreds even when they were all alone. So stop running from the questions or the reading passages or the grammar topics.

Saddle up.

Buckle up.

Woman up.

Man up.

Fight back and don't take "No" for an answer from the SAT. Step into your identity as a son and daughter of God. The test doesn't want this. It doesn't want you to realize who you really are, that you are like David. You have the ability to take down the giant in front of you because you are someone who is powerful and who can change your atmosphere, rather than be thrown around by it. You are not at its mercy. It is at yours.

But you have to choose this. Jesus has given it to you but will you take it? Will you live in it? Nobody can make you. God won't force you. He loves and honors you too much. You have to choose to leave whatever past you have behind you and realize that this, right now, is your day. You don't let adversity beat you down and crush you into the mud. Instead you feed on it. You eat it for lunch and force it to make you stronger for next time, for the next challenge that threatens you.

This is how a Conqueror, like you, thinks.

CHAPTER TWENTY

WEAPON #3: PREPARE LIKE A CONQUEROR

THINKING FOR YOURSELF and being comfortable with actually trusting your instincts becomes so much easier when you do the work ahead of time to prepare well. When you dig in to SAT strategy—how to handle exponent problems, how to implement the three-phase battle plan for the reading section, or how to figure out those tricky sentence placement questions on the writing and language section—your confidence will start to skyrocket. You'll start to believe that your instincts are reliable. And they are. You have trained them properly.

The standard way of preparing for the test usually looks like one of two scenarios. Either a student will casually do a couple practice tests thinking that simple exposure to the test is enough to get them ready, or they will read a book and watch a video or two to get some strategy instruction under their belt. But neither of these is a good plan. They are both incomplete and possibly even lazy.

No. A Conqueror who wants to be more than standard and to prepare thoroughly understands that in order to master the SAT, the preparation plan must involve both instruction and practice. Each is equally vital, and neither should be sacrificed.

STEP ONE: LEARN THE SAT STRATEGY

Weapon #3: Prepare Like a Conqueror

Yes, you must learn how to actually do the test. I'm teaching you the foundational heart level and general principles that you've got to start living by, but chances are good that you'll need more than that. You'll need to learn specific strategies for each specific section. And here's a secret that Conquerors embrace: learning SAT test-taking strategy is far more important than reviewing school concepts. It's okay if you need to brush up on math and grammar topics, absolutely. But the bulk of your instruction should be about test strategy, not subject-verb agreement.

You need to learn how to think in order to outsmart the test. You need to learn the logic and critical thinking skills necessary to kill this giant, because it is primarily a logic and critical thinking test, not a math test, or a grammar test, or a reading comprehension test.

But please do not stop there.

STEP TWO: PRACTICE THE SAT STRATEGY

You will separate yourself from the herd of standard test-takers when you choose to take this new instruction and actually practice with it. This is difficult and not many students actually do it. It takes discipline and putting in extra work and time beyond what your parents or teachers require of you. But as a redeemed and valuable child of God, you are worth this extra effort. That's right. You are actually worth the extra investment from yourself.

There is no way for you to improve your SAT skills, truly, if you just sit passively and take in information. Don't let this book be the end of your preparation. Take what you're learning here, take the specific strategies you learn from me and my other SAT materials, and actually work with them.

Let's pretend you're in one of my classes in your hometown of Hallockville. In the middle of our second session, just as you're about to wrap up your practice math section, we all—you, me, everyone in the class—get this emergency alert on our phones:

“Ninja alert: An army of ninjas has just landed on the beach, and they are swiftly and stealthily, with footsteps as soft as floating feathers, swarming into town. They are deadly and all citizens should either flee or take other protective measures.”

So I interrupt class, and I say, “Okay everyone. Forget the SAT. Everyone read this.”

I pull out of my desk a dozen copies of the New York Times best-seller, *How to Be a Kung Fu Master in 20 Not Very Easy, but Somewhat Doable Steps*, and I pass them around with the instructions, “Okay everybody, read this right now.”

Somehow the ninja invasion takes long enough for us to sit and read the whole thing. I patiently wait for you to finish reading, at which point I force you to put the book down, pack your things because we’re done for the day, and go out and fight. Fight the ninjas.

Are you going to survive? Probably not. In fact, your failure at survival, let alone saving Hallocksville, is nearly guaranteed. All you did was read a book! You can’t defeat highly trained ninjas just because you read a book! To fully master Kung Fu so as to not get absolutely demolished, you’d have to spend years of hard work training and honing your character, skills, etc. You might need to take a pilgrimage or two to Huaiyang, Kung Fu’s birthplace, or to Foshan, the city dubbed the Kung Fu capital. The bottom line: you have to do more than just take in concepts. You’ve got to work with the material.

Now, without that Kung Fu manual, you wouldn’t have known how or what to train. The instruction is obviously important, but incomplete. Just as training without instruction is also incomplete.

It is no different for the SAT. Simply taking in SAT information with no practice, no actual work with the strategies, is not good. Nor is just doing practice without having the right strategies under your belt. You must have both.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

WEAPON #4: WRITE ALL THE HECK OVER THE TEST

YOU UNDERSTAND THAT attacking and taking charge of the test, thinking for yourself, and trusting your instincts as you untangle these tricky questions are all important skills for you, an SAT Conqueror, to master as you attack the test. But the question that I would have if I were you is, “How do I actually DO it? Like, literally. What do I actually DO that is not just a somewhat ephemeral good-sounding concept. I need practical.”

Here you go.

YOUR PENCIL IS YOUR WEAPON

Write all the heck over the test. Do not sit in your chair passively on any part of the test: reading, writing, or math. You should always be actively engaged not just in your mind, but also in your body—namely, your hand. As cheesy as it sounds, being on the attack means you need a weapon. And since slicing the test booklet to shreds with your favorite Scottish broadsword might be an effective way of demolishing the test, it unfortunately won’t get you a good score. Therefore, your next best option is your pencil. If it’s just sitting there lifelessly while you read through a passage or a word problem, then it’s not doing its job. And you are not doing yours.

An active pencil leads to an active, engaged brain. And as we know now, an engaged brain, the mark of a Conqueror’s Mindset, leads to more power,

more confidence, and better performance. An engaged brain allows the real you who Jesus blessed the world with to shine through.

There's something powerful that happens between your hand and your brain and all of the firing synapses and neurons and neurotransmitters when you pick up your pencil and start to write. And this is not just me making this up. Do a quick search online and you'll find article after article, university study after study, that all point to the same conclusion. Writing by hand activates your cognitive abilities in ways that few other activities can. Students who take notes by hand seem to score better on tests than those who take notes on computers. Writing by hand leads to noticeably more observable brain activity. It's quite impressive.

So if you are having trouble staying in charge, not falling asleep, and not getting intimidated, then you absolutely can lead your mind into your Conqueror's Mindset with your actions—with the act of physically writing.

ON THE READING SECTION

What does this look like on the reading section? As you are reading through each passage, notate it. Underline the crucial things that you should be looking for, like its main idea, tone and keywords that you've discovered you should be on the lookout for. If you go through my training, you'll see more about this. But for now, know that you should be taking quick, powerful, and useful notes both before and during your reading of the passage.

ON THE WRITING SECTION

On the writing section, you want to use your pencil to note or mark the main point, or "common thread," that you see occurring in the whole passage, in the paragraph, and in different sections of the same paragraph. You want to cross out certain underlined vocabulary words, transition words, and sometimes even whole sentences (especially if it's a logical sentence placement question).

* * *

ON THE MATH SECTION

Keeping your pencil moving on the math section entails a thousand different possibilities, depending on the type of question. Maybe you need to write equations when the test gave you a word problem. You need to draw a picture, map out a diagram, list out data points. If the question gave you an equation, maybe you should draw a graph instead. Always be ready for the test to give you the information in a less useful way than what you could come up with. Be suspicious of each question, and use your pencil to clean up the mess they present you with on each question.

One particularly powerful process to get comfortable with is to handle math questions one sentence at a time. As you read each sentence, with your pencil, write down math symbols. Represent the same snippet of information, not in confusing full sentences, but in easy meaningful math facts.

$$2+b$$

$$x = 78$$

etc.

Use your pencil to re-present to yourself the information in ways that work for you.

TAKE NO PRISONERS (ELIMINATE WRONG ANSWERS)

On all of the sections, you should get very comfortable crossing out wrong answers. Don't allow them to stay pristinely untouched and to keep cluttering your mind with doubts and questions. "Is this actually correct? Did I miss something?" The longer you let the wrong answers linger as possible choices, the more likely they are to burrow their way into your thoughts and turn your confidence into second-guessing. Cross them out.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

WEAPON #5: REMEMBER, YOU'RE DEALING WITH A STANDARDIZED TEST

MIND-BLOWING FACT for you: The SAT is a standardized test. I know. I know. It looks like I just wasted six perfectly good words to tell you that. It sounds dumb, obvious, and boring. But the fact is very true, and very important for you to fully understand.

Because we are dealing with a standardized test, the SAT's content cannot be too difficult. The standard way of thinking for most students is to see a difficult question and think, "Oh no! This is beyond me. This is too hard for me. I'm not smart enough for this." And they operate under the old victim mentality, making themselves in this case a victim of both the question and of their own lack of knowledge, or their own limited level of instruction in school.

Since the SAT is standardized, every student across the nation must have the same opportunity to learn what needs to be learned in order to be ready for the test. Therefore, they cannot include concepts from higher level math, like advanced trigonometry and calculus, because not every student will take these classes in their high school career. The test makers must find the sweet spot of math difficulty that is low enough for everyone to have been exposed to it, but difficult enough for it to be challenging, sometimes.

This means that the test material is never out of your reach. You are not too stupid to handle it. Do you hear what I am saying? You are not too stupid

for this test. You may be underprepared. You might not remember all of the math concepts. You may even have done terribly in the SAT-relevant math classes. But you deserve to be here. You are not unqualified. And it is possible for you to grow your knowledge and to finally understand this stuff, even if you never did before.

EASY QUESTIONS VS. HARD QUESTIONS

There is a spectrum of difficulty that each SAT question fits into. Some are easy. Some are difficult. And some are somewhere between the two. But the difference between easy and difficult questions is not necessarily that the easy questions have lower level concepts while the difficult ones are only for valedictorians and Harvard-bound geniuses. The difference is often simply the level of trickiness. Easy questions are easy because the road to the right answer is obvious. Difficult questions are difficult because you have to work harder, be more creative, engage more critical thinking to find that elusive path to the right answer.

Nonetheless, with the right grit and determination, you can indeed find it.

Think for a moment about the math sections. They are arranged generally from easy to hard, beginning to end. So questions toward the beginning will have more obvious ways to answer them. The trail that readily presents itself will most likely be the way that you should just go ahead and use, like a path with a trailhead that is wide open, paved with a nice velvet red carpet laid across it, and signs all pointing right at it.

But questions toward the latter part of the section will probably best be solved in a way that you wouldn't naturally think of. They require more SAT-specific creativity and strategy. The path to the right answer for these is harder to find, like a trailhead that's hidden by overgrown bushes and thorns and a shroud of fog blocking your vision. Hard to find? Yes. But there, nonetheless, and able to be found.

You can do it. You have no excuse anymore. So stop thinking, "I'm just not gonna be good at this part of the SAT."

More Than Standard

Start thinking instead, “No. I will not look for any excuses. I can prepare. I can improve. I can put in the work and learn and hone my skills. I can even develop new skills.”

That’s how a more than standard Conqueror operating under the power of Jesus thinks.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

WEAPON #6: DON'T BE A GOOD STUDENT

WHEN YOU OPERATE in a Conqueror's Mindset, you don't just default to the course of action that comes naturally. You make confident, proactive decisions about what the best course is, and you train yourself in that course until it becomes natural. For the SAT, that means adopting new ways of thinking that don't work in English and Math class. In fact, it means abandoning some of the ideas that actually would make you a good student in those classes.

Remember, a good school student is not automatically an SAT conqueror. Students run into problems when they, without question or scrutiny of their own thinking, bring to the test the mindsets that have served them so well in their classes.

So, do not be a good student.

Be a good thinker.

Be a powerful thinker.

Be an independent thinker.

The SAT is designed to cause standard students who fall into the most common thought traps to get standard or below scores. But when you stand in your confidence and powerful Conqueror's Mindset and your thinking becomes more than standard, that's when you can excel.

If most students think that their good student skills make them good at the SAT, then you want to forget about your good student skills. They are all on the chopping block and up for elimination until further notice.

DON'T BE A GOOD ENGLISH STUDENT

Imagine that it's the first day of school, and your English teacher has you studying a certain dark and gloomy poem. When you read it, you embarrassingly can't keep yourself from crying. But then you hear sniffles coming from all over the room, and to your relief, you look around to find all the other students with tear-stained cheeks as well.

No one in the class has ever heard of the author, Jimmy John Jenkins, before, but your teacher still gives you a free-writing assignment about his life. She wants you to write about what you think might have been going on for him that would cause him to write such a sad poem. Your friend Timmy wonders if maybe Jenkins's dog died recently. Sally says that his parents must have neglected him when he was a toddler. You write about how he probably went through a recent divorce and was now escaping his pain through writing.

The truth is, each student in the class could say something totally different. But it's feasible that each student could receive full credit as long as their response is logical and based somewhat on what little you all know. Thus, you could be dealing with twenty-something "correct" answers.

Don't be one of the many students who let this English class experience influence how you approach the SAT. The standard thought process for a student on the reading section looks something like this: "Oh man, there are two of these choices that look right. In fact, two of these choices actually are technically correct. So how should I go about choosing the best one, the one that the test-makers would favor?"

On the SAT, it's crucial that you remember that there is only one right answer. That's it. There is no room for debate on this. On the reading section, there is always only one correct answer and three wrong answers for each question. They are not varying degrees of good or correct. They are, for very concrete reasons, either correct or not. Every wrong answer can be shown to be wrong by something that is black and white on the page in front of you.

And every correct answer has black and white evidence, or justification—also on the page in front of you.

Your job, therefore, is to ruthlessly scrutinize each answer choice and hold it up to the strictest of standards. Any slight error—any tiny red flag—is enough for you to eliminate it and move on.

On the writing section, this same principle of having only one correct answer applies. I have worked with many students, and I would say that most of my students begin their SAT preparation process with the completely wrong method for handling writing section questions. The standard method is to evaluate the answer choices simply by what sounds the best. What sounds the least choppy. What sounds, according to some nebulous set of criteria, the most “flowy.”

But this is not powerful, and it does not take charge. This kind of thinking puts you at the mercy of the test and does not enable you to think for yourself. Instead, you only think according to what the test throws at you, according to how each answer choice subjectively sounds to your particular ear.

If the test is not your friend, though, then this is incredibly risky. Remember that the test is crafted to mislead you. So you can bet that these writing section answer choices have been crafted to sound better than they actually are.

The problem is compounded by the fact that, in reality, there are many ways that the same piece of writing can be edited or revised in order to sound better. The practice of peer reviews, which many English teachers use, testifies to this fact. Many teachers will assign a paper to be due on a certain “peer review” day where you bring your finished draft and pass it around to three different classmates. Each classmate can have totally different suggestions for how to improve your paper. Are two of them wrong and one of them right? No. Are all three classmates potentially right? Sure, possibly.

Not so on the SAT. On the writing section, where your job is to essentially revise a certain passage, the same principle is true: three definitively wrong answers, and one absolutely right answer. No debate.

While a standard victim mentality causes you to depend on the answer choices and to go with the flow, deciding based on what merely seems like the best, your more than standard Conqueror’s Mindset should lead you to

proactively discover the definite grammar rules that the SAT tests. The question types and their patterns. The strategies for dissecting each. Go at the writing section fully prepared, not just relying on what worked in English class.

DON'T BE A GOOD MATH STUDENT

Most of us have done hundreds, if not thousands, of math problems over the course of our illustrious academic careers. From our pages of times tables in third grade, to our fifty-problem precalc homework assignments, repetition in math is something we are quite familiar with.

One example is the quadratic formula: “ X equals the opposite of b , plus or minus the square root of b squared minus four $a c$, all over two a .” The way I learned how to work with this beast, and actually became good with it, was by using it over and over in who knows how many assignments. Well, there was also the fact that my teacher taught it to us, putting it to the tune of “Jingle Bells” to help us memorize it.

Yes, Mr. Tarr, I still remember it to this day because of you. Thank you.

The point is, math rightfully utilizes repetition, which then creates in you a certain pre-programmed, automatic response. You see an equation, you solve for x . You see a quadratic function, you factor it down to two sets of parentheses so you can find two solutions.

This is fantastic for math class. If you know your go-to methods for solving certain problems, you'll be a great math student. But if you limit yourself to these methods on the SAT, you will, at best, be missing easier (though trickier) ways of answering questions. At worst, your being limited to math class methods will actually keep you from being able to answer some questions altogether.

When you attack the math section of the SAT from a Conqueror's Mindset, you must be willing to be creative, to “cheat” by using hacks, logic, common sense, shortcuts, and good old critical thinking. While the standard thinking says that this is just a math test, the more than standard thinking understands that it's instead a critical thinking test that merely uses math as its subject matter.

More Than Standard

The SAT differs from your math class in another very important way. In school, if you don't know a certain topic, matrices for example, then there's not much you can do to ace the test on that unit. When Test Day Friday comes, and you sit down in your desk to find that dreaded matrix test staring back at you, if you still don't understand how to multiply matrices together, then you may as well set your pencil right back down and turn in your blank test. No amount of creativity will get you the answers.

But on the SAT test, if you don't immediately know how to answer a given question—if you can't see how it's even possible—do not panic. Hope is not lost. Don't back out.

Stay in the game. Because this is not your typical math test, you don't need to know every step from beginning to end. Instead, you only need to find something to do, one simple action to take, to begin to solve the problem. And then, you need to know how to think confidently and creatively.

Determination and creativity are more important on the SAT than math concept mastery.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

WEAPON #7: USE SYSTEMS

DO NOT GO into the test thinking that you'll just wing it. While that might seem like some kind of strange confidence, it's really just lazy and foolish. It's like David running out to face Goliath with no sling and stone. "Well, I'll just wait and see what happens when I reach him."

That would be stupid.

No. Instead, David armed himself with weapons that he planned to use. They may have been seemingly weak and foolish weapons, and part of a weak and foolish plan. Nonetheless, they were at least something.

God does not usually like to do all of the work, to exert all of the effort, on his own while we recline in our lawn chair, sipping our mini-umbrella-ed iced tea, watching the action from our keester. Nor does he want us to just run off on our own and do everything in our own strength while we strive for the ideal of being self-made. He wants to co-labor with us. He wants us to be partners with a living, breathing, give-and-take relationship.

Hence, David brings his weapons, meager as they are. God works the miracle and kills Goliath with a stone.

So you, when you attack and take charge of the SAT, need to bring to the battle your systems for how you will handle each section as a whole, and the various types of questions within each section. Do you know what the best system is for you to effectively understand each reading passage, pinpoint the right and wrong answers to its questions with laser precision, and maximize

Weapon #7: Use Systems

your limited time? Do you know what system you will use to save time and cut through the confusion on logical sentence placement questions? Do you know what you will do when the math section throws an impossible multi-variable exponent equation at you? Do the work and prepare like a Conqueror so that you can know what you will do come test day.

While these specific systems are beyond our discussion in this book, you can find more SAT resources from me and Conquer the Test at the back of the book. There, you'll see how you can access more instruction where we dive deep into the best systems to use on each part of the test. But whether you check out those resources or not, do the work to learn and develop your systems ahead of time so that you really can be in charge. Systems allow you to know your plan of attack and execute it well completely independent of what the test throws at you. Systems are the practical means for you to not be a victim at the mercy of the test, but to instead be a trained warrior ready to conquer it.

CONCLUSION

THANK YOU AND God bless you, my friend. It has been an honor to join you in this crucial stage of your life where you are figuring out, “What the heck am I going to do after high school? Who am I going to be? What role does Jesus play in all of this?” Oh! And, “How do I do well on the SAT anyway?”

Remember that no matter how you feel or how many voices and thoughts you hear that tell you you’re no good, or that you are dumb, or that you’ll never amount to anything, that your future is destined to be small and unfulfilling and meaningless—Jesus says you are more than a conqueror. He says you are precious, and he honors you. He shares his own glory with you, according to the gospel of John.

So do not settle for those crappy feelings of self-doubt and low confidence. Let God’s delight in you and his presence with you flood you with confidence and fuel you to run out into the world and take down every giant standing in your way, starting with the SAT.

But there’s something else. You’re going to find so much more adventure, peace, and fulfillment, and you’ll experience true powerful intimacy with God when you surrender to him. And I’m not just talking about asking Jesus into your heart. I’m talking to you even if you are already a Christian. When it comes to things concerning our future and our college and career, we tend to leave Jesus out of it. We tend to have our dreams and the checklist of what we need to accomplish in order to be responsible adults.

Can I encourage you with something? Throw that checklist away. The only path you should be following is what you hear from God. Your life is his. Give everything away, lay all of it down on the ground in front of him, and say,

Conclusion

“God, you take all of this. Throw away what you want, and keep what you want. I hold on to nothing above you.”

If you can live this way, where you make your life about him, you’ll find that he’s ready to make himself about you. He’ll show himself strong on your behalf. But if you get stuck in the standard Christian experience of just going to church and making him another run-of-the-mill part of your life that you’ve added on because it’s the right thing or because he’ll make it better—then you’re going to run into frustration and disappointment.

Be completely on fire, sold out for Jesus. Yes, pursue your dreams and passions, but hold them loosely in case God has other ideas. If he does, trust him. They’ll be better than yours, not worse. They’ll be delightful, not depressing. Blessings, not bummers. You get the idea.

This is not the end of you and me. Flip a page or two to read a preview of my next book, *Old School*.

Flip a page or two also in order to access my other more comprehensive SAT training resources. I’ve got a free mini-course available for you on conquering the reading section. And if you decide that you want me to teach you the whole test, you can grab my full Conquer the Test online training course as well.

Remember, you can do this. Jesus has made you strong. You are more than a conqueror. You are More Than Standard.

GET ACCESS TO THE FREE CONQUEROR'S TRAINING LIBRARY.

HONESTLY, THIS BOOK is only the beginning of your two-fold journey—your journey towards that approaching SAT date and your mastery of the test, AND your journey out of the old standard victim mentality and into the more than standard Conqueror's mindset, the mindset of Jesus.

The most powerful and enduring life transformation happens when we apply ourselves and dig deeper into this material than the rest of the crowd. Most people read a book and move on. But the Bible tells us to not only be hearers of the word, receivers of good information, but to instead be **doers** of the word, those who expend energy and actually put into practice what they're learning.

Be the second.

I've put together a whole library of both SAT and Jesus-centered resources for you to propel you further down this path. When you sign up for access, you'll get:

- 1) My free online video and worksheet course, "Conquer SAT Reading."
- 2) My free online video and audio course, "Prosper."

Get access to the free Conqueror's Training Library.

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- 3) My free teaching, "OVERCOME: Crafting Your Powerful College Essay."
- 4) PDF — Your Guide to the Campfire: How to spend time with Jesus and actually get something out of it.
- 5) PDF — Your Guide to the Battleground: A template for transforming your life by changing your mind.
- 6) Sample lessons from my paid "Conquer the Test SAT Boot Camp."
- 7) More stuff too :)

You can get access to all of these for free by signing up at:

www.conquerthetest.podia.com/traininglibrary

DID MORE THAN STANDARD CHANGE YOUR LIFE?

IF JESUS HAS transformed you from a victim into a Conqueror, and you are now seeing him, yourself, the SAT, your future, and what life in the kingdom of God can be like—all in a brand new way, then would you please tell others about it?

If you feel like you have a brand new foundation that will propel you into SAT mastery and awesomeness—you guessed it—would you tell others about it?

Take just a couple minutes and head over to the book's Amazon page and leave a review. That would be awesome, just like you're awesome.

PREVIEW OF OLD SCHOOL

THE FOLLOWING IS an excerpt from my forthcoming youth nonfiction book, *Old School*. Enjoy.

Okay, I'm going to shoot straight with you right from the beginning. There's no point in trying to convince you of what I think you should do to excel in school and all that by wowing you with statistics and facts and figures. Or trying to prove to you that you need to put in the work and you need to get good entrance test scores and you...blah blah blah.

I'm not going to present you with the research that proves that your mindset, your words to and about yourself, your perspective drastically influence what you actually experience in reality. First of all, I don't think you care about the research enough to pay attention to it. And second of all, I don't think I care about it enough to write about it.

Honestly, this is a book rooted in the heart of God for your life. And that's where our discussion is pretty much going to stay. No, it's not a book about the "Christian perspective" on school and college and entrance tests and scholarships, etc. In fact, I think we need to do away with the Christian perspective thing altogether. What it does is turn Jesus into a flavor that we get to season our lives with. I'll add him to the mix and it will really kick this dish up a notch.

I'm sorry, but Jesus didn't die for you so that you could do things the Christian way. He died for you and rose from the dead and gave you his Holy Spirit (if you want him, that is) so that you could completely die to the bad way, the good way, the moral way, the right way and the wrong way. Now, you're meant to come alive into an entirely different way. A different reality.

Your life is meant to be epic and completely foreign to the minds of most people you see walking down the street. You were meant to seem foolish, crazy, dangerous, and—let’s be real—a tiny bit awesome to all of the normal, standard people. To the standard way of life.

Once you follow Jesus, you are now more than standard. Whether you see it or not.

Admittedly, you and I are in a tough spot though. Here you are, looking to rock your life. You’re staring at the future figuring out all of the obstacles that you’ve got to master in order to actually get there. Not the least of which are those dang college entrance tests. Don’t worry, we’ll get to those. I’m going to help you think powerfully and healthily so that you can conquer them.

But you and I both know that what you really want, aside from the success in all these practical endeavors in front of you, is something real. And you even want something more. The last thing you want is to live life jumping through hoop after hoop in order to survive, succeed, get your ducks in a row, and also go to church on Sunday and believe some good stuff about God. That’s silly. That’s stupid, even. You’re too smart to waste your time splitting your loyalty that way.

See, growing up, I watched the other Christian adults around me. I saw that as we become church-goers, we more than likely adhere to the belief that Jesus is God. Pretty standard. We accept him as “our Lord and Savior.” We say that he’s in control and he can have his will in my life. But here’s the problem. We say all these things with our words, but we don’t actually live like it. I mean sure, we live according to certain standards because we think that those are the things that Jesus wants. But we don’t actually live like he is real. Like he is alive. Like he will make a difference in our day.

And I apologize to you who have watched us demonstrate for you a boring, powerless, lifeless way of following Jesus. In Romans, Paul wrote, “I am not ashamed of the Gospel. For it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes it.” But this form of the gospel that you’ve seen? I’m sure not proud of it. What we’ve done is given our primary loyalty (which is proven by our actions, not our words) to the western way of life. We have said, “Yes, I’ll be a Christian. But I’ve got to study hard, get good grades, go to a good college, not take out TOO many loans, buy a house, get a job in Silicon Valley,

More Than Standard

etc. But yeah, like I said, I'll also be a Christian." And we say love Jesus first and foremost. But it's all intellectual—in our heads. What we are really doing is trying to adorn our standard way of life with Jesus rather than giving up the standard way of life in order to live in his Kingdom.

I don't want that for you.

I don't think you want that for you.

You don't want to live with split loyalty between what your world tells you you've got to do and what Jesus says your life should be like.

You want to choose one.

I'm just here to help you see that you indeed must choose. You can't have both like you've seen others try to have.