Live No Lies: Recognize and Resist the Three Enemies That Sabotage Your Peace

First things first: This is a must-read book. Period.

In *Live No Lies: Recognize and Resist the Three Enemies That Sabotage Your Peace*, best-selling author John Mark Comer calls out his thesis (and sounds the alarm) with this provocative statement: *But hear me loud and clear: Our war against the three enemies of the soul is not a war of guns and bombs. It's not against other people at all. It's a war on lies. And the problem is less that we tell lies and more that we live them; we let false narratives about reality into our bodies, and they wreak havoc in our souls.* Throughout the book, he does a masterful job of not only providing cultural analysis, but also offering practical and hopeful guidance for the emotional health and spiritual well-being that we all desire. As a leader, Comer's book will give you a set of lenses that will allow you to see more clearly how to make mid-course adjustments in your life and in your leadership.

Check out these **Book Notes** to see why you need to read this book ASAP.

Chuck Olson
Founder | Lead With Your Life

Title: ***Live No Lies:*** *Recognize and Resist the Three Enemies That Sabotage Your Peace*

Author: John Mark Comer

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Book Description:

We are at war. Not with a foreign government or domestic terrorists or a creepy new artificial intelligence hell-bent on taking over the world. No, it's a war we feel deep inside our own chests: we are at war with lies.

The problem isn't so much that we *tell* lies but that we *live* them. We let them into our bodies, and they sabotage our peace. All around us in the culture and deep within our own body memories are lies: deceptive ideas that wreak havoc on our emotional health and spiritual well-being, and deceptive ideas about who God is, who we are, and what the good life truly is.

The choice is not whether to fight or not fight, but whether we win or surrender.

Ancient apprentices of Jesus developed a paradigm for this war; they spoke of the three enemies of the soul: the devil, the flesh, and the world. *Live No Lies* taps into this ancient wisdom from saints of the Way and translates the three enemies for the modern era, with all its secularism and sophistication. As a generation, we chuckle at *the devil* as a premodern myth, we are confused by Scripture's teaching on *the flesh* in an age

where sensual indulgence is a virtue not a vice, and we have little to no category for the New Testament concept of *the world*.

In this provocative and practical book, bestselling author John Mark Comer combines cultural analysis with spiritual formation. He identifies the role lies play in our spiritual *de*formation and lays out a strategic plan to overcome them.

Do you feel the tug-of-war in your own heart, the inner conflict between truth and lies? The spirit and the flesh? The Way of Jesus and the world? It's time to start winning. It's time to live no lies…

Book Quotes:

I find it an apt metaphor to capture the thesis of this short book. I know your time is precious, so let me get to the point. We are at war. Not with aliens from Mars, but with an enemy far more dangerous: lies. But unlike The War of the Worlds, our enemy isn't the figment of an overactive imagination. In this case, there's no hoax. Our enemy is real. LOCATION: 192

All I want to do is name the felt experience of following Jesus in our cultural moment, and I just can't find a better metaphor: it feels like a war for the soul. LOCATION: 201

For centuries, teachers of the Way of Jesus used a paradigm that's been lost in the modern era, that of "the three enemies of the soul." The world. The flesh. And the devil. They saw the three enemies of the soul as alien invaders from hell and a kind of counter-trinity to God himself. LOCATION: 213

My intent with this book is to reinterpret the ancient paradigm of the three enemies of the soul for the modern age. While it's easy to scoff at the ancient categories, I believe the world, the flesh, and the devil are alive and well; and aided by our skepticism, they are wreaking havoc in our souls and society. LOCATION: 242

But hear me loud and clear: Our war against the three enemies of the soul is not a war of guns and bombs. It's not against other people at all. It's a war on lies. And the problem is less that we tell lies and more that we live them; we let false narratives about reality into our bodies, and they wreak havoc in our souls. LOCATION: 244

Here's my working theory: as followers of Jesus, we are at war with the world, the flesh, and the devil… LOCATION: 247

The war is raging on, yet many of us feel like a shell-shocked soldier, lost and confused in the chaos of the battlefield. Our generation is living through three tectonic shifts in Western culture. LOCATION: 258

The first is from the majority to the minority. LOCATION: 261

While the church is not an ethnic minority (and it's important for me to clarify that), we are what sociologists call a cognitive minority. Meaning, as followers of Jesus, our worldview and value system and practices and social norms are increasingly at sharp odds with those of our host culture. We face constant pressure, from both the Left and the Right, to assimilate and follow the crowd. LOCATION: 268

Second, our place in culture is shifting from a place of honor to a place of shame. LOCATION: 271

Third is the tectonic shift from widespread tolerance to a rising hostility. LOCATION: 283

At the risk of mixing metaphors, the literary motif used by the writers of Scripture for this kind of a cultural experience is that of exile. LOCATION: 290

The writer Walter Brueggemann defined exile as “the experience of knowing that one is an alien, and perhaps even in a hostile environment where the dominant values run counter to one’s own.” LOCATION: 293

When you’re a cognitive minority under constant pressure to assimilate, you can’t help but think, Am I crazy to believe what I believe? To live how I live? LOCATION: 308

I’m a pastor, not a pundit; I have zero political agenda here. But I deeply believe this: I have a soul. You have one too. And your soul, like mine, is locked in a war with lies. LOCATION: 335

Please hear my tone: I’m not angry or anxious. I chose the medium of a book because it’s conducive to quiet, critical thinking. But make no mistake: I’m calling you, dear reader, to war. LOCATION: 340

What if exile is something to fight but not to fear? What if instead of coming apart, we came together? What if instead of losing our souls, we discovered them? This is a book about how (not) to lose your soul in digital Babylon. This is a manifesto for exile. This is a rally cry to the war on lies. LOCATION: 354

For now, let’s open with his provocative idea: our fight with the devil is first and foremost a fight to take back control of our minds from their captivity to lies and liberate them with the weapon of truth. LOCATION: 395

In the interim, the devil is like a wounded animal, a dying dragon, more dangerous than ever. Contrary to popular artistic imaginings, the devil is not in hell; he’s here, on earth. LOCATION: 463

No, the devil is an immaterial but real intelligence at work in the world, with more power or influence than any other creature in the universe after God. LOCATION: 478

As C. S. Lewis wisely said, “There is no neutral ground in the universe: every square inch, every split second, is claimed by God and counterclaimed by Satan.” LOCATION: 554

For Jesus, there is an invisible but real intelligence at war with God and all that is good, beautiful, and true. The devil’s end goal is to drive our souls and society into ruin. To decimate love. But here’s my main point: his method is lies. His primary stratagem—his go-to, signature move—is deception. LOCATION: 589

Jesus sees our primary war against the devil as a fight to believe truth over lies. LOCATION: 597

It’s easy to get lost in the metaphysical weeds, but for our nontechnical purposes, truth is what we can rely on as real. LOCATION: 605

So, truth is reality. Lies are unreality. LOCATION: 613

The wonder of the human person is our ability to hold in our minds ideas that correspond to reality and ideas that don’t correspond to reality. LOCATION: 634

We are the only creatures who have the capacity to imagine what isn’t but could be. LOCATION: 644

Here’s the problem: our capacity to hold unreality in our minds is our genius, but it’s also our Achilles’s heel. Because not only can we imagine unreality, but we can also come to believe in it. We can put our faith in ideas that are untrue or, worse, that are lies. LOCATION: 653

When we believe truth—that is, ideas that correspond to reality—we show up to reality in such a way that we flourish and thrive. We show up to our bodies, to our sexuality, to our interpersonal relationships, and, above all, to God himself in a way that is congruent with the Creator’s wisdom and good intentions for his creation. As a result, we tend to be happy. LOCATION: 658

But when we believe lies—ideas that are not congruent with the reality of God's wise and loving design—and then, tragically, open our bodies to those lies and let them into our muscle memories, we allow an ideological cancer to infect our souls. We live at odds with reality, and as a result we struggle to thrive. LOCATION: 661

The emotional/relational/familial/societal/political meltdown we've been living in for years now is daily proof of the fact that our mental maps are off, that we're drifting further and further into dangerous territory. LOCATION: 737

My point is this: lies distort our souls and drive us into ruin. LOCATION: 786

A low-hanging-fruit example that's still fresh in our collective memory is Nazi Germany. What's easy to forget in the many parodies of twentieth-century Germany, from Indiana Jones to Jojo Rabbit, is that, at the time, Germany was the apex of Western civilization, on par with or ahead of England and far ahead of America. Pick your metric of choice: art, architecture, literature, poetry, academics, science and technology, even theology—Germany was the birthplace of Luther and the Reformation. And yet within a few short decades, the entire society was corrupted from the inside out by ideas. Ideas about race. About nationalism. About God. Ideas that drove Europe and the world into chaos. LOCATION: 789

For all the recent talk about the threat of tyranny, we forget that ideological tyranny is a far greater threat than political tyranny. In fact, the latter is based on the former. LOCATION: 798

Foreign correspondent David Patrikarakos, in his book War in 140 Characters: How Social Media Is Reshaping Conflict in the Twenty-First Century, makes the case that wars are no longer about territory but about ideology. This is why America can't win the war on terror. Jihad is an ideology. You can't fight an ideology with a tank. In fact, when you attempt to, it's often just gas on the fire. LOCATION: 805

Over the last few years, I've watched so many people, on both the Left and the Right, be taken captive by ideology. It's grieved my heart. Ideology is a form of idolatry. It's a secular attempt to find a metaphysical meaning to life, a way to usher in utopia without God. The best definition I know of ideology is when you take a part of the truth and make it the whole. In doing so, you imprison your own mind and heart in lies that drive you to anger and anxiety. It promises freedom but produces the opposite. It does not expand and liberate the soul but shrinks and enslaves it. LOCATION: 819

Facing the lies we have come to believe can be terrifying. As T. S. Eliot put it, "Human kind cannot bear very much reality." The illusions we cling to become part of our identity and, with it, our security. They make us feel safe even as they imprison us in fear. Ripping them out of the humus of our soul can be excruciating. As David Foster Wallace put it, "The truth will set you free. But not until it is finished with you." It's only in coming face to face with reality as it actually is before God that we find peace. LOCATION: 835

My point is this: we've been taught—and at times, the church has aided and abetted secularism here—that religious ideas like good, evil, and God can't be known; they can only be taken on faith. But for Jesus and the writers of Scripture, faith is based on knowledge. It's a kind of deep trust in God that is grounded in reality. LOCATION: 880

We think of faith as something for religious people, but all of us live by faith. To have faith in something is simply to live as if it's true. It means to put your trust in something or someone and remain loyal to it. The question isn't, Do you have faith? But who or what do you have faith in? LOCATION: 901

As the Quaker intellectual Elton Trueblood so eloquently said during his tenure at Stanford, "Faith…is not belief without proof, but trust without reservations." LOCATION: 932

Disinformation—or in the language of Scripture, deception—is at the root of almost every single problem we face in our society and our souls. LOCATION: 1028

And now we're getting to the core thesis of this book. Here it is again: the devil's primary stratagem to drive the soul and society into ruin is deceptive ideas that play to disordered desires, which are normalized in a sinful society. LOCATION: 1078

Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuit order, is credited with defining sin as "unwillingness to trust that what God wants for me is only my deepest happiness." LOCATION: 1131

The exact nature of the lies changes from generation to generation, culture to culture, and person to person, but they always run along these lines: Distance yourself from God. Do your own thing. Redefine good and evil based on your own gut and desire. LOCATION: 1198

Many intelligent and sophisticated people in our world simply do not want to be accountable to God or any kind of higher authority; instead, they want to be free to live as they please, with no guilty conscience from within or legal restraint from without. This is behind much of the West's rejection of God—as led by cultural elites, who often exemplify this heart posture en masse. LOCATION: 1239

Now we come to a key point: It's by Spirit and truth that we're transformed into the image of Jesus, but the reciprocal is also true. It's by isolation and lies that we're deformed into the image of the devil. LOCATION: 1345

This is one of the things that made COVID-19 so devastating. Social isolation was a form of social justice, a way to care for the vulnerable, but its effect on mental health and human flourishing was lethal. The suicide rate spiked to an all-time high. We need community to thrive. LOCATION: 1368

The devil is just as aware of our need for community as we are, if not more so, and he uses that awareness to gain the upper hand in the fight, doing all he can to cut us off from community with God's people and from God himself. LOCATION: 1371

And this is how we, as apprentices of Jesus, fight the devil. Not via some emotional or spiritual frenzy. We simply stand in quiet confidence in God's truth via the practices of Jesus. LOCATION: 1423

You could say it this way: spiritual disciplines are spiritual warfare. LOCATION: 1425

…it's through the practices of Jesus that we present our minds and bodies before God and open our souls to his Spirit and truth. LOCATION: 1432

Henri Nouwen said it this way: "Solitude is not a private therapeutic place." Rather, "solitude is the furnace of transformation. Without solitude we remain victims of our society and continue to be entangled in the illusions of the false self." LOCATION: 1443

You fight the devil's lies by simply choosing to not think about them. But as we all know, you can't think about nothing. So you give your mind something else to think about: Scripture. You replace the devil's lies with God's truth. You cut new neural pathways that eventually take root in the neurobiology of your body itself. You become what you give your mind to. LOCATION: 1475

And take note: it is our responsibility to curate our thought life. No one else can do it for us. Not even God. This may sound overwhelming in a culture where digital addiction is ubiquitous and the human mind is jumpier and more distractible than ever. But it's not. LOCATION: 1519

It will take time—years, honestly—but you can rewire your neural pathways to organize your mind around God's Spirit and truth. LOCATION: 1521

Synopsis: what we give our attention to will shape the persons we become. What we think about we become. LOCATION: 1544

My point is this: many of us spend hours every day filling our minds with lies, cutting off our minds from God's Spirit and truth, and only a few minutes each morning, if that, filling our minds with truth and resting in the Spirit, or presence, of our Father. LOCATION: 1555

The poet Mary Oliver once said, "Attention is the beginning of devotion." The starting place of devotion to God and movement into his kingdom is simply to set our attention on his Spirit and truth. LOCATION: 1578

I'm saying this: First thing upon waking, if at all possible, before you touch your phone or open your browser or touch the dial on your radio or TV, spend time in quiet prayer and Scripture. Soak your mind and imagination in Jesus's truth before they are assaulted with the devil's lies. LOCATION: 1591

Working theory of how we fight the devil: We practice the spiritual disciplines laid down by Jesus, such as silence and solitude, prayer, fasting, and Scripture—and continually set our minds before the Spirit and truth of God. When tempted, we stand in quiet trust in God's love and wisdom and bring our minds back to Scripture. LOCATION: 1626

In summary: The devil's goal is to first isolate us, then implant in our minds deceitful ideas that play to our disordered desires, which we feel comfortable with because they are normalized by the status quo of our society. Specifically, he lies about who God is, who we are, and what the good life is, with an aim to undermine our trust in God's love and wisdom. His intent is to get us to seize autonomy from God and redefine good and evil for ourselves, thereby leading to the ruin of our souls and society. LOCATION: 1629

This is what the New Testament writers were referring to when they wrote about the inner tug-of-war between the spirit and the flesh. They recognized an invisible but real war in the deepest parts of our beings, raging on the battlefield of desire. LOCATION: 1771

Happiness has become about feeling good, not being good. The good life has become about getting what we want, not becoming the kind of people who want truly good things. LOCATION: 1826

The self—not God or Scripture—is the new locus of authority in Western culture. LOCATION: 1828

Self is the new god, the new spiritual authority, the new morality. But this puts a crushing weight on the self—one it was never designed to bear. It must discover itself. Become itself. Stay true to itself. Justify itself. Make itself happy. Perform and defend its fragile identity. As my Peloton instructor would say, "Validate your greatness." But what about the many days when we're not all that great? The pressure is exhausting. Cue the stats on burnout, anxiety, and mental health. LOCATION: 1838

What is it you want? What do you really want? My guess is, if you go deep enough, you ache for God himself. To live in his love. To yield to his gentle peace. To let your body become a place where his will is done "on earth as it is in heaven." That's a gift of the Spirit in you. LOCATION: 1885

My point is simply this: our deepest desires—usually to become people of goodness and love—are often sabotaged by the stronger surface-level desires of our flesh. This is exacerbated by a culture where the widespread wisdom of the day is to follow our desires, not crucify them. But in reality, "Be true to yourself" is some of the worst advice anybody could ever give you. LOCATION: 1894

Here's my best shot at a definition of agape love: A compassionate commitment to delight in the soul of another and to will that person's good ahead of your own, no matter the cost to yourself. LOCATION: 1963

As near as I can tell, in biblical theology, external authority is one of the main roles of government in the public sphere and parents in the private. Their job is to restrain the flesh in those who can't self-restrain—be that a criminal on a bank-robbing spree or simply a two-year-old being, well, two. LOCATION: 2116

When we give in to our flesh, we devolve to a remarkably unoriginal baseline. Desire. Use. Repeat. We call it addiction; Jesus and Paul called it slavery. LOCATION: 2169

Many people think that eternal life refers to a quantity of life after death, but for the New Testament writers it also meant a quality of life that starts now for the apprentice of Jesus, grows in scope over a lifetime of apprenticeship, and then continues into eternity. LOCATION: 2192

The popularized idea of Hebb's law (named after Dr. Donald Hebb) from neuroscience states that "cells that fire together wire together." Translation: every time you think or do something, it becomes easier to think or do that same thing again, and the more you repeat this process, the harder it is to break the self-perpetuating cycle. Through repetition, thoughts and actions get into your brain's habit system, the basal ganglia, which is either your best friend or your worst enemy depending on what you sow into it, and are then encoded into the wiring of your brain. LOCATION: 2248

This is the miracle of the human brain, as designed by God. With our self-determining freedom, we point our mind and body in the right direction, and eventually, it directs us, automatically. Unfortunately, this is also why it's so hard to stop sinning. Because every time we sow to the flesh (that is, sin), we etch a neural pathway into the grooves in our brain, and from there, it begins to shape our muscle memory until we end up squarely in the New Testament's definition of slavery, or what Saint Augustine called the "shackles of gratification." LOCATION: 2259

The journalist Charles Duhigg, in his bestselling book The Power of Habit, popularized what psychologists have been saying for years: that our choices become our habits, our habits become our characters, and, as the Roman poet Heracleitus said five hundred years before Christ even walked the earth, character is destiny. The things we do, do something to us. They shape the people we become. LOCATION: 2285

It's our daily, seemingly insignificant decisions that eventually sculpt our characters and harden them into stone or free them to flourishing. LOCATION: 2305

But again, the reciprocal is true as well. The daily decision to rejoice—to cultivate a way of seeing our lives in God's good world, not through the lens of our phones, news apps, or flesh, but through gratitude, celebration, and unhurried delight—will over time form us into joyful, thankful people who deeply enjoy life with God and others. What starts as an act of the will eventually turns into our inner nature. What begins with a choice eventually becomes a character. LOCATION: 2320

This is the power of our choices, decisions, and habits. For good or for evil. To index us toward freedom or slavery. We make our decisions, and then our decisions make us. In the beginning we have a choice, but eventually, we have a character. LOCATION: 2327

The insight of philosophy is this: our freedom expands or shrinks with each decision we make. LOCATION: 2359

This is the power and potential of freedom. And the danger. Again, it's bad news or great news depending on what we sow. Every thought, every desire we follow, every choice we make is an investment in our future, in

the kind of people we want to become. How do you grow a forest? One seed at a time. How do you grow a life? One tiny, unglamorous decision at a time. LOCATION: 2444

Guilt is about the what; shame is about the who. LOCATION: 2471

Guilt thinks to itself, What I did was unloving, and I need to make it right. Shame thinks, I am unlovable, and there's no hope for me. LOCATION: 2474

Shame is almost never helpful, and most of the time it's toxic. We all live from an identity, or a sense of self, to give us belonging in a community and a purpose in life. Shame says our identity is bad, unlovable, or irredeemable. So as a result, we live out that identity, which is a lie, and—surprise, surprise—we live badly. LOCATION: 2475

But I would argue that guilt can actually be a good thing. There are times and situations when guilt is the emotionally healthy, mature, loving response to our own sin. Guilt is to the soul what pain is to the body. A kind of moral discomfort. Pain is bad only when it goes on indefinitely; in the short term, it's a gift from God to our bodies, a messenger whose job is to tell us we need to fix something and fast. LOCATION: 2479

Step one: we are to "crucify" our flesh…You don't manage your flesh or simply keep it in check—you launch a militant campaign to kill it. LOCATION: 2530

For Paul, the way we fight the flesh and win is not through willpower but through the Spirit's power. LOCATION: 2542

But willpower versus triggered trauma? Or willpower versus addiction? Or willpower versus a father wound? It doesn't stand a chance. As long as a temptation is just interfacing with the prefrontal cortex, willpower is a great resource to draw on. But the moment we're dealing with the amygdala, with the part of the brain or soul that is deeply wounded or hardwired in sinful ways of being, we are outmanned and outgunned by the flesh. LOCATION: 2551

Willpower is at its best when it does what it can (direct my body into spiritual practices) so the Spirit's power can do what willpower can't (overcome the three enemies of the soul). LOCATION: 2565

We've been working under the hypothesis that spiritual disciplines are spiritual warfare. Put another way, the practices of Jesus are how we fight the world, the flesh, and the devil. LOCATION: 2567

Every time you practice a habit of Jesus, your spirit (one way to think of your spirit is as your inner willpower muscle) gets a little stronger and your flesh (your inner animal) gets a little weaker. LOCATION: 2570

It's as simple as that: small, regular habits/practices/disciplines that open our minds up to the Spirit and close them off to the flesh. LOCATION: 2591

No practice of Jesus is more alien or neglected in the modern Western church than fasting. LOCATION: 2594

But fasting is a practice by which you deny your body food in an attempt to starve your flesh. LOCATION: 2605

Fasting is a way to turn your body into an ally in your fight with the flesh rather than an adversary. LOCATION: 2612

Fasting trains our bodies to not get what they want. At least, not all the time. LOCATION: 2620

This is why fasting—far from a medieval form of self-hate—when done rightly is a pathway to freedom. Fasting

is practicing suffering; it's teaching our bodies to suffer. Suffering is unavoidable in life; joy is not. In fasting we're learning how to suffer with joy. LOCATION: 2626

What's left of the practice in the Protestant church is usually around the Lord's Supper, where people say sorry to God in their minds before they receive the bread and the cup at church. The problem with this way of practicing confession is similar to that of the medieval church—it's private. For confession to yield not just forgiveness but freedom, it must drag our sins into the light, not keep them in solitary confinement. LOCATION: 2651

But here's the main thing I hope you take away from this chapter: the way we fight and overcome our flesh isn't through willpower but through the Spirit's power. And we get access to that power via the practices of Jesus. Fasting and confession are just two especially helpful practices in our war with the flesh, but there are many more you can experiment with. The key is to find ways of living in reliance on the Spirit's presence and power in your ordinary life. LOCATION: 2674

As a general rule, our feelings follow our thinking, so if you want to augment your emotions, change your thought life. We can't change what we feel, but we can, within reason, change what we think about. LOCATION: 2685

James was both warning us of the danger of desire left unchecked and calling us to train our desires to love and want what the Spirit loves and wants. This is what the library of Scripture calls guarding your heart. Like a sentry, we are to police the flow of traffic into our inner beings. The heart, in biblical literature, is the trifecta of a person's thinking, feeling, and desire. Or in other language, the mind, the emotions, and the will. We must guard all three. LOCATION: 2695

Therefore, we must run every habit, every thought, every relationship—everything—through this simple grid: Does this sow to my flesh or my spirit? Will this make me more enslaved or more free? More beastly or more human? LOCATION: 2707

Remember, the key to spiritual formation is to change what we can control (our habits) to influence what we can't control (our flesh). LOCATION: 2710

Definitions: The flesh—our base, primal, animalistic drives for self-gratification, especially as pertains to sensuality and survival. The Spirit—God's empowering presence in us. Freedom in modern Western use—the permission to do whatever we want. Freedom in the New Testament—the power to want and do what is good. Love in the modern Western use—desire; often sexual desire. Love in the New Testament—the compassionate commitment of the heart to delight in the soul of another and to will that person's good ahead of your own, no matter the cost to yourself. The law of returns—every action has a reaction, and those reactions are often disproportionate to the action. LOCATION: 2744

Working theory of the law of returns applied to spiritual formation: sow a thought, reap an action; sow action, reap another action; sow some actions, reap a habit; sow a habit, reap a character; sow a character, reap a destiny, either in slavery to the flesh or freedom in the Spirit. LOCATION: 2753

Working theory of how we fight the flesh: We feed our spirits and starve our flesh by practicing habits laid down by Jesus, specifically fasting and confession of sin. As we do this over time, we not only grow our own willpower muscles but, more importantly, we open our minds and bodies to a power that is beyond us—that of God's Spirit. LOCATION: 2756

Because we now lived in a moral ecosystem where "judging" your friends for burning CDs was seen as wrong but stealing was seen as just fine. Right and wrong had been redefined along the lines of popular opinion—or

better said, popular desire—and the moral line moved, in just a few short years. LOCATION: 2822

But the world is more than just a system that's out there in the sociopolitical ether. It is, as Eugene Peterson pointed out, "an atmosphere, a mood," that's crept into us like a cancerous rot. An airborne emotional pollutant we inhale every day, an anti-God impulse we circulate in our bodies' lungs. It's "the society of proud and arrogant humankind that defies and tries to eliminate God's rule and presence in history." LOCATION: 2915

In summary, I would define the world as a system of ideas, values, morals, practices, and social norms that are integrated into the mainstream and eventually institutionalized in a culture corrupted by the twin sins of rebellion against God and the redefinition of good and evil. LOCATION: 2920

The world is what happens when Adam and Eve's sin goes viral and spreads through a society. The result? The distorted becomes normative. Sin is recast as any number of things—freedom, human rights, reproductive justice, "the way things are," nature, science, "boys will be boys"—anything but sin. LOCATION: 2927

As Renée DiResta, technical research manager at the Stanford Internet Observatory, summarized postmodern ethics: "If you make it trend, you make it true." But the widespread social acceptance of an idea or behavior does not make it true, much less cause it to lead to flourishing. If history teaches us anything, it's that the majority is often wrong. "Crowds lie. The more people, the less truth," as Eugene Peterson put it. Crowds are often more foolish than wise. LOCATION: 2952

The midcentury prophet/pastor A. W. Tozer once said, "The cause of all our human miseries is a radical moral dislocation." He used the analogy of a sailor and his sextant; as a sailor once navigated his place in the world by the stars, we once navigated our place in the world by the true north of God and his vision of good and evil. But in the world, especially in the secular, (mostly) progressive West, we no longer get our bearings from God. The old moral absolutes have been called into question. The new authority is, as we explored earlier, the authentic self, defined as desire and feelings. As a result, we've completely lost a sense of direction other than our own inner emotional rudders, which all too frequently lead us astray. LOCATION: 2973

The late Dr. Larry Hurtado, historian of early Christianity, in his wildly celebrated book Destroyer of the Gods, told the story of how a tiny Jewish sect of Jesus followers overcame the bastion of paganism and won over the Roman Empire in only a few centuries. His thesis was that it wasn't the church's relevance or relatability to the culture but its difference and distinctness that made it compelling to so many. The church was marked by five distinctive features, all of which made it stand out against the backdrop of the empire: The church was multiracial and multiethnic, with a high value for diversity, equity, and inclusion. The church was spread across socioeconomic lines as well, and there was a high value for caring for the poor; those with extra were expected to share with those with less. It was staunch in its active resistance to infanticide and abortion. It was resolute in its vision of marriage and sexuality as between one man and one woman for life. It was nonviolent, both on a personal level and a political level. LOCATION: 3042

No political party or intellectual ideology outside the church of Jesus—that I'm aware of—holds all five together. LOCATION: 3055

People import a religious-like devotion and frenzy onto politics. The Economist called it "America's new religious war." And in this sweeping craze, so many people have been taken captive to ideology, which is a form of idolatry. A growing number of people are more loyal to their ideology or political party than they are to Jesus and his teachings. LOCATION: 3068

Honestly, I can't think of a more gut-wrenching example than abortion, where the greatest infanticide in human history is recast as "reproductive justice." The sheer nerve to use the word justice to refer to the

dehumanization (not a baby, a “fetus”) and destruction of millions of children is inexplicable. The moral reasoning here is just staggering in its complete break from logic and wisdom and even science, and yet it has widespread social acceptance. LOCATION: 3099

But as the gospel took root in each of these cultures, they were forever changed. They moved into a new Christianized mode. I say Christianized, not Christian, because there’s no such thing as a Christian culture; what Rieff called the second culture was always a mix of Christian and pagan or, later, secular ideas, values, and practices. But there was a time in the West when the basic framework of Christian thought was accepted across the social spectrum. LOCATION: 3182

But soft power is a different beast. It’s “the ability to shape the preferences of others” and “the ability to attract.” Hollywood is the epitome of soft power. It’s done more to change Western mores around sex, divorce, adultery, vulgar speech, and consumerism than most anything, simply by making movies that are fun to watch. Another example is the advertising industry, which is an attempt to control our behavior, not through coercion, but consumerism, simply by appealing to our desires. LOCATION: 3236

Every follower of Jesus, in every culture, has to constantly ask the question, In what ways have I been assimilated into the host culture? Where have I drifted from my identity and inheritance? LOCATION: 3248

The temptation for us in the West is less to atheism and more to a DIY faith that’s a mix of the Way of Jesus, consumerism, secular sex ethics, and radical individualism. LOCATION: 3249

Everything starts with deceptive ideas, or lies we believe (put our trust in and live by) about reality—mental maps that come from the devil, not Jesus, and lead to death, not life. But deceptive ideas get as far as they do because they appeal to our disordered desires, or our flesh. And then the world comes in to complete the three enemies’ circular loop. Our disordered desires are normalized in a sinful society, which functions as a kind of echo chamber for the flesh. A self-validating feedback loop where we’re all telling each other what we want (or what our flesh wants) to hear. LOCATION: 3252

Well, our working theory has been that spiritual disciplines are spiritual warfare. Or said another way: the practices of Jesus are how we fight the world, the flesh, and the devil. LOCATION: 3263

Or since the Western, secular world is currently more of an anti-culture than a culture, more about tearing down than building up, more about deconstruction than construction, then maybe it’s better to say the church is a counter-anti-culture. In the language of Anabaptist thought, the church is an “alternative society.” A group on the margins of the host culture, living in an alternative but compelling and beautiful way. A prophetic signpost to kingdom life in a culture of death. LOCATION: 3274

But while church is not less than Sunday services, it is far more. It must be more to survive the Western spiritual apocalypse. Church must become a thick web of interdependent relationships between resilient disciples of Jesus deeply loyal to the Way. LOCATION: 3297

Remember, what we now think of as traditional values, like marriage between a man and a woman until death do us part, were radical when they were introduced by Jesus and the writers of Scripture. To Jews, in a patriarchal culture of easy divorce (for men, that is), Jesus’s teachings on the equality of women (which we now take for granted) and the evil of divorce were stunning. To Greco-Romans, for whom pretty much any form of promiscuity you could possibly imagine was A-okay, Jesus’s call to limit your sexuality to one partner (of the opposite sex) for life was mystifying. These ideas became traditional because so many people realized they led to human flourishing. But in our post-Christian, deconstructionist zeitgeist, they’ve become radical yet again. LOCATION: 3345

A Rule of Life is simply a schedule and set of practices and relational rhythms that organize our lives around Jesus's invitation to abide in the vine. It is how we live in alignment with our deepest desires for life with God in his kingdom. LOCATION: 3365

Here's Jon Tyson's definition: A Christian community in a web of stubbornly loyal relationships, knotted together in a living network of persons, in a complex and challenging cultural setting, who are committed to practicing the way of Jesus together for the renewal of the world. LOCATION: 3380

The remnant is the label used all through the library of Scripture for the small group inside Israel (and later the church) that was loyal to God when the majority of people were not—what Barna called resilient disciples. LOCATION: 3393

People can't live without meaning, purpose, and community. The secular world can't seem to offer that; Jesus can and does. What if the church were to come back to her call as a community radiant with the love of God? LOCATION: 3434

The devil's deceptive ideas get as far as they do because they appeal to our flesh's animal cravings. But these in turn find a home in our bodies through the echo chamber of the world, which allows us to assuage any guilt or shame and live as we please. As a result, evil is often labeled good, and good, evil; and the soul and society devolve into a reign of anarchy via the loss of a moral and spiritual true north. In such an exilic moment, the church as a counter-anti-culture has the potential to not only survive but also flourish as a creative minority, loving the host culture from the margins. LOCATION: 3460

For Jesus, our fight isn't against Rome, the "barbarians" to the north, or even the corrupt Jewish aristocracy that supported his torture and death in the name of religion, any more than our fight today is against Russia, ISIS, or the "other" political party. Rather, it's against the triumvirate of the world, the flesh, and the devil. And our victory isn't won by swords, spears, or predator drone strikes but with truth embodied in self-sacrificial love. LOCATION: 3486

This is why it is absolutely crucial for us to recapture the idea of spiritual war; because as long as we deny the reality of demonic evil, we will demonize people—the very people we are called to love and serve. Instead of fighting Satan, we will turn people or even entire groups of people into Satan. As a result, instead of fighting back the hate and violence and darkness of the three enemies, we will just add even more hate and violence and darkness to a culture in desperate need of healing. LOCATION: 3490

To say yes to Jesus's invitation is to say no to a thousand other things. As the monks used to say, "Every choice is a renunciation." To say yes to Jesus is to say no to living by my own definition of good and evil, to spending my time and money however I want, to the hyperindividualism, antiauthoritarianism, and full-tilt hedonistic pursuit of our day. It's a thousand tiny deaths that all lead up to one massive life. It's not a futile grasping for control, but the freedom of yielding to Love. It's saying to Jesus, Whatever, wherever, whenever, I'm yours. LOCATION: 3527

Meaning, it's true it will cost us to follow Jesus, but it will cost us even more to not follow him. Jesus is just trying to get you to run a simple cost-benefit analysis: your soul versus yourself. LOCATION: 3565

But friends, here's the good news, and it really is the best of news: we already have all we need to live a happy, free, beautiful life—access to life with the Father, through Jesus, by the Spirit. LOCATION: 3616

So, how do we fight the war for our soul in a secular age that claims we don't even have one? How do we defeat the three enemies—the world, the flesh, and the devil? We die. And then… We live. LOCATION: 3619

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