# Fighting Shadows

I find great value in Jon Tyson's (pastor at Church of the City New York) messages, finding him to be very insightful in connecting the Scriptures to culture. Recently, he co-authored a book with Jefferson Bethke entitled *Fighting Shadows: Overcoming 7 Lies That Keep Men From Becoming Fully Alive*. Though the target audience is men, it has considerable overlap and application to the lives of leaders. In short, here is the thesis of the book: *Satan's plan is to position something between you and God so that you cannot see his light. He wants the shadow of this substitute to fall over your life. He wants you to think that God is gone, the problem is all there is, and you are destined to struggle in the dark. Satan wants you to fail. Satan's strategy is to eclipse God's presence with problems and temptations by bringing them so close to your face that you cannot see beyond them. He wants to distort your vision and bend your reality so that God disappears behind the temptation in front of you.*

This book speaks directly to the core temptations of life and leadership. Check out these Book Notes to convince you to take advantage of its wisdom.

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Founder | Lead With Your Life

**Title:** Fighting Shadows: Overcoming 7 Lies That Keep Men From Becoming Fully Alive

**Author:** Jefferson Bethke and Jon Tyson

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**Book Description:**
There's a shadow that's settled over the hearts of men today. Masculinity is in crisis. Critiques about the dangers of toxic masculinity and the abuses of patriarchal systems have grown louder than ever. The very notions of masculinity and manhood are under attack. In response to cultural shifts, some have doubled down on old stereotypes in ways that just add to the conflict and confusion.

The result? Many men simply feel paralyzed–worried about saying the wrong thing, unsure what to do with their ambitions or strengths, simultaneously tempted and shamed by a hypersexualized and pornified culture. Our models and mentors have failed us. Based on their years of working in men's ministry, Bethke and Tyson have good news for men looking for clarity and courage in this age of quiet desperation. In *Fighting Shadows*, they help men

- overcome the temptations of escapism, passivity, or overcompensation;
- combat the most harmful shadows that men battle today, including loneliness, apathy, distraction, lust, and shame; and
- embrace masculinity as a God-given gift, not a curse to be avoided, suppressed, or battled.

An entire generation of men is being told they should abdicate the responsibility and joy of living into God's

calling on their lives—don't be one of them. If you're a man who's wondering what to do with your strength, your longings, and your gifts, it's time to step out of the shadows. Jesus has a vision for you.

**Book Quotes:**
For followers of Jesus, it's about how our vision of being godly men has fallen so far short of our calling. We just don't know how to live from full hearts and hold our heads high as men in the modern world. LOCATION: 275

In our years of working in men's ministries, we've generally seen men take three missteps in their reactions to the shadows falling over their hearts.

- Overcompensate. Faced with criticism, we may be tempted to double down on traditional gender roles with aggression and defiance.

- Shut down. Alternately, we may believe the best way to protect our necks is by not sticking them out in the first place. So we bottle our passion and replace it with passivity.

- Medicate. Finally, it is incredibly tempting to grab hold of anything that distracts from frustrations or mutes the pain of disappointment. LOCATION: 306-314

What these reactionary missteps all have in common is they deaden our hearts and deform us further into the very thing we hate: reactive men who don't know how to find their place and live up to their role in God's story. Slowly we just shrink back. We float. We let our visions fade, strengths atrophy, hearts die. We drift from the light into the shadows. LOCATION: 320

The writer of Ecclesiastes said, "For who knows what is good for a man during his lifetime, during the few years of his futile life? He will spend them like a shadow" (6:12 NASB, emphasis added). LOCATION: 323

Spending our lives like shadows, confused about what's good for a man—this has become the fate of so many men. LOCATION: 325

We are supposed to be leaders and servants, strong and sensitive, healthy and whole. We are meant to be emotionally available, sexually restrained, biblically literate, and theologically informed. But in the absence of effective mentors and models, not to mention the lack of margin to really work on ourselves, we just drift to the edge—out of the light, out of the pressure, and into the shadows where the expectations are low. LOCATION: 351

But here's the absolute truth: you were not born for the shadows; you were born for the light. LOCATION: 374

Robert Bly wrote, "Where a man's wound is, that is where his genius will be. Wherever the wound appears in our psyches, whether from alcoholic father, shaming mother, shaming father, abusing mother, whether it stems from isolation, disability, or disease, that is precisely the place for which we will give our major gift to the community." LOCATION: 401

The community of men needs your gifts. They need your story of redemption. They need your authenticity, your energy, you. LOCATION: 404

Here is the heart of the battle: we hate to fail as men. Much of the pain we face arises from the sense of failure in our hearts. We feel like we have failed in our faith, doubting God, and disobeying his Word. We feel like failures at work, torn by ambition, frustration, and apathy. We feel like failures with women, not understanding how to love and respect them, while being tempted to use and commodify them. We feel like failures with our

kids, getting snappy and bored at the same time. LOCATION: 430

Satan's vision is for you to fail. Satan is at war to make sure you do. He is working toward the demise of men. LOCATION: 434

Satan's plan is to position something between you and God so that you cannot see his light. He wants the shadow of this substitute to fall over your life. He wants you to think that God is gone, the problem is all there is, and you are destined to struggle in the dark. Satan wants you to fail. Satan's strategy is to eclipse God's presence with problems and temptations by bringing them so close to your face that you cannot see beyond them. He wants to distort your vision and bend your reality so that God disappears behind the temptation in front of you. LOCATION: 441

Satan's strategy may seem simple, but he has perfected it through countless generations of men. He knows that when we can see God with clarity, we can resist temptation and move forward. But if he can block us from the light, the shadows will fall and our faith will flounder. LOCATION: 448

THE SHADOW OF DESPAIR. The Lie: There is nothing really worth living for. The Truth: Your hope is secure in Jesus. LOCATION: 547

Hope and despair are all about how we see the future and what we believe about it. And genuine biblical hope is rooted in what we believe about the future and how we concretely let it affect our present. LOCATION: 559

Optimism is basically what I like to call worldly hope. It's not concrete. It has no surety. It's wishful thinking that says, "Maybe my future will be different." It's deficient. LOCATION: 583

The war is in the mind. It starts there. And more men need to do war in the mind so they can win the war in the world. Our thoughts become actions, our actions become behaviors, and our behaviors become our lives. LOCATION: 590

While optimism is little more than wishful thinking, hope operates at another level. Hope at its essence is about expectation. LOCATION: 594

How you experience the present is dictated by your belief about the future. How you live now is determined by how you believe you will live then. LOCATION: 607

We hope for total control. This is such a temptation for men. We hope that if we can just work enough, try enough, pursue enough, we can eventually have things "under control." But we aren't in control—and life will teach us that quickly. We can certainly suggest. Nudge. Push in a direction. But total control is an illusion. Our hope isn't in control. It's in the one who has control. LOCATION: 662

THE SHADOW OF LONELINESS. The Lie: Loneliness is part of being a man. The Truth: Friendship is a superpower.

Loneliness can, in fact, be just as strong a predictor for illness and death as smoking, obesity, and high blood pressure. Sleep is also less restorative for those who are lonely. Loneliness weakens your immune system. It also increases the risk of dying of heart disease, cancer, and stroke. LOCATION: 808

But the best use of your time in terms of how much it will impact your life—emotionally, physically, and spiritually—has been verifiably shown to be investing in deepening your relationships. LOCATION: 844

What else? It assumes there is more. It's curious. It says keep going. LOCATION: 927

THE SHADOW OF SHAME. The Lie: I need to do everything possible to prevent people from seeing my failures and weaknesses. The Truth: God delights in you, even though you aren't perfect. LOCATION: 1040

Now let's be clear: shame is not guilt. Guilt is the sense that I have done something wrong. Shame is the sense that there is fundamentally something wrong with me. LOCATION: 1053

Shame is the internalization of there's something wrong with me. I'm gross, dirty, bad. And the minute you give those thoughts power, shame settles over your heart and the poison begins to infect every facet of your being. LOCATION: 1064

Shame sends you into hiding. It's a form of slavery, and it will do everything in its power to keep you from living out God's call on your life. LOCATION: 1076

Shame starts as an emotional, physical, and mental reaction to feeling exposed, vulnerable, and scrutinized. Any time we see that we have failed, made a mistake, or sinned, there's a powerful impulse to hide. We don't want to see our failure or inadequacy. And we certainly don't want other people to see it. Under the massive pressure of shame, our natural tendency is to hide, deflect, distract—anything to escape the feeling that we're unworthy, ugly, or bad. LOCATION: 1092

In other words, to be eradicated, shame requires light and exposure, and that only happens through relationship and presence—the very thing shame makes us want to run from. No wonder shame is so difficult to overcome. It hits us hardest in the very place that holds the possibility of healing. That's the power of the cycle of shame. LOCATION: 1119

And so back to the picture of shame as anti-creation. You need to recognize shame as a force. It's a force that takes you backward when God is trying to take you forward. It's a force that disintegrates when God is trying to integrate. C. S. Lewis's imagery in The Great Divorce is key. If you haven't read this book, I recommend you get a copy—it's one of my personal favorites. LOCATION: 1134

Vulnerability about our failures and weaknesses feels like death for many men. And to some degree, it is. Vulnerability is the death of pride and isolation. It is loudly admitting and showing you cannot solve your own problems. LOCATION: 1152

When shame seeps into the cracks in your heart, you as a man will likely be tempted by a couple of false solutions. The first is the temptation of religion. You'll be tempted to clean yourself up by treating your shame like a debt you can repay via religious means—sacrifice, penance, going to church that Sunday, giving to the poor . . . you get the idea…The second temptation is distraction. Where the temptation of religion is to think you can self-clean your shame, distraction invites you to numb your feelings of shame. LOCATION: 1247-1251

You can't fix your shame with religion or bury it with distraction. There's only one real solution—an invitation—an invitation from God himself. He invites us not to religiously modify our shame or medicate our shame. He offers to heal our shame. LOCATION: 1259

Here's a wild truth I suspect most men don't realize. God isn't ashamed of you. He isn't disappointed in you. He delights in your presence. LOCATION: 1264

THE SHADOW OF LUST. The Lie: I am a slave to my sexual desire. The Truth: Faithfulness is a key to my formation. LOCATION: 1281

I believe it's important to teach young people about the potency and power of sex. I believe teenagers need grace-filled conversations in a world of moral chaos. I believe sex before marriage is wrong. But much of what

was taught by purity culture—and is still being taught in many churches today—created cycles of guilt and shame and hopelessness that still haunt so many. And over time it has become clear that this framework was a formula not for holiness but for embarrassment and disgrace. LOCATION: 1359

What a tragedy that God is seen as the great spoiler of sexuality, not its inventor. This is a tragic misunderstanding of his heart and plan. LOCATION: 1387

God doesn't want us to repress our sexuality; he wants to connect it. God doesn't want us to release our sexuality; he wants to protect it. God doesn't want to remove our sexuality; he wants to redirect it. LOCATION: 1473

God wants to use our sexuality as a tool of spiritual formation to make us more like Christ. LOCATION: 1476

Lesser loves always let us down. God wants to fulfill our desire with what truly satisfies. LOCATION: 1507

For the believer, sex is not about how much you get, but how much you give. It's about a physical sign of a whole life commitment. It does with our bodies what we do with our lives—the sacrificial giving and uniting of our time, energy, attention, and resources. We let God's revolutionary love shape the pattern of our human love, not the animalistic lust of the sexual revolution. LOCATION: 1542

We must rediscover that our quest for sex is ultimately not a quest for pleasure; it's a quest for union, a quest for belonging, a disguised search for God. Though we struggle to say it out loud as men, what we ache for is to be vulnerable and accepted, known and loved, seen and celebrated. Sexuality is a reminder of the true source of our acceptance and love. God became vulnerable for us. LOCATION: 1560

THE SHADOW OF AMBITION. The Lie: Ambition is fuel for personal success. The Truth: Ambition is a gift for kingdom impact. LOCATION: 1576

It's hard for a man to know what to do with his ambition these days because the channels for healthy expression seem to be blocked. The word ambition can trigger vision and passion, or it can paralyze and overwhelm. What exactly is a man to do with his ambition? What do you do with yours? LOCATION: 1586

Ambition demands attention, and to get attention we must distinguish ourselves from the masses. This introduces a comparative and performative element in all we do. A whole generation of men has been raised on the need for distinction. LOCATION: 1624

The truth is when it comes to your life, you are not at war with ambition; you are in a war for ambition—godly ambition. Without godly ambition you will collapse back into a cocoon of self. Without godly ambition your vision will be reduced to your own wants and needs. You won't recognize it, but instead of seeking first the kingdom of God, you will seek the kingdom of the American dream. LOCATION: 1635

In his book A Christian Manifesto, Francis Schaeffer warned of a looming threat to the church. It wasn't the huge culture wars we think of today; it was something smaller, more insidious. It was a reduction of kingdom vision to personal vision. He warned about reducing our faith to "personal peace and affluence." When Christian men stop caring about God's kingdom and mission, and reduce their vision to personal well-being and wealth, the church is doomed. A man must live for more than himself and his stuff. LOCATION: 1674

Jesus gave us this prayer to orient our vision and order our desire. In praying the Lord's Prayer, our hearts are drawn up into what God is doing in the world. It lifts us beyond the horizon of our own concerns and engages us in the story of God's will and work. It looks something like this: The Father's name-The Father's kingdom-The Father's will-Then My needs-My forgiveness-My protection.This prayer elevates a man's vision to

something noble, something helpful, something large. It pulls him out of the cocoon of self into a kingdom calling. LOCATION: 1683

If you are going to be a man of holy ambition, you must learn to ask questions that lift your eyes and expose your heart—questions whose answers may very well implicate you and call you into action, questions that connect you to the needs of those around you. LOCATION: 1720

Change the questions you ask, and you may change your life. Allow God to expand your circle of concern, and you never know where heaven will break in. And when heaven breaks in, the shadow of selfish ambition shrinks back in the light. LOCATION: 1734

Something happened in Nehemiah's pain, something remarkable. It's called "the crystallization of discontent." This phrase describes what happens inside someone when they get fed up…Every breakthrough in history has been preceded by someone experiencing the crystallization of discontent. LOCATION: 1745-1754

The crystallization of discontent is one of the greatest gifts a man can experience, because it's the fuel for radical change. But it must be carefully guarded, because the Enemy will work to shut it down and eliminate the threat. LOCATION: 1760

There are four degrees of action men can take: Doing nothing; Retreating; Taking normal levels of action; Taking massive action. LOCATION: 1803

Most men's actions fall into the first three categories. But your life will not change until you focus on the fourth level. We love sharing our opinions, critiquing, and judging, but the men the world needs are men who act. LOCATION: 1804

When a man is filled with holy ambition, anything is possible. Holy ambition leads to divine acceleration. LOCATION: 1841

THE SHADOW OF FUTILITY. The Lie: My work doesn't matter. The Truth: You have a calling to serve and heal the world. LOCATION: 1870

Let's talk about it. Let's get equipped to fight the shadow of futility. The truth is the struggle for meaning and purpose is not new—it just looks different today than it used to. But even with all the changes, the fundamental principles for overcoming futility and finding meaning in our work remain just as valid today as they ever were—you just need to know where to look. LOCATION: 1897

There are four levels of ruling. Think of them like concentric circles. Ruling yourself; Ruling a small team (marriage); Ruling a tribe; Ruling a city. LOCATION: 1907

But I learned that meaningfulness is found in how you do something, not just in what you do. And we as men need to recover the sacredness of daily work, in any domain. LOCATION: 1940

When you see God's will as a dot, you may feel that even if you barely miss, you've still missed. Anything other than a bullseye is a failure. And the frustration adds up. When you live with constant concern that you're not in God's exact, specific will, it drains your energy and warps how you see your life. But what if God's will is more like a circle? A sandbox to play in rather than a bullseye you need to hit every single time? In a sandbox, you can play in this corner or that corner, but you are still in the sandbox. The point is that you don't want to step out of the sandbox. But there's a lot of freedom within that sandbox, right? LOCATION: 1957

Living in God's will brings us options and freedom, within a range that's defined not so much by the bullseyes we hit but by the big parameters of obedience to godly principles paired with right motives. LOCATION: 1962

Calling is large. Calling is the gifting over your life—the wiring, the way you operate in the world. Calling is the thing friends or people around you constantly ask you about. It's the collection of ideas and activities you are most passionate about. It's the theme that has been woven into your DNA. Your calling is more like the circle than the dot—the sandbox rather than the bullseye. LOCATION: 1975

Too many men today overemphasize their specific job's role in bringing meaning and purpose to their lives, and they underemphasize the importance of the code they live by. But we need men with codes. You need a North Star to define your direction, a purpose to dedicate yourself to. You don't get the luxury of finding a code when disaster hits. It must already be there, embedded deep in your soul, if it's going to have any effectiveness in a moment of crisis. LOCATION: 2012

Without intentional training or formation, men's second nature is not directed toward love, life, goodness, sacrifice, beauty, and goodness; it is more likely to be loneliness, shame, cowardice, and selfishness. But when men who live by a code are squeezed by a crisis or a challenge, they leak out virtues at every seam. Men who live by a code can change the world. LOCATION: 2021

THE SHADOW OF APATHY. The Lie: There is nothing worth giving yourself for. The Truth: You were born to live a life of consequence. LOCATION: 2081

We recently surveyed four hundred women, asking what they believe is wrong with men in the modern world. The answers were fascinating, but one theme seemed to stand out from the replies we received. Can you guess what it was? Apathy. LOCATION: 2089

Men seem like they are stuck, paralyzed, drifting through life on autopilot. The feedback from the surveys was brutal: Men today lack purpose and drive. Men today lack direction in life. Men today lack initiative in relationships. Men today lack a sense of vocational call. LOCATION: 2095

The shadow of apathy is standing over a generation of men. LOCATION: 2100

The context of our faith determines how we live that faith. If we see ourselves in a garden, we live one way. If we see ourselves on a battlefield, we live another way. We must not confuse our original design (Eden) and ultimate destination (new creation) with our current reality. We are in the middle of the story, and it is a war. It's a fight between good and evil, justice and injustice, liberation and oppression, God and Satan. We are in a war, and the battle is for our hearts. LOCATION: 2176

We live in an age of radical individualism. It's an age that continually urges us to focus on ourselves. Our desires and wounds can have a kind of gravitational pull that causes us to collapse back in on ourselves. Selfishness reduces a man's vision. It causes him to lose sight of anything beyond himself. It pulls him out of the fight and into his head. LOCATION: 2275

You are not a civilian; you are a soldier. You are not in a fairy tale; you are in a fight. Your time matters, your vision matters, you matter. Your life is worth more than you know. LOCATION: 2281

Jesus got angry, turned over tables, cleansed the temple, cast out demons, and announced judgment on a city; yet he did it with tears, honored individual dignity, and made space for personal restoration. Jesus was both violent and gentle. LOCATION: 2325

So many men today never reach their redemptive potential. They don't take the journey to the end. They sit in church and sing the songs and say amen without ever really confronting the forces killing their hearts. They stop fighting the shadows and start accepting them. They get numb, settle, or collapse inward to medicate their quiet desperation. LOCATION: 2374

So many men allow these shadow forces to direct their lives. They are run by a shadow government they cannot name, hindered by a shadow calling they didn't choose, and blocked from seeing all God has for them. Then they never see the glory of God and the glorious future he has for them. This is what the Enemy wants—for you to stop trusting, start striving, and manage your anxiety and disappointment until you die. LOCATION: 2384

You have learned to fight the shadow of despair with hope, fight the shadow of loneliness with community, fight the shadow of shame with vulnerability, fight the shadow of lust with faithfulness, fight the shadow of ambition with a kingdom vision, fight the shadow of futility with calling, and fight the shadow of apathy with a cause. LOCATION: 2390

Who doesn't like to be a center for concern? A kind of second childhood falls on so many men. They trade their violence for the promise of a small increase of life span. In effect, the head of the house becomes the youngest child. LOCATION: 2450

Do not retire from manhood. Do not fall back into a second childhood. I am not for foolhardy bravado, but the sweet trap must be resisted. Hebrews 11 is called the hall of faith, not the hall of sustainability. You must press into the call of God on your life. He calls you to live from your heart. He wants you to step into the unknown, the place of risk and faith. That can be as small as joining a new community of men or as large as changing your career. You can't let everyone's concern for you drown out God's call on your life. Listen to his voice. It will be the one that calls you out of comfort, calls you to the cross, and calls you to find your life by losing it. LOCATION: 2453

What sort of men is our world inheriting today? How much fierceness have we surrendered for yardage? To get this right you are going to need to prioritize your calling, not just the voices of concern. Only you and the Holy Spirit truly know if you are living your call with all your heart, and if the gifts of God are aflame within. Resist the sweet drink of lethargy. Spit out the halfhearted life. LOCATION: 2461

We need men who are defined by a biblical vision of manhood. We need men who see themselves as image bearers and sons of God—those entrusted with power and responsibility to create, cultivate, care, and defend our world for God's glory, their joy, and the good of others—men like the one Jesus is forming you to become. LOCATION: 2485

***Note: should you wish to find any quote in its original context, the Kindle "location" is provided after each entry.***