

LOOK AGAIN

Recognize Your Worth

Renew Your Hope

Run with Confidence

TIM TEBOW

WITH A.J. GREGORY



NELSON
BOOKS

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Look Again

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To our daughter, Daphne Reign. May you always know your God-given worth, live with the hope of eternity, and run with confidence because you know whose you are and who you're running to.



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A NOTE FROM TIM

IF YOU'VE PICKED UP THIS BOOK, I WANT TO START by saying something really simple—but really important: Thank you.

Thank you for being willing to open something that I know at times won't always be easy to read. This book will take you on a roller coaster of emotions. You'll be challenged and inspired. You'll also read some hard things—stories that aren't easy to take in. But I also want you to find hope—in the highs, the lows, the moments of darkness and light, and in the journey that connects them all.

Some of what's in this book is heavy. It's painful. It's not the kind of content you can skim over casually. These are real stories. Real people. Real suffering. And that weight? It matters.

Even the process of putting this book together came with tension. There were a lot of discerning conversations about how deep we chose to go, knowing that I didn't write this to make people comfortable. I wrote it to bring light. To bring perspective. And, ultimately, to bring hope.

Because avoiding pain doesn't heal it. Ignoring injustice doesn't stop it. But naming it and facing it with faith and courage is what uncovers hope. And that changes everything.

There will be moments when this book challenges you. But I want you to know that on every page, in every story, there is hope. The book of Hebrews reminds us we have a hope that is an anchor for our soul—firm and secure. That anchor doesn't disappear in the darkness. It holds us steady. If the gospel ended at the cross, this would be a book

without hope. But thank God, it doesn't end there. The grave couldn't contain the reason we have hope. And that's why this book doesn't end in despair either.

Even when you can't see it—hope.

Even when you don't feel it—hope.

Even when the pain is loud—hope.

My prayer is that you will find hope in who you are, how God sees you, and how you can see others. If you want to see yourself and see others differently . . .

If you're facing heartbreak . . .

If you want to believe that your life—and the lives of others—really matter, no matter what the world says . . .

You've picked up the right book.



INTRODUCTION

THE HAUNTING SOUND RIPPED THROUGH THE Haitian village, silencing the birds. The women walking froze mid-stride, ears locked on the noise. Could it be an injured dog? Maybe a goat? As the wailing rose, the women quickened their pace, weaving through thickets and darting between brush. Then, at the sound's peak, they froze, the color draining from their faces.

The cry didn't belong to an animal; it came from a baby boy.

Frantzky lay on a thin mattress on a worn porch, his clubbed feet twisted inward. The stained fabric sagged through splintered wooden planks, fistfuls of worn-out stuffing bursting through broken seams. Frantzky's skeletal body writhed as mosquitos bit at his skin. Neighbors told the women his mother had likely gone to the market, so the women waited for her on the porch. They took turns cradling the severely malnourished baby. His mom didn't return until the next day.

The women would soon learn that this "baby" was actually three years old. Weighing only thirteen pounds, Frantzky was the size of a four-month-old infant. Ravaged by sickness, this boy had clubbed feet, a drug-resistant strain of malaria, and significant neurological problems that led to serious developmental issues. He would never walk or talk on his own. Overwhelmed by his special needs, Frantzky's mother had tried to abandon him several times. As in many other

cultures across the world, in her community children with special needs face deep stigma, often viewed as supernaturally cursed. Fearing shame, families often hide these children or abandon them on doorsteps or in trash cans.

The women who found Frantzky were part of a Haitian ministry we've partnered with, led by incredible friends. Though these people took measures to educate and support his mom, she had no desire to care for him, so he came under the care of myLIFEspeaks, an organization that works closely with Haitian Child Services to create infrastructure so abandoned and neglected children don't fall through the cracks. During the next six years, Frantzky received intensive physical and nutritional therapy and medical intervention to treat his malaria as well as surgery to correct his clubbed feet. Whenever I'd visit, I'd carry Frantzky around with me, rarely putting him down. He'd thrust his arms around my neck and hold on as tight as he could, which wasn't very much considering his limited dexterity. Despite his medical needs, joy seeped from his spirit. Even today I can still feel the warmth from Frantzky's smile. Stretching from dimple to dimple, it was his trademark. He wore it all the time. Softening hearts, spreading warmth, he impacted countless lives with his smile alone.

When Frantzky was about nine years old, he fell gravely ill. Unable to keep any food down and after forty-eight hours of vomiting, he was rushed to a local clinic. The moment the medical staff took one look at Frantzky's disabled body, they turned him away. He was raced to a nearby hospital, where once again he was turned away at the door. A second hospital admitted him reluctantly, but within hours it was clear the staff wasn't giving Frantzky the care he desperately needed. By the time he was transferred to a third hospital, it was too late. Left ignored and untreated for so long, his symptoms worsened. He died within minutes of arriving.

I don't know what was worse—Frantzky dying from a likely treatable virus or being treated like a virus, seen as if he was the problem.

The way people looked at Frantzky is both shocking and heartbreaking. Or should I say, the way they *wouldn't* look at him. For most of us, reading about the plight of a helpless and abandoned child stirs something deep within us. It's an emotional wake-up call. But let's zoom out for a bit.

I want to ask you a question that's challenged me over the past fifteen years, one I can't shake: How do you see people? I'm not talking about just surface stuff but how you view them at your core. Do you measure their worth by social status or achievements? By what they can give or do for you? Do you define people by their flaws or failures? Does their value stem from their talent or connections?

What if I told you there was a way to look at people that would change everything? I mean *everything*, and that's not hyperbole.

Launched in April 1990 at the cost of \$1.6 billion, the Hubble Space Telescope was designed to show the world just how stunning space is. As of February 2024, the most famous telescope in the world has made more than one million observations revealing super massive black holes, new stars being born, and galactic collisions. You can find Hubble's discoveries in every modern astronomy textbook.¹

Few remember that Hubble was nearly a total flop.

The images from the 1990 launch came back blurry. The promise

I want to ask you a question that's challenged me over the past fifteen years, one I can't shake: How do you see people?

of jaw-dropping, spectacular pictures? Far from it. What should have been crystal-clear views of the galaxies were hazy and unimpressive images. The most famous telescope in the world became the punch line not only in the space community but in the general population. From Congress to late-night television, NASA's embarrassing blunder fueled countless jokes.

Hubble's problem was a flaw in its primary mirror, the heart of the telescope. It couldn't focus.² For the brightest stars astronomers could tweak the images with software, but when it came to the dimmer corners of the universe, Hubble needed a fix, or, more simply put, new glasses.³ The problem and its solution were monumental. Just how much was at stake? One astrophysicist said, "If the Hubble repair is a failure, we can write off space science for the foreseeable future."⁴

In 1993, NASA launched a servicing mission to manually repair the telescope. It was the last chance to turn the entire space program around. In just eleven days, and with a record-breaking five spacewalks, the telescope's focus was corrected.

With the fix in place, Hubble looked again into the vastness of space, unveiling galaxies, stars, and a beauty that had always been there yet had been unseen in its full glory. The difference between those new images and the ones from just three years earlier was mind-blowing. As remarked in NASA's January 1994 press conference after the repair, "The trouble with Hubble is over."⁵ You might call it the greatest comeback in scientific history.

You can have the best equipment in the world, but if the basics aren't in place, none of it matters. Just as this telescope's tiny flaw distorted its ability to see the cosmos clearly, our view of people becomes distorted when we judge them based on hollow, unreliable, and faulty standards instead of seeing them through God's eyes.

When God looks at you, me, and everyone else, He sees beyond

physical appearance. Beyond cultural norms and labels. Beyond what someone has or doesn't have, beyond what someone can or cannot do, beyond physical and neurological restrictions and limits that are self-imposed. It's why Jesus could look at the marginalized, the forgotten, and the overlooked and find beauty, value, and worth every time.

One of the most life-changing aspects of my faith has been how God opened my eyes to see the true value of people—especially those the world overlooks, marginalizes, or judges. This shift in perspective, spurred on by a bumper sticker you'll read about in a later chapter, has deeply shaped my journey. It has become the heart behind everything I do. And in this book, I am going to share that heart with you.

Look Again is the result of three years of intense study and research, but more than that, it's a testament to how God has challenged and impacted me through vulnerable people. This book is also an invitation to join me in coming to grips with one of the most important human truths, a truth I've only recently been able to articulate. I can finally reveal what I believe God has shown me in my heart and what the world must know.

When I look back at some of my biggest regrets, those moments I wish I could take back, I realize that so often I didn't see people the way God sees them. I missed their worth. I didn't carry the hope I should have shared. And that's my prayer for you: that you would be open to learning from my mistakes. I hope that my daughter, Daphne, and all the children Demi and I may have will one day look back at the things I pursued and what I devoted my time, my heart, and my energy to and be proud of their daddy. I want them to be proud not of the things I did but of how I saw people like Jesus does.

Because here's the truth: When your eyes are cloudy, your heart gets cloudy too. When you don't see people with the worth God's given them, it's easy to react out of pride, anger, or fear. But when you see

them through His eyes, it makes all the difference. You carry hope. You treat others with the love and value they deserve. When we see ourselves and others clearly, we begin to recognize the worth He's placed in you and in everyone around you. And when you do, it will change how you live, how you love, and how you make a difference in this world.

This book is divided into three parts:

Recognize Your Worth: Understanding what it means to be created in the image of God and an ancient truth of how God sees us.

Renew Your Hope: Uncovering the undeniable reality of who others are and the hope that's promised even through difficulties, challenges, and trauma.

Run with Confidence: Recognizing our urgent responsibility to protect, defend, and fight for the worth of others.

Transformation starts by recognizing your worth. And I'm not talking about the kind of worth the world hands out based on status, success, or how many likes you get. I'm talking about the real thing. The kind of worth that comes from the One who made you. And when that truth sinks into your soul, it ignites something powerful: hope. A real, unshakable hope that isn't dependent on your circumstances but anchored in who God says you are.

When you know how deeply you're loved, you can step forward boldly, even when the odds are stacked against you.

It's the hope that reminds you that God has done something incredible for you. He's redeemed you, called you by name, and given you a purpose. That kind of hope changes everything. When you recognize your worth and embrace the

hope that comes from God's truth, you can't help but run with confidence. Not because everything in your life is perfect but because you know the One who holds your future. And when you know how deeply you're loved, you can step forward boldly, even when the odds are stacked against you.

I've seen this happen with some of the trafficking survivors I've met, women who have been through unimaginable pain and darkness but are now flourishing again with confidence. They've caught hold of that hope, and it's transformed their lives. They're pursuing their dreams, taking steps forward, and making a difference.

I'm inviting you on that kind of journey. Because when you truly grasp the worth God placed on you from the beginning, you can cling to lasting hope through hard times and bring that hope to a hurting world.

In this book I tackle some bone-deep, heartbreaking topics and evils, including trafficking, exploitation, and laws that have wrecked lives. I also share stories of people who have taught me so much about how God loves and sees each one of us.

But hold on: This book isn't just about other people. It's also about the one reading this book—you. The only way to begin to see and treat others the way God does is to understand and embrace how He sees us. And man, how many times have I fallen short!

The only way to begin to see and treat others the way God does is to understand and embrace how He sees us.

NASA astronaut Story Musgrave, payload commander of Hubble's repair mission, once said this about space: "You look to the heavens for what the meaning of life is down here. . . . It tends to shed a light on who we are. And who humanity is."⁶

Musgrave recognized Hubble as a bridge between the heavens and

our understanding of ourselves, but the real connection isn't just in the stars. The truth is, the Creator of the universe designed the blueprint for who we are—and I can't wait to walk alongside you as we unlock this life changer in the pages to come.

By the time you reach the end of this book, I hope you'll be able to look again and answer this question with confidence: How do you see people? My prayer is that your answer will be: "Like God does."

Frantzky was born into a world of hatred and indifference. His funeral, however, painted a very different picture. The entire village filled the streets to honor his precious life. Even his mother came. And in what can only be described as a God-ordained moment of reconciliation and a sign of deep love and respect, she offered to bury in their family tomb the son she had abandoned.

Frantzky was finally seen the way God had always seen him.

Sometimes I wonder what might have happened if the doctors who dismissed him had chosen to look again, beyond his disability. What if so much of the world's suffering comes from not seeing ourselves and others the way God sees us? So, let me ask you: What would change if you truly saw yourself through God's eyes? How would it transform your self-image, your choices, your hope, and your confidence? And what if you could see others the same way? How would that impact how you love, serve, and bring healing to a hurting world?

As we dive in, I want to start where history and humanity collide—with a story of some of the lives of those the world has cast aside. This first chapter belongs to the history books, a history I hope will never be repeated.

Part 1

RECOGNIZE YOUR WORTH



**YOUR WORTH
DOESN'T COME
FROM WHAT YOU DO,
FROM WHAT YOU'VE
DONE, OR WHAT'S
BEEN DONE TO YOU.
IT COMES FROM
WHO MADE YOU.**



Chapter 1

LIFE UNWORTHY OF LIFE

THERE ARE ONLY TWO ROOMS IN THE HOUSE where my wife, Demi, and I live where I have any say in how things look. The first is the gym, which is in our garage. The other is the TV room, where we watch movies and, of course, catch college football games. Both rooms are easy places to lose perspective, the TV room most of all. I'll walk in, put on a game, and before I know it—especially if the University of Florida is playing and losing—I'm sucked into the story unfolding on the screen. I can get so worked up that I lose my cool, and that low-key anger lingers all day. That's not an exaggeration. No matter how many times it's happened (and trust me, it's a lot), it still feels nearly impossible not to get supercharged over stuff that in the grand scheme holds little to no value. I knew things had to change to help level out my perspective.

AN MVP LENS

Right by the door of the TV room, I hung a beautiful portrait of Frantzky, the boy you met in the introduction. Our friends at myLIFEspeaks knew

how much I loved this little boy and gave the painting to me as a gift after he passed away. Every time I walk into or out of that room, I see Frantzky. His hallmark smile, pushed high by his dimpled cheeks, takes center stage. A silver crown studded with colorful jewels rests above his eyebrows, hinting at a worth far greater than what society thought of him. When you see his face, you're immediately drawn in.

Seeing this picture helps remind me of what truly matters. Some days I miss the mark, but I keep trying—both in life and in that TV room—to focus on what's bigger than a game, a score, a win, or a loss.

In 2011, I wrote my first book, *Through My Eyes*. Looking back, my eyes had not been fully opened to what I needed to see. Yes, that book certainly shared a look into my life then, but over the last thirteen years I have learned valuable lessons, many at the expense of my own failures, disappointments, and insecurities about my image. While I may have chased after the title of MVP (the sports acronym for “most valuable player”) along with championships, awards, and accolades many years ago, God has since opened my eyes to pursue the more important MVP—the *most vulnerable people*. These MVPs are the children, men, and women who have been viewed as less than, insignificant, or cursed and have been thrown away, abandoned, trafficked, exploited, or orphaned.

When I was fifteen and on a mission trip, I met Sherwin, a boy in the jungles of the Philippines whose feet were turned backward. Because of his disability, this little boy was seen as what I mentioned above: a throwaway, insignificant, and cursed by the people in his community. That day I knew Sherwin wasn't a throwaway to God, and by extension he shouldn't be to me. Meeting that boy was the first time God ignited in me a passion and vision to fight for the real MVPs. I want to spend the rest of my life fighting for the most vulnerable people. It's one of my greatest honors.

A NEW TIME

In 2023, the Olympic Stadium in Germany was used to host the 2023 Special Olympics, welcoming 7,000 athletes with intellectual disabilities from more than 170 nations to compete in 26 summer sports. I not only had the opportunity to attend but I also helped host and share the stories of some of these incredible athletes. To say it was emotional would be an understatement.

One of my favorite moments was getting to walk with these men and women from all over the world during the Parade of Athletes in the Opening Ceremony. Some athletes beamed with wide grins, others held back tears, and all of them soaked up the moment when for once the world's eyes were on them celebrating their achievements. When I looked at the faces of the athletes with special needs, their families, and their coaches, I saw pure and unfiltered joy radiating throughout that stadium. I remember thinking it was a picture of worship. It wasn't a church service, but the beauty of God's creation was being glorified. Being able to attend and help host the Special Olympics in Berlin felt like truth, renewed hope, and redemption rolled into a few days.

The highlight of being in Berlin for the Games was meeting some truly remarkable athletes. Like seventy-year-old Loretta Claiborne, chief inspiration officer of the Special Olympics. This was her ninth time competing since she first joined in 1970, at just the second Special Olympics ever held. When I met her, she was competing in tennis. Loretta also has a deep passion for knitting and patiently tried to teach me a thing or two. Unfortunately, I more or less created a jumble of tangled yarn. (You're a great teacher, Loretta—sorry I wasn't the best student!)

Loretta passionately spoke about her desire to change the attitudes of people toward those with special needs. She said, "If we're given a

chance . . . we can do anything we want to give back to the community. We want to be a part of society. We want to get an education. And the only way we could do that is for society to look at us as people.” Echoing millions of men, women, and children around the world, she reminded us, “My disabilities do not define who I am.”¹

My buddy Charlie Phillips, a powerlifter from Missouri, is another inspiring athlete. He was born with incorrectly positioned organs and hypotonia, a condition causing low muscle tone. Having spent years in and out of hospitals, he was once told by doctors that he would never walk. Charlie proved them wrong.² When he was eleven, he participated in his first Special Olympics USA Games in track and field, representing the state of Pennsylvania. Charlie came home from the 2023 World Games with four medals for powerlifting. He said, “I definitely beat the odds . . . my dream has come true.”³

Another special moment was watching track and field superstar Marcelino Lages from Brazil being fitted with a special hearing aid. For the first time in his life, he could hear, and in this instance, he heard a crowd cheering for him.⁴ Wow! I can’t even begin to imagine what that must have been like for Marcelino.

I was also incredibly blessed and psyched to meet a student named Alejandra at Tebow Down, one of our ministries in Guatemala that serves children with developmental disabilities. I wasn’t as excited, though, when she gave me a thumbs-down after I showed her my gymnastic moves. Oh well, there’s a reason she’s the Olympic gymnast and I’ve been cut from football teams a bunch of times.

Innocentia Msikinya, a table tennis competitor from one of my favorite countries, South Africa (I’m biased, of course, since my wife is South African), also inspired me. She enjoyed crushing me when we played a quick one-on-one game. As a professional nail technician, Innocentia loves getting to talk to people and ask all about them

while she does their nails. She told me she's so grateful to the Special Olympics for including athletes of all abilities.

What an honor for me to get to share stories with the world and watch history unfold.

I'm inspired by the motto of the athletes in the Special Olympics Germany: "Nothing about us without us having a say,"⁵ a slight twist on a common saying in the disability community. In other words, nothing was going to happen to them without their say-so. The statement was a personal declaration of worth and a claim of ownership over their lives. God would agree. He might even put His own spin on it: "Nothing about anyone without My say about them."

Just a few miles or a short car ride away from the Olympic Stadium stands a quiet memorial that I'll never forget. It's a 24-meter-long wall of blue-tinted glass, stretching beside a bus terminal. At first glance, it might not look like much. But it tells the story of something unimaginable. This wall honors the memory of hundreds of thousands of men, women, and children with disabilities who were murdered under the Nazi regime's "T4 euthanasia program." While Adolf Hitler's atrocities against the Jewish people are widely known, fewer know who he targeted first: people with special needs. Before ordering the extermination of the Jewish population, Hitler sought to eliminate children and adults he deemed unworthy of life to begin creating what was in his mind the master race, an Aryan nation he called the "highest image of God."⁶ What a horrible perversion of the biblical phrase meant to highlight the inherent worth of every human being.

In 1936, the Olympic Games took place in Germany. And while the world cheered for incredible athletes, behind the scenes darkness was spreading. The Nazi government was already sterilizing people they didn't consider "fit" to belong to their vision of a superior race. Jewish citizens were being stripped of rights, segregated, and silenced.

And the foundations of a much greater evil were being quietly laid. When the Games were over and the rest of the world retreated to their corners, the same stadium was used multiple times for speeches and rallies to promote Nazi ideology.

What you're about to read isn't easy. It wasn't easy to write either. But don't look away. Stay with me. Because just like the gospel didn't

Just like the gospel didn't end at the cross, your story—our story—doesn't end in the dark.

end at the cross, your story—our story—doesn't end in the dark. The grave didn't get the final word, and neither does pain. We're headed somewhere . . . so let's walk through this together.

THE COST OF BEING UNFIT

In 1920, a German psychiatrist named Alfred Hoche and attorney Karl Binding wrote a book titled *Allowing the Destruction of Life Unworthy of Life*. The work is just as sick as the title suggests. The authors argued that certain individuals—particularly those with severe disabilities or chronic illnesses—have no worth or right to live. Championing eugenic ideology, a set of beliefs and practices to improve the genetic quality of a human population through selective breeding or elimination, Hoche and Binding advocated the practice of “mercy deaths.”⁷

Viewed as a launching pad for Nazi genocide policies, this eugenic work normalized dehumanizing people with disabilities, promoting the extinction of “useless eaters,” as cruelly deemed by the authors.⁸ Hoche and Binding proposed that people with intellectual disabilities, or who they identified as “mentally dead,” were no more than excess baggage to be dumped.⁹ They believed that killing people with

disabilities wasn't truly taking a life, as they saw them as lacking intelligence and emotional capacity, no more than simple animals.

Hoche and Binding downplayed concerns raised by this twisted mindset. They assured readers that mercy killings for people with disabilities were acts of "higher civil morality" that stemmed "from the deepest compassion."¹⁰ Simply put, killing this population was the kind and the right thing to do. *Allowing the Destruction of Life Unworthy of Life* was a hit, quickly releasing two editions within two years.¹¹ It's no surprise that Hitler and fellow Nazi leaders embraced the eugenic ideology and made it their own in the form of racial hygiene.¹²

It's important to note that Hoche and Binding were not members of the Nazi Party. Nor were they socialists. Experts in their disciplines, they belonged to the academic world. These authors envisioned a future starkly different from their modern era, which valued preserving all life, no matter how "worthless." In this imagined "new time,"¹³ a new morality would emerge, where an individual's worth was measured by their contribution. The deliberate elimination of people with disabilities who required "heavy sacrifices" would become not only accepted but necessary.¹⁴

Thirteen years later this new time had come.

A FUTURE DENIED

In January 1933, less than six months after Hitler came to power, he enacted the eugenic-inspired Law for the Prevention of Offspring with Hereditary Diseases. This legislation, drawn up by a committee consisting of respected medical doctors, geneticists, public health officials, and legal experts, mandated involuntary sterilization of people with the following physical and mental disabilities: hereditary feeble-mindedness, blindness

and deafness, schizophrenia, manic-depressive disorder, Huntington's, and severe physical deformity.¹⁵ At least 375,000 Germans were sterilized under this law and as many as 20,000 people died from complications relating to the procedure.¹⁶

Forced sterilization wasn't a legislative mandate confined to the borders of Germany. Starting in 1907, about 60,000 people were sterilized in the United States, most of whom were individuals living in institutions, deemed "mentally ill" or "mentally deficient."¹⁷ Reproductive experts at the time viewed sterilization as a way of lessening or eliminating the social and financial burden of caring for "degenerate stock."¹⁸ The state of Indiana passed the world's first law mandating sterilization. More states followed. By 1932, a total of thirty-two states had passed laws permitting the government to sterilize the "insane," "feebleminded," "dependent," and "diseased."¹⁹ One advocate praised these so-called surgical solutions, referring to them as "a science devoted to the improvement of the human race through better breeding."²⁰ To date, eight states have issued official apologies.²¹

This is important history. It's also largely forgotten history. But in every way, when we stop seeing people as fully human, horrible things ensue. For Hitler, exterminating the potential for life that was deemed unworthy before it could even begin wasn't enough. Eugenics played a part in another of Hitler's laws for racial hygiene. In 1935, he enacted the Marital Hygiene Law, which forbade "healthy" Germans from marrying anyone with "diseased, inferior, or dangerous genetic material."²² According to his autobiography, *Mein Kampf*, marriage should produce only able-bodied and mentally fit offspring, or what he termed "images of the Lord and not monstrosities halfway between man and ape."²³

Do you hear how evil twists the truth about God's image into something horrible?

T4: OFFICIAL EUTHANASIA BEGINS

In mid-1939, the Nazi government secretly began planning the systematic killing of children with disabilities. This program, known as “T4,” was initiated by Hitler just two years before the broader genocide of European Jews in what he called the “Final Solution.”²⁴ The term *euthanasia*, which traditionally means “good death,” was distorted by the Nazis to mask a mission of murder.²⁵ Eventually the T4 program expanded to include teenagers and adults.

On August 18, 1939, the “Requirement to Report Deformed etc. Newborns” was issued, ordering physicians, midwives, and nurses to report all infants born with specified medical conditions: Down syndrome, blindness, deafness, microcephaly, hydrocephalus, physical deformities like missing limbs and spine or skull defects, and paralysis.²⁶

The wording of this law was purposely misleading. It suggested that the objective for this reporting was to collect information and help answer scientific questions rather than its true goal of obtaining names of people who were to be murdered. The form proved insufficient, and in June 1940 another form was released requiring additional information, including the child’s religion, address, and medical histories.

Upon receipt the forms were sent to three medical experts, who were tasked with deciding the fate of these children. Assessments were made without examining the children or accessing their medical records. A plus sign (+) on a form indicated death, a minus (-) for life or postponement of death. The children with the plus sign were sent to state hospitals under the guise of “being cured,” instead of the evil truth that they were marked for death.²⁷ Parents who questioned the process faced threats of losing their custodial rights.²⁸

Some children with disabilities were poisoned; others were starved. Many doctors in these hospitals chose to let these kids die from so-called natural causes, often by withholding care to ensure a slow and painful death. It also made for a more realistic death certificate. One physician was known for giving tours of his hospital to expose the “biological deficiency” of his pediatric patients with disabilities. One individual on such a tour testified that this doctor once plucked a child out of its crib and held it up in his hand like a dead rabbit. Praising the benefits of death by starvation as “much simpler and far more natural,” the doctor held the “whimpering skeleton” and said something like, “With this one, for example, it will still take two to three days.”²⁹ At least twenty-two killing wards like this one were eventually discovered.³⁰ I’d like to tell you about a few of these children.

One child named Robert suffered from a shattered hip due to a complicated birth. The injury wasn’t noticeable until he turned four. In an interview years later, he shared how when his mom brought him to the doctors, she overheard a disturbing conversation in which one doctor said he “would do away with” Robert by giving him a needle and putting the child to sleep. Alarmed that a physician would kill her child, Robert’s mother fled the office with her son. She and Robert led a life on the run for years.³¹

Seven-year-old Erwin wasn’t so lucky. Born with Down syndrome, he died in a killing center in April 1943. His fake cause of death was listed as pneumonia. Also listed on the record were the words *Jew* and *mongolism*, a term used to describe someone with Down syndrome.³²

Max developed meningitis early in childhood and became deaf and intellectually delayed. He was killed when he was fourteen. A note in his file said he was “unlikely ever to be able to work.”³³

Starting with children, Hitler and the Nazi regime set in motion a broader plan to purge Germany of what it labeled “life unworthy of life.”³⁴ On September 21, 1939, just a month after the initial decree to kill children with disabilities, the murder of adults with disabilities was officially initiated.³⁵

Adult victims of the euthanasia program included patients in nursing homes, mental hospitals, and long-term care facilities. In 1939, mental hospitals housed more than three hundred thousand patients. In 1940, the number dropped to forty thousand.³⁶ A professor working in one of the psych wards grew concerned about the future of the medical field. “With all the mentally ill being eliminated, who will want to pursue studies in the burgeoning field of psychiatry?”³⁷

Patients who survived the kill list managed to pass a standard of mental and physical capacity set alarmingly high to prove value via function. For example, even if an adult with disabilities was physically and mentally able to perform menial or what were called “mechanical” tasks such as peeling potatoes or sweeping floors, it wasn’t enough to justify keeping them alive.³⁸

Like the children before them, these men and women with special needs were collected from various institutions, boarded on buses, and brought to the killing centers. The staff at the facilities processed them as any other new patient, mainly to assure the patients and their families that nothing was out of the ordinary. The unsuspecting patients were led to believe the sudden change was just a routine transfer. They were then examined by doctors, which unbeknown to the individual was merely a means to gather information to falsify a realistic cause of death.³⁹

Relatives and guardians of these deceased individuals were given falsified death certificates that listed natural causes like heart attack,

pneumonia, stroke, or tuberculosis.⁴⁰ The pre-murder assessment was necessary to avoid red flags—for instance, listing a patient’s death as appendicitis if they already had a scar, evidencing that their appendix had been taken out.⁴¹ After the exam, patients undressed. Naked, they were led into a gas chamber that looked like a shower room. The door was shut and the gas released.

Before entering the killing room, some of the patients with disabilities were under the impression they were preparing to bathe and so entered willingly.⁴² Others were less cooperative and had to be either sedated or forced inside. Some were tricked into the room under the false impression they would receive clothing.⁴³ At least one female patient somehow knew from the outset the horrible reality of what was to happen. While boarding the bus headed for the center, she cried out, “Is it my fault that I am born this way, and that they do this to me?”⁴⁴

Dr. Albert Widmann, a chemist who was asked to obtain the carbon monoxide for these chemical showers, was once questioned if it was used to kill people. His chilling reply: “No. Animals in the form of humans.”⁴⁵

In total, at least 275,000 children and adults with special needs were killed, including those with mental impairment and nongenetic physical disabilities (such as veterans of World War I who had lost a limb) and people who were deaf and had behavioral problems.⁴⁶ This number, however, is a conservative estimate. It excludes those who were both Jewish and disabled, individuals with disabilities killed in occupied countries, and those who were murdered after the so-called end of the program. Accounting for these people, the actual number of children, men, and women with disabilities who were sterilized, exploited, or killed may realistically be as high as one million.⁴⁷

DESECRATING THE IMAGE OF GOD

Thank you for sticking with me and reading this chapter. It is part of why it is so important that we don't look away from these painful, dark things but instead realize just how precious *every life* is. How worth fighting for. How can we do that without a careful, honest look at how quick the world can be to exploit and extinguish the lives of the vulnerable? Just by becoming aware—by looking again at what many people turn away from—you are taking the first step to change things.

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This history is not unique. I could fill an entire book with devastating stories of people who were victimized by both flawed systems and destructive ways of thinking. Hitler understood and used the term *image of God* to fit his agenda, his experiences, and his prejudices. In his mind, God's image fit a specific mold—and excluded anything that didn't.

It breaks my heart to know how many lives have never had a chance to truly experience the fullness of being made in God's image. It makes my heart race. It causes my muscles to tense up. It triggers my emotions to run wild. It's a deep pain, knowing that so much misery and suffering were caused because we didn't recognize the image of God in one another.

It's easy to think *I'd never be part of that*, but I wonder how many of us—me included—have unknowingly supported ideas or conversations that devalue other people? Every time I fail to lift up someone who is hurting, to realize someone's potential, or to stand with someone who is trying to do the right thing, I'm missing what God has

mapped of Himself in each human being. This convicts me every day to be intentional, to see God's image in others and call it out. To help us all look again at *everyone* around us.

Every time I fail to lift up someone who is hurting, to realize someone's potential, or to stand with someone who is trying to do the right thing, I'm missing what God has mapped of Himself in each human being.

People with disabilities make up the largest yet most overlooked and underserved population on earth. But Jesus' life tells a different story. More than 70 percent of His recorded miracles were for the most vulnerable population (the poor, widowed, oppressed, and people with disabilities, diseases, and illnesses). Sixty percent were for those who were "afflicted"—in today's language, those

with special needs. Jesus' acts toward the forgotten and less-than in His time reveal His heart, a heart we're called to emulate. While we've made great strides in supporting people with disabilities, there's still a long way to go.

It's easy to value people who look like us, who move in our circles, who parrot our ideologies. But when I reflect on my own sinful and broken nature, I'm reminded to look deeper—not for sameness or for what we may have in common but for the worth God has placed in each person created in His image. Society may overlook them, but they're more than enough in God's eyes. And they should be in ours too.

The mini history lesson we've walked through is dramatic, raw, and uncomfortably real. It probably stirs up some emotion—and it should! Stories like these force us to confront the darkness and admit painful realities; they should also inspire us to care enough to act. When

we witness suffering—like people being marginalized, abused, and exploited—it impacts our hearts deep within, igniting a sense that *this isn't right*. But why isn't it right? It's because we recognize something in them: a worth that demands acknowledgment. And that answer has everything to do with how we see ourselves and others and really with who we are.

Think back to the beginning of this chapter when I stood in the Olympic Stadium in 2023, a place once overshadowed by darkness and unspeakable injustice. If God were a Marvel superhero, redemption would be His defining power. To stand where crowds once cheered a leader who devalued and destroyed millions and now hear the roar of celebration for athletes with special needs was overwhelming. In that moment, I was struck with deep gratitude for a God who sees infinite value in every single life—and who writes stories of beauty in the very places that once bore so much pain.

This paints the perfect picture to illustrate the meaning of *renew*: “to flourish once more . . . to help someone flourish . . . to begin again.”⁴⁸ That stadium, like the T4 program, was created for something terrible, something designed to devalue and discard lives. But now? Now it's a place filled with joy, celebration, and honor. What man intended for evil, God has reclaimed for His glory. Let this picture remind you that darkness doesn't get the final word. The gospel didn't end at the cross. Resurrection lies at the heart of our faith. Death was defeated, and hope rose in its place.

Hope changes our lens. It redefines how we view struggle, how we see ourselves, and how we treat the people around us. As we move forward, keep your heart open. Recognize the tension between the brokenness of the world and the unshakable truth that every human life is intentionally designed by God with inherent

Resurrection
lies at the heart
of our faith.

worth and value. Yes, that includes *you!* If this is hard to believe about yourself, keep reading.

It's time to see others as they really are. It's time to recognize your worth too.

It's time to look again.