

RESILIENT

ALSO BY JOHN ELDREDGE

The Sacred Romance (with Brent Curtis)

Walking with God

Wild at Heart

Waking the Dead

Epic

Knowing the Heart of God

Beautiful Outlaw

Free to Live

Captivating (with Stasi Eldredge)

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Love and War (with Stasi Eldredge)

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Moving Mountains

All Things New

Get Your Life Back

RESILIENT

Restoring Your Weary Soul
in These Turbulent Times

JOHN ELDREDGE



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Resilient

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ISBN 978-1-4002-0864-7 (HC)
ISBN 978-1-4002-0868-5 (eBook)
ISBN 978-1-4002-3782-1 (ITPE)

Library of Congress Control Number: 2022932089

Printed in the United States of America
22 23 24 25 26 LSC 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

*To Sam and Susie, Blaine and Em, Luke and Liv:
Time with you makes me a more resilient man!*

He has made his people strong.

PSALM 148:14 NLT

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Introduction

No Ordinary Moment

Camels have an Achilles' heel; this is where we will begin.

But their vulnerability is hidden by their legendary *resilience*: these famous “ships of the desert” have been crossing dune seas since before the time of Abraham.

The stamina and strength of camels is truly impressive—they can carry heavy loads across leagues of burning desert sand, going without water for weeks while their human companions die of thirst. But the treacherous thing about camels is that they will walk a thousand miles with seemingly endless endurance, giving you little indication they are about to collapse. Then it just happens. As the Alchemist said to Santiago,

Camels are traitorous: they walk thousands of paces and never seem to tire. Then suddenly, they kneel and die. But horses tire bit by bit. You always know how much

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you can ask of them, and when it is that they are about to die.¹

Human souls hide an Achilles' heel too.

We have an astonishing capacity to rally in the face of calamity and duress. We rally and rally, and then one day we discover there's nothing left. Our soul simply says, *I'm done; I don't want to do this anymore*, as we collapse into discouragement, depression, or just blankness of soul.

You don't want to push your soul to that point.

But *everything* about the hour we are living in is pushing our souls to that very point. Some folks are nearly there.

We entered the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 worn out by the madness of modern life. Now, this isn't a book about the pandemic, though when history tells our story COVID-19 will be our generation's World War II—the global catastrophe we lived through. What began in 2020 was a shared experience of global trauma, and trauma takes a toll—the long experience of losses great and small, all the high-volume tension around masks, quarantines, vaccines, school closures, and on and on the list goes. Journalist Ed Yong won the 2021 Pulitzer Prize for Explanatory Reporting for his coverage of the pandemic. Here's what he found:

Millions have endured a year of grief, anxiety, isolation, and rolling trauma. Some will recover uneventfully, but for others, the quiet moments after adrenaline fades and normalcy resumes may be unexpectedly punishing. When they finally get a chance to exhale, their breaths

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may emerge as sighs. “People put their heads down and do what they have to do, but suddenly, when there’s an opening, all these feelings come up,” Laura van Dernoot Lipsky, the founder and director of the Trauma Stewardship Institute, told me. . . . “As hard as the initial trauma is,” she said, “it’s the aftermath that destroys people.”²

Right now we’re in a sort of global denial about the actual cost of these hard years (which are not over). We just want to get past it all, so we’re currently trying to comfort ourselves with some sense of recovery and relief. But folks, we haven’t yet paid the psychological bill for all we’ve been through. We would never tell a survivor of abuse that the trauma must be over now that the abuse has stopped. And yet that mentality is at play in our collective denial of the trauma we’ve been through.

We need to be kinder to our souls than that. Denial heals nothing, which is why I’m more concerned about what’s coming than what lies behind. In our compromised condition we’re now facing some of the trials Jesus warned us about as we approach what the Scriptures refer to as “the end of the age” (Matthew 24:3).

Extraordinary times can be thrilling, but they also tend to be very demanding. Our hearts will need guidance and preparation. It would be a good idea to take the strength of your soul seriously at this time.

In case you’ve already forgotten what the pandemic was like, allow me to refresh your memory. Fear of death suddenly swept the world, death unseen and unpredictable,

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death by plague. In a matter of weeks, we found ourselves in various forms of quarantine and lockdown—schools, churches, and businesses all closed their doors. The economy reeled. Everything that makes for a joyful, normal life was taken from us in a moment and withheld for many, many months.

Follow me closely now. To be suddenly stripped of your normal life; to live under the fear of suffering and death; to be bombarded with negative news, kept in a state of constant uncertainty about the future, with no clear view of the finish line; and to lose every human countenance behind a mask—may I point out that this is exactly the torment that terrorist regimes use to break down prisoners psychologically and physically?

Folks, this had a traumatic effect, and we've got to plan for our recovery and find new resilience.

“At least we can get back to our normal lives,” one friend said. But that's not true either. I know you *want* it to be true, but events are converging that prevent normal life from happening. Our enemy, the prince of darkness, has engineered this situation to do serious harm to the human heart. I believe we are set up for a sweeping loss of faith.

There is hope, great hope. Jesus Christ knew that humanity would face hard times, especially as history accelerates toward the end of the age. He gave us counsel on how to live through such trials, and now would be a good time to pay attention to what he said. The Creator and Redeemer of our humanity has given us a path toward recovery and resilience. We would be fools to ignore it or push it off to “some other time.” Whatever you believe

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about the coming years, I think we can all agree that greater resilience of heart and soul would be a very good thing to take hold of.

In this hour we don't need inspiration and cute stories. We need a survival guide—which is exactly what this book is. Each chapter opens with a true story of human resilience against the bleakest odds. You'll also encounter “Skills” callouts to draw your attention to practical tools for strengthening heart and soul. And every chapter will pull your attention to Jesus himself, for we need the supernatural resilience provided in Christ. It is always available—we simply have to take hold of it.

LIVING WATER

In 1946 Wilfred Thesiger made an impossible trek across the desolate Empty Quarter of Arabia with four Bedouins, journeying in winter on camelback. They reached a desperate point in their odyssey when the odds looked grim—they were nearly out of water, the next well was beyond an impassable mountain range of dunes, and their camels were showing signs of collapsing.

All the skins were sweating and we were worried about our water. There had been a regular and ominous drip from them throughout the day, a drop falling to the sand as we rode along, like blood dripping from a wound that could not be staunched. . . .

I suppose I was weak from hunger, for the food which we ate was a starvation ration, even by Bedouin standards. But my thirst troubled me most. . . . I was always conscious of it. Even when I was asleep I dreamt of racing streams of ice-cold water, but it was difficult to get to sleep. . . .

I worried about the water which I had watched dripping away on to the sand, and about the state of our camels.¹

The survivor's first need is water. You can live forty days without food, but only three without water. Water is life; finding water is one of your first objectives.

Chapter 1

I Just Want Life to Be Good Again

Restore the sparkle to my eyes.

PSALM 13:3 NLT

The longing for things to be good again is one of the deepest yearnings of the human heart. It has slumbered in the depths of our souls ever since we lost our true home. For our hearts remember Eden.

Most of the time this beautiful, powerful longing flows like an underground river below the surface of our awareness—so long as we are consoled by some measure of goodness in our lives. While we are enjoying our work, our family, our adventures, or the little pleasures of this world, the longing for things to be good again seems to be placated.

But when trials and heartbreaks wash in, the longing

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rises to the surface like a whale coming up for air, filled with momentum and force. This is especially true after times of severe testing, because during the testing we are rallying. But when the storm subsides, the longing for things to be good again rises up to demand relief.

How we shepherd this longing—so crucial to our identity and the true life of our heart—how we listen to it but also guide it in right or wrong directions, this determines our fate.

The Drive That Propels Us

God has given each human soul a capacity and drive, a primal aspiration for life. This is as fundamental to you as your own survival.

The epicenter of our being is the deep longing to *aspire* for things that bring us life, to *plan* for those things, to *take hold* of them, to *enjoy* them, and start the cycle over as we aspire toward new things! This is the essential craving for life given to us by God. Let's call this capacity the Primal Drive for Life.

The longing for things to be good again is the mournful cry of the Primal Drive for Life in us, like the haunting cries of whales under the sea.

It seems to me we can never give up longing and wishing while we are thoroughly alive. There are certain things we feel to be beautiful and good, and we must hunger after them.²

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This hunger allows human beings to survive the most terrible ordeals; it also enables us to savor all the goodness of this world, to love, and to create works of immense beauty.

I've long enjoyed Saint John of the Cross's poetry about the soul's intimacy with God. So I was shocked and appalled to discover that this dear man was, at one point in his life, unjustly imprisoned and tortured.

In 1577, as a result of the attempted reform of the Carmelite order and his alliance with St. Teresa [of Avila], he was kidnapped and imprisoned at Toledo. It was during this period of debased confinement and torture . . . that he miraculously composed some of his greatest poetry.

For much of the nine months St. John was in prison, he was confined to a tiny cell, actually an unlit closet in which he could not even stand up. He was left to relieve himself on the floor of this tiny cell, and his few scraps of food and water were sometimes thrown into his feces and urine. On a regular basis he was brought from his cell and beaten . . . to the extent that he became permanently crippled. He was not given a change of clothes or allowed to wash for months. He became infested with lice and dysentery. He was forced to sleep upon his own excrement.³

Saint John prevailed and brought enormous beauty to the world from his ordeals. His Primal Drive for Life was imbued by God with a supernatural resilience.

So Very Thirsty

Our Primal Drive for Life has taken a real beating over the past few years.

It isn't only the pandemic. We were all running like rats on a wheel *before* 2020—addicted to technology, overwhelmed by global news, wrung out from social tensions, exhausted body and soul from the madness of modern life. Does anybody even remember? Life was *draining*. It wasn't like we stepped out of a three-year sabbatical when we stepped into 2020. We were set up to be steamrolled by the pandemic.

Then came the repeated cycles of fear, control, chronic disappointment, all those losses great and small, the inability to make plans for the future. This throttled our capacity for living, just as serial rejection harms our ability for relationship, or chronic failure cripples our capacity for hope. We started reaching for relief.

Stasi and I were among the sixty-two *million* homeowners who did renovations during the pandemic—that's more than three-quarters of all homeowners in the US, the highest levels ever seen.⁴ We painted the living room, got new carpet, new chairs. We upgraded our garden as well. This was far more than boredom or the desire for change; it was a profound longing for a fresh start *at life* in the midst of so much loss and uncertainty. The renovation craze reflected something deeper—a yearning for life to be good again, expressed in paint and carpet, gardens and landscaping.

But the whole time Stasi and I were renovating our

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home, I could feel something was off. The preoccupation of making our home nicer took my mind off the death count in New York, London, Paris, and Delhi, the vicious acrimony over vaccines. But it didn't feel like the answer. It was good; I enjoyed it. But it didn't bring about the fix I was longing for.

Speaking of fixing things, I noticed through the first half of 2021 that I was doing all sorts of obsessive fixing. Everything from a dripping faucet to a lamp that had been wobbly for years—they each seized my attention, and I had to set it right. My soul was desperate to set things right. Haven't you felt this too?

Then life began to return to some semblance of normal—we got restaurants back, movies, outdoor concerts. The world rushed out like the starving survivor of a shipwreck brought back from isolation and set before a Sunday brunch. In the summer of 2021 you couldn't get a rental car, Airbnb, or campsite. Airports, beaches, and national parks were jammed. It was like spring break in Miami. The longing for things to be good again was (and is) raging.

Personally, I couldn't get enough. But all those comforts and activities weren't delivering whatever my soul was desperately longing for.

That Won't Work

One of the most remarkable things about human beings is how resilient we can be. The Primal Drive for Life can accomplish impressive things. Saint John took his

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suffering and brought forth beauty; Nelson Mandela survived twenty-seven years of imprisonment and brought forth forgiveness.

Yet one of the most surprising things about human beings is how all that resilience can evaporate in a moment.

One day the resources we have to sustain the Primal Drive for Life simply run out. The mother who for decades pours and pours into her family, and then one day up and has an affair with her best friend's husband. The minister who for decades served up banquets from the Word of God suddenly decides he doesn't believe in Jesus anymore.

It has to do with *reserves*.

We tap into our deep reserves to endure years of suffering and deprivation. Then one day our heart simply says, *I don't care anymore; I'm done*. We abandon the fight and go off to find relief. I fear this is what's happening now on a global scale.

Human beings are at the same time both resilient and unpredictably fragile, like camels. A better test for how vulnerable we may *actually* be is to check on our reserves. For we can rally, and we have rallied. Way to go, everybody! But every time you rally, you tap into your reserves, and though you might feel like you're doing pretty well on any given day, you're still burning through precious resources and your reserve tank is precariously low . . . like the drip, drip, dripping water bags of Wilfred Thesiger's party, way out in the middle of the desert.

This is the trauma cycle. We rally in the face of harm, and when the harm subsides, we live in denial of it and go off in search of some taste of Eden. When our efforts

One of the most remarkable things about human beings is how resilient we can be. Yet one of the most surprising things about human beings is how all that resilience can evaporate in a moment.

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are thwarted, rage surfaces—which is common to trauma responses.⁵

This is why rallying can actually be deceptive. Reserves tell the true story.

During the early stages of the pandemic, I circled up my little staff of eighteen wonderful saints (all working online) to check on their well-being. I asked them questions about resilience: “How is your operating strength these days? If you are normally functioning at 100 percent, what are you functioning at now?” Their answers hovered around 30 percent. Most days they were feeling about 30 percent of their normal strength. This is what trauma does.

“Now tell me about your reserves—if a major crisis were to hit tomorrow, what sort of reserves do you have available?” Their answers averaged about 15 percent—and this is a very resilient group of people!

I asked them the same questions a year later, in 2021. Though things had somewhat improved, they were not reporting soaring scores. How about your own reserves? Have you even assessed them? Allow me to ask you a couple of questions:

- ♦ If another pandemic were to sweep across the globe next week, some brand-new deadly threat, and we found ourselves back to quarantines, living under the vague threat of suffering and death, in a state of constant uncertainty about the future, with no clear view of the finish line—how would your heart respond to that?
- ♦ Or try this on: Your house or apartment is going to burn down tomorrow, and though everyone will

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survive, you will lose everything else. All your belongings, records, valuable documents, precious family keepsakes. You will need to rebuild your entire life. Do you have 100 percent vim and verve for that scenario?

Like I said—we have not yet paid the psychological bill for the COVID-19 pandemic. We tapped deep into our reserves to rally, and we are in no condition to face more trauma . . . let alone the assaults of our enemy. Trauma sensitizes you to more trauma and brings to the surface *past* trauma. You don't get used to it; each new crisis simply piles on the stress.⁶

The treacherous thing about human nature is that the Primal Drive for Life is so compelling we will sacrifice almost anything for it—health, marriages, careers, even our faith. After a time of global trauma and deprivation, the longing rages so we wander off in search of life. But reckless wandering without a clear plan or destination often adds to our suffering rather than bringing relief.

When John Wesley Powell made the first descent of the uncharted Colorado River through the Grand Canyon in 1869, he and his colleagues had no idea of the test that was in store. Wild rapids, unexpected falls, swirling pools that threatened to devour their wooden boats. After weeks of this, several of the crew mutinied. Against all warnings they left the river and tried to find an exit out of the canyon through Apache lands.

Those men were never heard from again.⁷

I fear we are being lured into similar dangers as we grasp for relief from all we have endured.

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Return to Me

The exodus of the people of Israel and their journey through the Sinai desert is one of the greatest survival stories of all time. More than two *million* people wandering through a land of sand and barren rock, homeless, looking for the land of abundance, a place to call home. When will life be good again?⁸

There were no real sources of food in that desert. Water was about as scarce as it is on the surface of the moon. A “barren wilderness—a land of deserts and pits, a land of drought and death, where no one lives or even travels” (Jeremiah 2:6 NLT).

This is more than a moment in Jewish history. It is recorded for us as one of the great analogies of human experience, our journey from bondage to freedom, from barrenness to the promised land. Ultimately, it is the precursor to our journey of salvation, from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of God.

It is a story about the Primal Drive for Life—where will we take our thirst?

This is *the* choice, *the* test. Always has been, always will be.

This Primal Drive for Life was so compelling it caused thousands of those rescued slaves to mount a rebellion to go back to bondage in Egypt just to have their familiar ways back. Sobering.

“The heavens are shocked at such a thing and shrink back in horror and dismay,” says the LORD. “For my people

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have done two evil things: They have abandoned me—the fountain of living water. And they have dug for themselves cracked cisterns that can hold no water at all!”

JEREMIAH 2:12–13 NLT

The great alarm the Scriptures are sounding is that our longing for life to be good again will be *the* battleground for our heart. How you shepherd this precious longing, and *if* you shepherd it at all, will determine your fate in this life and in the life to come.

This is playing out in a “postpandemic” world: we only sort of want God; what we *really* want is for life to be good again. If God seems to be helping, awesome. We believe! If he doesn’t . . . well, we’ll get back to him later, after we chase whatever we think will fill our famished craving.

The first stage of the coming storm is this: we’ve all run off to find life and joy following years of stress, trauma, and deprivation. But it isn’t working; *it won’t ever work*. We return to our normal Monday through Friday disappointed, and disappointment will become disillusionment. And disillusionment makes us extremely vulnerable to our enemy.

We must lovingly shepherd our famished thirst back to the source of life.

The River of Life

My longtime friend and publisher Brian Hampton used to tell me, “Put the cookies on the bottom shelf.” By which he

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meant, “Don’t make folks wait until the end of the book to get the help you are offering.” Fair enough. Let me give you something right now that will prove enormously helpful. Your appreciation for it will grow as we go on, I promise.

When the human heart and soul experience month after month of disappointment and loss, death rolls in. Dr. Richard Gunderman described the progressive onset of disillusionment as the accumulation of hundreds or thousands of tiny disappointments, each one hardly noticeable on its own.⁹ The loss of hope and dreams suffocates the Primal Drive for Life.

But our God has provision for us!

I know, I know—most of you think that what you need right now is three months at the coast. Walking on the beach, drinks on the deck, and with all my heart I hope you find that. But for most of us, a sabbatical in some gorgeous refuge is not available. What *is* available is the River of Life, God himself, in ways we have not yet tapped into.

God wants to make his life available to you. Remember—he’s the creator of those beautiful places you wish you could go to for a sabbatical. All that beauty and resilience, all that life comes from God, and he wants to impart a greater measure of himself to you! The life of God is described in Scripture as a river—a powerful, gorgeous, unceasing, ever-renewing, ever-flowing river.

Ezekiel was given a number of beautiful visions, glimpses into the kingdom of God that permeates this world. He saw the temple of God in Jerusalem, and out of the temple was flowing the River of Life. As it flowed forth across the countryside, it became so deep and wide it wasn’t possible

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to swim across it—an image of abundance! I love how the passage ends: “Where the river flows everything will live” (Ezekiel 47:9).

Everything will live. This is what we want—to live, to find life in its fullness again.

The apostle John was given a revelation of the coming kingdom and the restored earth, and he saw the River of Life flowing right down the middle of the city of God:

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.
(Revelation 22:1–2)

There is so much life flowing from God that it flows like a mighty river. Isn't that marvelous? Follow me now—the River of Life is not just for later. Jesus stated clearly that the river is meant to flow out of our inner being right here, in *this* life: “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them” (John 7:37–38).

The mighty life of God flowing in you and through you, saturating you like a river.

Now let me pull all this together. We have a capacity and drive in us for living. It's a precious longing, and it's taken a beating. God is “the fountain of life” (Psalm 36:9). There is so much life flowing from God that it flows like a

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river no one can even swim across—a superabundant outflow of life! This life is meant to flow *in* us, and *through* us.

Skill

RECEIVING THE RIVER OF LIFE

In order to tap into the River of Life, we begin by loving God in our longing for life to be good again. That's where things are decided. Nearly all of us have been chasing relief in a myriad of hopes, plans, and dreams without first turning to God. So we need to enter the longing, feel it, become present to it, and in that place start loving God. Choose him.

Our first step toward resilience is to return our Primal Drive for Life and our longing for things to be good again to God; we come back to Jesus from all other places we've been chasing life. We allow him to be our rescuer here, in the longing for life to be good again. We ask God to fill us with the river of his life.

Jesus, I come back to you now in my longing for life to be good again. I love you here, Lord, in my soul's longings, desires, and heartaches. I consecrate to you my Primal Drive for Life. I surrender to you my ability to aspire for good things, plan for them, take hold of them, enjoy them, and keep on aspiring. I consecrate all living in me to you, Lord Jesus; I give you my famished craving for life to be good again. I love you

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here. I love you right here. And now I ask that the river of your life would flow in me, in my Primal Drive for Life and in my longing for life to be good again. I open my heart and soul to the river of life. Let it flow in me, through me, and all around me—restoring, renewing, and healing me. You alone are the life I seek, and I welcome your river into my heart and soul; I receive the river of your life in me. Thank you, God! In your mighty name I pray.

We are going to explore a number of “supernatural graces” as we move through this book. It will help your faith to know that your experience of these will be gentle. Though we call them “supernatural” graces, that doesn’t mean they come like an earthquake or lightning strike. God is tender with our weary souls; he doesn’t overwhelm us with his presence. As we practice these graces, their strength will grow. But your initial experience of them will be gentle—this will help you trust what you are experiencing.

Give this simple prayer, asking for the River of Life, a try for one week; you’ll see.



LOST AND DISORIENTED

The first thing you should do when you are lost is stop! This is critical—stop moving and get your bearings. Even if it takes some time. The classic mistake of those who don't survive in crisis situations is that they panic and run off in hopeless directions, or simply slog on, making their situation more dire.

In 1857 John Muir and a companion were caught in a blizzard on the 14,142-foot summit of Mount Shasta, a volcanic peak in northern California. No Gore-Tex, no down, no ice axes or storm tents.

After we had forced our way down the ridge and past the group of hissing fumaroles, the storm became inconceivably violent. The thermometer fell twenty-two degrees in a few minutes, and soon dropped below zero. The hail gave place to snow, and darkness came on like night. The wind, rising to the highest pitch of violence, boomed and surged amidst the desolate crags; lightning flashes in quick succession cut the gloomy darkness; and the thunders, the most tremendously loud and appalling I ever heard, made an almost continuous roar, stroke following stroke in quick, passionate succession, as though the mountain were being rent to its foundations and the fires of the old volcano were breaking forth again.¹

Muir, a seasoned mountaineer, had taken careful note of prominent mountain features on their way to the summit, and he used those to guide them safely—first to refuge on the mountain, and again the next morning as they made their escape.

Chapter 2

Where Are We? What's Happening?

When you see clouds beginning to form in the west, you say, "Here comes a shower." And you are right. When the south wind blows, you say, "Today will be a scorcher." And it is. You fools! You know how to interpret the weather signs of the earth and sky, but you don't know how to interpret the present times.

LUKE 12:54–56 NLT

I remember the first time I got really and truly lost. My young sons and I were elk hunting high in the Rocky Mountains in Colorado. There'd been a decent snowstorm the night before, and as we circumnavigated the mountain, we could see the tracks of every living thing—not

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only elk and deer but snowshoe hares, ermines, pine squirrels, and field mice. I love reading the stories that footprints in fresh snow tell.

Then we came upon human tracks.

I was really upset. I thought we had this mountain to ourselves. *What are these jokers doing up here?* We sat there staring in disbelief at the footprints when slowly, slowly as the sun rose, it dawned on us—they were *our* footprints.

Which meant that we'd been going in circles when I was certain we'd been going in a straight line. I thought we were headed from point A to point B, where one of our buddies was going to pick us up in his four-wheel drive truck. Our tracks told a different story. I had no idea where we were.

The disorientation threw me off-balance for quite some time. *Where are we? How long have we been wandering in circles? What do we do now? Which direction is the way out?*

Our Perception Is Under Siege

I have nothing but compassion for you, dear beleaguered souls.

You really have nothing to compare this moment to, because this is the only hour in which you've ever lived. So it's only too easy to lose track of how soul-scorching and mind-numbing it is. And we are trying to process it all with trauma brain (what my friends refer to as "COVID brain").

Mental fragmentation is one of the classic symptoms following trauma. Five minutes after brushing my teeth, I don't remember if I brushed my teeth. I pick up my phone to text

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someone, and in the four seconds it takes to raise my arm, I don't recall who I was going to text. I can't stay focused on one task very long; I flit from thing to thing.

Yesterday I walked up to our office doors and absent-mindedly tried to open them with my car's key fob. We have one of those systems where every employee has a fob on their key ring to open the front door. Only I was trying to open it with my *car* key fob (they don't look anything alike). I stood there puzzled, pressing *click-click-click*, and it was only when I heard my car door locks going up and down that I realized why the office door wouldn't open.

Mercy.

With our fragmented brains we are still trying to take in the same amount of media we were in 2018. We are the most plugged-in generation ever. *Ever*. In a moment like ours—so much media, news, and sensation bombarding us from every direction, plus all the opinions and counter-opinions and misinformation on social media—it's hard to maintain perspective. “To keep your head when all about you are losing theirs,” as Kipling observed.²

Yesterday I listened to a special report on people who work all those consumer helplines—the 800 numbers you call when you need to know how to plug in your dryer or change your flight. Apparently these folks don't just have tough jobs. They work in abusive environments. Harassment, pressure, verbal abuse. Another injustice is exposed, which is really important. But the day before, it was an entirely different report or exposé on another injustice. The constant barrage of injustice and outrage overwhelms the soul. It clouds our perspective on what the story is right now.

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Making matters worse, over the past decade many people have made social media their news source. It's where they turn for what's current, what's getting attention, what's happening in the world. We forget that social media companies are private companies held by private owners with strong personal opinions about what should and shouldn't get air time. Simply because the president or prime minister said it, or social media is shouting it, doesn't mean it's important or even true. But boy oh boy is it whipping a lot of people into a frenzy.

One of the first warnings Jesus gave us about living through such times was simply "don't freak out." "You will hear of wars and threats of wars, but don't panic" (Matthew 24:6 NLT) or "see that you are not frightened" (NASB1995).

Unflappable Jesus, the most level-headed guy ever, simply refused to get baited into any of the drama of his own day. And he urges us to be unflappable too. Jesus knew that everything was going to be shouting for our attention, trying to get us all "spun up." This injustice, that exposé. The message shouted at us from every side is, "Get upset! You really ought to be upset about this!"

It wears a soul down.

And there is a way out.

There Is Only One Story

The human brain processes information in the form of narrative. This is one more example of how deeply story is woven into the fabric of reality.³

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Story is the way we orient ourselves in the world. Story is how we figure things out, bring order and meaning to the events around us. The story we hold to at any given time shapes our perceptions, hopes, and expectations; it gives us a place to stand. In this mad hour on the earth, what story are you telling yourself—or letting others tell you?

Is it a political narrative? *We just need to get the right people in power!*

Is it a social narrative? *The issue is injustice! We need justice!*

Is it about the economy? *A new era of prosperity is coming!*

Most importantly, is it the story God is telling?

We are living in a story, friends. A story written and being unfolded by the hand of God. Despite what the world is shouting at you, the story of God is still the story of the world. This is the hardest thing to hang on to, and the most important thing to hang on to: *the story of God is still the story of the world.*

Allow me to quote a passage from the book of Ephesians:

God raised [Jesus] from death and set him on a throne in deep heaven, in charge of running the universe, everything from galaxies to governments, no name and no power exempt from his rule. And not just for the time being, but *forever*. He is in charge of it all, has the final word on everything. At the center of all this, Christ rules the church. The church, you see, is not peripheral to the world; the world is peripheral to the church. (Ephesians 1:20–23 THE MESSAGE)

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