

GET YOUR SPIRIT BACK



BREAK FREE OF
NEGATIVE SELF-TALK
AND STEP FULLY
INTO YOUR CALLING

FOREWORD BY LOUIE GIGLIO

EARL MCCLELLAN

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self-talk and step fully
into your calling

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WATERBROOK

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To the love of my life, Oneka.

To Parker, my firstborn son who makes me proud.

To Grayson, my gift from heaven who inspires me.

To Elle, my beautiful picture of God's grace.

The LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua son of Jozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of the whole remnant of the people. They came and began to work on the house of the LORD Almighty, their God.

—HAGGAI 1:14

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**GET
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SPIRIT
BACK**

INTRODUCTION
MORE IN YOU

Do you ever sense you were put on this earth for more? A feeling that you're destined to touch more lives and make a bigger impact? Are you yearning to make a difference? And yet, something keeps you feeling stuck—immobile, frustrated, and confused.

Maybe people think you're full of confidence, void of insecurities, and ready to conquer the world. But there's a voice in your head that says otherwise, and *that* voice is so loud and convincing—it intimidates, bullies, and lies with precision and ease.

I know that voice.

I know what it's like to be in a board meeting, realize the discussion is leaving out an important perspective, and your heart tells you to speak up. But the voice of insecurity tells

you to be quiet. And while you're being indecisive, the conversation turns to another topic and you've missed your chance.

I know what it's like to chat with friends and sense God telling you to pray for someone, but the fear of making everyone feel weird keeps you silent. You tuck away the prompt, mumble an apology to God, and shuffle out with another burden on your shoulders.

I know how it feels to long for a better, healthier, more confident future—so much you can taste it. But every time you take a step forward, something pushes you back and says:

“Sit down.”

“Be quiet.”

“No one will understand.”

“You will look like a fool.”

“You will look greedy.”

“You will look desperate.”

All these comments and so many more come to us from within. And they force us back into a box we know we weren't built for.

If any of these scenarios sound familiar, then I'm confident that your finding this book is no mere coincidence. I want you to know I see you. You're kind, resilient, admired, called, and ridiculously loved by God. All that is true. And yet . . .

I see you quitting before you ever start.

I see you disqualifying yourself before you apply.

I see you concerned about what your friends and family will think.

I see you talking yourself out of opportunities before they reach your inbox.

I see you living under the radar.

I see you because I'm just like you.

I played Division I basketball in college. I was a freshman walk-on, which meant I tried out and made the team. The Hall of Fame basketball coach Bill Self was in his first season of coaching. Going into the Christmas break, we had six wins and six losses. After the break, we lost fifteen straight games. *Fifteen*. It was a *nightmare*. I had never lost that many games in a row in my life. We ended the season 6–21. (As an aside, I worked my way into a starting role my freshman year, partially because so many guys got kicked off the team and partially because I played so hard on defense.)

In my sophomore year, we went 10–17 and ended the season on a multiple-game winning streak, and in my junior year, we started 5–0. We got a Top 25 team vote, which was huge for a small mid-major school.

So we entered a game in Iowa ranked as one of the top fifty teams in the Division I schools (of which there were more than three hundred). I was the point guard (essentially the quarterback in basketball), and we were losing by just a few points when Coach Self called a time-out. He looked me in the eyes and told me to take the ball down the court and make a basket for the team. We got back on court, I dribbled past my man, and I passed the ball to one of my trusted teammates. He took a corner three-point shot and

missed. The buzzer sounded, and we lost the game.

In the locker room after the game, one of the assistant coaches sat me down. He put his arm around me and summarized the battle I've faced most of my life: "Earl, Coach told *you* to shoot the ball. He didn't tell you to pass it."

I was happy to give 110 percent to my team. I was happy to hustle hard. Set an example. Be challenged and play my part. I was happy to call plays. I was happy to be a leader, but I was *not* comfortable with people ever thinking I was putting myself above the team. I never wanted to be seen as selfish or arrogant, a ball hog. So when Coach Self told me to shoot the ball, I felt that my teammates might think I was posturing, so I passed the ball instead.

And I lived this way for far too long. I give 110 percent. I work hard. I'm a great teammate. But if a moment comes when I'm supposed to step out and I suspect people will think I'm being prideful, I'll too often pass rather than take a shot. Because no one can think a person who gives 110 percent and shares the ball is full of pride, right? But make no mistake about it—it is pride. And this false humility has held me chained for decades.

When I was about fifteen, my mentor took me to lunch and told me, "Earl, I really want to tell you something, but I'm not sure you want to hear it."

Well, I'm a 3 on the Enneagram. They tell me that makes me an Achiever. I was anxious to know what I needed to know, but I didn't want to hear criticism.

He said, "Earl, you are prideful and rebellious."

Then I punched him in the face. I'm just kidding! I didn't. Those words actually made me want to punch *myself* in the

face. It hurt me that bad to know I was letting my mentor down.

Looking back as an adult and a pastor, I would counsel mentors to use different words and to avoid attaching a person's behavior to their identity, especially when they've been made new in Christ. But those words hit me. *Prideful. Rebellious.* I think all these years, in a lot of ways, I've been trying to run as far from those words as possible. And in running from them, I've found myself shrinking back, living with too much fear, not stepping up to my full potential. To others, my life can look great. But I know I have more to give. And you have more in you as well.

I can see you because I see me. I have foolishly imprisoned myself. I confused humility with disobedience, kindness with fear, and confidence with arrogance. For too long I've allowed the grace of God to save me from my old life but not carry me completely into the new life He purposed for me.

For too long I've allowed the grace of God to
save me from my old life but not carry me
fully into the new life He purposed for me.

So in this safe place between you, me, and the page, let me ask: Who must get out of the way so you can step fully into who God purposed you to be?

My answer is probably the same as yours: Me.

But I'm done. I'm done with the second-guessing. I'm

done with the timidity. I'm done with the negativity. I'm done with the hiding. I'm done with the fear, and I'm done with the doubt.

Let's take a journey together. Let's grow together. Let's mature together. Let's be transformed together.



For the sake of full disclosure, I've put my hope in a Jewish Rabbi who walked this earth a couple thousand years ago and who I'm convinced altered the course of human history with His powerful life, death, and resurrection. I'm a Jesus lover to my core. That's why I think I've been so bothered for so long. Bothered with myself and bothered with the current state of things. I'm convinced there is life for all humanity. And these prisons and cages, these mindsets, are holding back too many of us from doing good on earth that Christ initiated through the Cross.

Imagine what our world might be like if those of us convinced of God's goodness became truly free of the mental and emotional traps that hold us back. Imagine a world where good change happened faster and with greater wisdom because no one dimmed the nudges and whispers of the Holy Spirit. Now imagine your own life: How much more free, confident, and energetic would you be if you didn't have to self-edit, self-filter, self-argue at every turn? How would your life unfold if you really believed—in mind, heart, and body—that almighty God loves you and has called you to this amazing life?

Think about all the time you wasted second-guessing.

Think about the mental and emotional energy you'd get back if you didn't answer questions from the Enemy of your soul. The whole world got messed up because the first humans decided to entertain a conversation with a serpent (see Genesis 3). And our whole lives have been hindered and at times derailed because we've engaged in conversations that have taken our eyes off God and placed them squarely on ourselves. But feel it for a second. Feel what *could be* by not living in fear, not being weighed down by insecurity, and not being drained by the mental gymnastics your doubts cause you to play. See your life being lived in fullness and freedom. That's what's ahead for you.

Let's be done with the prisons, break the chains holding us back, and find the way to the freedom of becoming who we truly, fully are.

But the kind of freedom we're aiming for is not temporary; it's permanent. Did you know the recidivism rate in the United States is 37.1 percent?¹ That means those who have been imprisoned keep going back. This is not a book on the issues, problems, and systems that enable and even encourage such an epidemic. But I tell you the rate because I think you and I are up against similar odds. If we want to get out of our personal prisons and stay out, it will require adjustments in relationships, maybe changes to our location, but most important of all, it will require a big shift in our *mindsets*! We will have to change the way we think if we want to live free.

We've lost our way, our spark, and we need it back. And we'll have to undergo radical reprogramming. If we're talking about computers, we need to install new processors and

not just another software update. If we're talking about a sports team, we need the kind of change that doesn't mean just a new jersey design but rather a new general manager, a new coach, and a new captain. If you're ready to shoot when you're supposed to shoot, pass when you're supposed to pass, lead when you're supposed to lead, serve when you're supposed to serve, and speak up when you're supposed to speak up—if you're done with a hunched-over spirituality and ready to walk out your life with confidence and purpose—then turn the page.

It's time to get your spirit back!

I DON'T LIKE THIS RIDE

I love physics. There's just something about this science that really draws me in, and two concepts that truly capture my imagination are centripetal and centrifugal forces. I learned about both in Mrs. Tripp's high school physics class at Providence Country Day School. And after that class, I started seeing these forces everywhere.

Centripetal force keeps an object moving in a circular path. As long as the centripetal force continues and everything remains balanced, the object will keep moving in a circle, like the drum in a washing machine. Or a spinning yo-yo. And centrifugal force is the pressure you feel when you're the object moving in a circular pattern, like on that crazy carnival ride that presses you flat against the wall as it spins violently and makes you scream like a little kid. You

know what I'm talking about: Everyone stands with their backs against the wall of this massive tin-can-of-a-ride with a little chain in front of them. That chain is the only thing that's supposed to keep them from being hurled to their deaths. Yeah, that carnival ride. It has many names, including the Gravitron. (If that doesn't sound like the name of some Decepticon from the world of Transformers, I don't know what does.) Others call it Alien Abduction. Some call it Starship 3000. But whatever the name, this ride from hell that should be outlawed keeps its prisoners pinned against the wall as it spins at warp speed.

When my kids recently asked me to take them on this ride, and I politely declined. When they persisted, I offered them funnel cakes because I don't like this ride!

Now all laughs aside, this ride serves as a metaphor for how the children of Israel became stuck in a cycle of their own. Their sin had created a massive amount of force that pushed them in a rhythm they couldn't get out of.

The book of Judges described how this cycle went. The children of Israel forgot about God and instead worshipped idols.¹ This placed them in bondage, slavery, and fear. In their desperation, they remembered God and cried out to Him. God, in His kindness and mercy, heard His children and sent them a judge, a leader. This judge fought to bring them out of their oppressive circumstances and put them in a right relationship with God. They once again worshipped God, and He blessed them. Then the cycle started all over again. They forgot God and found themselves in the chains of bondage, fear, and sin.

Centrifugal force. Stuck. Held captive.

And you and I can likely recognize a similar force at work in our lives. When we look at our dating relationships, we might see centripetal force. When we look at our insecurities: centripetal force. When we look at our self-talk: the Gravitron. Stuck against the wall, trying to move, wishing the ride would just stop.

I've had the honor of being a spiritual leader, pastor, and mentor to many different people over the years. And I see the cycles. I see men and women, older and younger, stuck on a ride, desperately wishing to disembark. Not only have I seen these people, but I've been this person.

I like to pray. It's a humbling thing to know that God—the God of the universe, the creator of all things—invites us to speak to Him and to listen to Him. It is overwhelming to think that Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, made a way for all of us to have an authentic, real, and life-giving relationship with the One who made all things. Wow!

And I love joining corporate prayer—praying out loud with other people. But let me tell you how messed up my head can be in certain situations. One time, about a dozen of us gathered in a circle—assuming postures of humility with heads bowed—praying about the issues our community was dealing with. As we prayed, I felt God nudge me to pray for a specific issue that faced many of us. The words began to form in my mind, and I could feel passion growing in my heart. But before I gave voice to these words, before I allowed the passion in my heart to overflow, I heard this thought: *Earl, you're just trying to get attention. You know these words are just about you. People are going to look at you and be so encouraged, and that influence is going to go right to*

your head. Be quiet. Don't pray.

Friends, we're talking about prayer. And I recognize someone could pray and have impure motives—anyone can have impure motives about anything. But the cycle of deception was so strong that even in prayer I allowed myself to cower, to sit silently, all wrapped up in my head and distracted for the rest of the time.

The Gravitron.

Starship 3000.

Centripetal force.

I didn't obey the nudge God put on my heart. Rather, I listened to the same internal bully who told me to pass the ball instead of taking a shot.

In that moment, I made it about me. I let my focus slip from prayer—from God and my friends—to myself. I could not get my arm off the spinning wall. I could not get my mouth to open as the ride in my head spun violently.

I wonder what kind of cycle is running in your mind. What kind of cycle is running in your family, your friends, or your community?

A friend of mine is good marriage material, but he doesn't want to get married because of the negative cycle he's observed in his family. He hasn't seen any marriages last. At least none he wants to emulate. He's spinning in his head. He's spinning and he wants to get off the ride, but he can't. He's stuck. It's not that there aren't great women. It's not that he's not a wonderful guy. It's that he cannot pull himself off the wall.

I bet each one of us can name some areas in our lives where we cannot pull ourselves off the wall; the centrifugal

force is too much, the spinning is too violent, the speed is overwhelming. But I want you to know, by the time we are done together, all of us are getting off this ride! We're going to be different people. Better people. More humble. With more fire. More life. It won't be because we're so good; it will be because God is so good. Your grabbing this book is a small way of praying, "God, get me off this ride." And in Jesus's name, we are going to see the cycle be broken.

And to show us how, we'll look at what God does in the life of another person caught up in the spin cycle: Gideon.



First, let's delve into the supporting cast members in Gideon's story, starting with the Israelites.

The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD, and for seven years he gave them into the hands of the Midianites. Because the power of Midian was so oppressive, the Israelites prepared shelters for themselves in mountain clefts, caves and strongholds. Whenever the Israelites planted their crops, the Midianites, Amalekites and other eastern peoples invaded the country. They camped on the land and ruined the crops all the way to Gaza and did not spare a living thing for Israel, neither sheep nor cattle nor donkeys. They came up with their livestock and their tents like swarms of locusts. It was impossible to count them or their camels; they invaded the

land to ravage it. (Judges 6:1–5)

The Israelites were just like you and me—normal everyday people trying to live their lives—but they also had a beautiful connection with God. The Israelites were God’s chosen people. They were a people through whom the Lord, by His grace, blessed the rest of the world. And by *bless*, we mean the ultimate blessing of Jesus Christ. The One who would forgive us of our sins and give us new life and new hope and reconcile us to God.

The Israelites were not chosen because of a particular strength or ability. They were chosen because God wanted to turn small and insignificant into large and influential. But pay attention to this: The Israelites needed to get their *now* correct so that their *future* would be right. That is to say, the generation of Israelites in Judges 6 needed to run their race well so they could pass the baton to the next generation. How they walked with God in their days wasn’t just about them but also about all the generations that would come after.

You, too, have a baton and are running your race and someday, you will pass the baton on to someone else.

All of us are part of a much bigger story. Not just a human story. But a God story—one where God is the main character and all of us play supporting roles in His narra-

tive as He establishes His glory, His goodness, and His kingdom on the earth. So like the Israelites, you also have a role to play by running your race well. And one day, you will pass the baton to someone else, continuing the legacy of this story. Let us not be individuals who drop the baton and thereby negatively affect those who are going to come after us. All of us have had someone go before us, and though it might be hard to imagine, someone someday will be following you. Or perhaps you're well aware of the fact that others are watching your example, and that's why you have a sense of urgency to break the cycle you're in, so those coming after you don't have to be stuck on this same ride.

So we have the Israelites. Check.

They are like us. Check.

They are part of a bigger story. Check.

They have a God who loves them. Check.

But they turn from the God who loves them and they do their own thing. Check.

Judges 6:1 tells us right away that "the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD." That's a bit hard to relate to. Many of us look at our own lives and don't think what we are doing is evil. Especially when we grade ourselves against those we would consider to be the worst of society. But doing evil in the eyes of the Lord in this context really has to do with forgetting not only God but the paths that He laid out for us to live.

When we talk about doing evil in the eyes of the Lord, we mean the things that are atrocious, according to our human standards. But we also mean those things that seem innocuous or benign but in truth are still behaviors that are

evil in the eyes of God.

As much as we do good things and as much as we work to be good people, we need to remember that we don't always do right in the eyes of the Lord. I don't say this to produce guilt or shame or condemnation. That's not my aim. That's not my goal. That's not my desire. Nor is it biblical. What is biblical is our understanding that we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.² God has a way and a path for us. And this way and path are not just for us to become something great. Our ultimate purpose is to make His name great and establish His love, His grace, His rule, His authority, and His kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. But we fall short. As we learn about the Israelites, we'll find we have more in common with them than we first realized. Try to see yourself in the Israelites—the good, the bad, and the ugly. Because God is about to break the cycle for them.

For seven years, the Lord “gave [Israel] into the hands of the Midianites.” The Midianites are the descendants of Midian, son of Abraham.³ These Midianites show up multiple times in the beginning of the Bible. After fleeing Egypt, Moses lived with the Midianites for forty years. Moses was roaming the Midian hillsides, watching over flocks of sheep, when God revealed Himself in the burning bush. Moses married a woman named Zipporah, and she was a daughter of a Midian priest named Jethro.⁴ It was Jethro who advised Moses on how to create a system of leadership that would allow both him and the people to flourish under God.⁵ But things didn't always stay good between the children of Israel and the people of Midian. The Midianites

and the Moabites convinced the Israelites to worship a false god: Baal Peor.⁶

There's even a pretty intense moment in the book of Numbers when a Midianite princess named Kozbi hooked up with Zimri, and the consequences of that one-night stand were tragic for both of them.⁷ The Midianites partnered with the Moabites against the Israelites, and the Moabite king hired a prophet to curse God's chosen people.⁸

Later on, there was a war that the children of Israel waged against the Midianites, and the Israelites absolutely decimated the Midianites.⁹ They basically killed all the men, but the Midianites were not completely destroyed. There were enough of them left that their tribe grew and eventually invaded and oppressed the Israelites so much that the Israelites were forced to move into the mountain cliffs, caves, and hideouts.¹⁰ Seems to me that the Midianites enjoyed pressing the Israelites. They thought about how the Israelites had hurt, demolished, and virtually annihilated them years earlier. Now they could exact their revenge. Every time the Israelites planted crops, the Midianites showed up to destroy their crops. They did not spare one living thing in Israel. Not the sheep, not the cattle, not the donkeys. As a matter of fact, the Midianites and these other invaders brought their own livestock and their own homes and tents, and then they descended upon the land of Israel and, as the Bible puts it, "invaded the land to ravage it."¹¹ The economy was so bad. The oppression was so intense.

The Gravitron was overwhelming. The Israelites cried out to the Lord for help.

Your age and geographical location play a significant

role in shaping your perception of empowerment, poverty, and the societal frameworks existing in various nations. These factors will give you your own unique viewpoint on this text in the Bible. I would never want to paint the picture that those who find themselves in a place of oppression and difficulty are there as a result of their own sin. That would be foolish, and I'm deeply empathetic to the nuances and seasons of different people and countries. We are simply looking at this situation in this text of the Bible. And this text is telling us that because of the cycle, because of the sin, because the Israelites had done evil in the eyes of the Lord, the Lord allowed the Midianites to prevail over them so that He could one day bring the Israelites back under His protection. And there's nothing quite like pain and struggle to open our eyes to our desperate need of God.

For seven years, they struggle. For seven years, they are hiding out. For seven years, they don't want to show themselves on social media, they don't want to go to work, they don't want to try out for the team, and they don't want to start a company. For seven years, all their work is destroyed. What they plant does not feed their family; it feeds their enemy. For seven years, they find themselves fighting, scratching, and climbing just to get by. Yes, babies are born, teenagers grow up, and people are still moving about. But life is limited. Joy is not radiating throughout the community. The struggle and pain of these years is taking a hefty emotional and mental toll.

I hate to bring it up, but do you remember 2020? I know during the pandemic some people didn't skip a beat. And some people really flourished in that time. But for the rest of

us, 2020 straight up sucked. We experienced so much compounded tension, so much difficulty racially, politically, and economically. So many businesses didn't make it through that season. So many relationships fractured during that year. From school to work to friendships, everything felt negatively impacted. Don't get me wrong, we made it work. We stood six feet away from our neighbors, all afraid to shake one another's hands. We washed our hands religiously. Our kindergarteners attended classes on Zoom.

That one year felt like seven years' worth of difficulty and pain. Many of us could not travel to see loved ones. We have a church in Guatemala, and our campus pastors were allowed to buy only one or two eggs at the store. They found themselves wandering through the streets, standing in multiple lines, so they could buy enough eggs from different shops. There was even an evening curfew. It was a lockdown.

I think this is what the children of Israel were feeling in Judges 6: locked down. No freedom of movement. *Where am I going next? Can I sleep tonight in peace? What will my kids' world look like in the future? Will life ever be normal again?*

So here we have a people who are struggling to find their way back to life. How is this true for you right now? Has it already been seven years for you? Has it been seventeen years? How many years or months has it been since you've not had freedom of movement in your mind, your words, your money, or your purpose? How long has it been since you harvested what you planted? How long has the centrifugal force kept you stuck?

And let's go a half step further. Who are your Midian-

ites? Perhaps your own self-talk? Your family members, your friend circle, or your co-workers? Who or what is taking up so much space in your brain and heart that you moved from the land you are called to occupy to hiding away in cliffs on the mountainside? Identify what Midian looks like in your life. Put a name on the swarm that is occupying the land in your mind.

Give the enemy a name.



You will win this battle. But you will not win this battle with worry.

No, worry is not the way through. You are going to win this battle another way.

You will win this battle. But you will not win this battle with worry.

“Midian so impoverished the Israelites that they cried out to the LORD for help” (Judges 6:6). Be hopeful, my friends, that just like the Israelites, we can also cry out to the Lord for help. That is, in fact, what we are doing, even as we meet together in the words of this book. We are crying out to the Lord for help.

I don’t know if the Israelites cried out in the first year, the second, the fifth, or the seventh. But what I do know is, they cried out to the Lord for help. And anytime we cry out

to the Lord for help, He hears us.

I encourage you to take some time, even now. Take some time and ask the Lord for help. It doesn't have to be flashy. It doesn't have to be eloquent. Just like a child speaking to their mom or dad, let your loving Father know you want help. "God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble."¹² So as we admit our need, we help posture ourselves in a place of humility that opens us up to the very grace we need to find the freedom we seek.

By the grace of God, you're going to get your spirit back! You're going to get your fight back. You're going to get your whole life back. You're going to break the cycle you're in. All of that is going to happen through prayer. We're not aiming for some temporary break. We're after breakthrough.



Since I've played basketball for so long, my knees have taken a bit of a beating. You know how it is when you've spent your entire life dunking on people, flying through the lane, gliding like an eagle, hovering over a ten-foot-tall basket with ease and grace (I'm only slightly exaggerating). Come on, you know what I'm talking about. So I was having some knee pain and went to the doctor. And I had a choice: I could just live with it, or I could get my knee scoped. If I lived with it, I could still function. I could still play with my kids. I could still rebound and play pickup basketball. But popping Advil and beating down my liver for the remaining years of my life was not something I wanted to do. I didn't

want to *just live with it*. I wanted to live. I did not want to tolerate it. I wanted to terminate it. So I got my knee scoped.

I took the anesthesia and let the surgeon do a deep work. The deep work cost more. The deep work had more rehab. The deep work required longer rest. The deep work took me out from playing in the short term, but it was designed to keep me playing for the long term.

This book, the motivation behind these words, is to encourage and equip you to allow the Great Surgeon to do the deep work. No longer will we just pop pills to medicate the dizziness of the cycles we find ourselves in. No, we're going after the stuff that is underneath the surface. We're going to the root of the problem. We're going to confront the enemies that stand against us. And we'll discover again—or perhaps for the first time—freedom of movement. And as Philippians 1:6 reminds us, “he who began a good work in you [and in me] will carry it on to completion.”