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# INTRODUCTION

Look Out!

Christians are under attack from the enemy more than ever before, and these attacks are becoming more subtle, and more difficult to detect.

I remember watching the TV news and seeing the fall of the Berlin wall. Having travelled to Germany many times, I have had the pleasure of meeting many former East German people, and talked with them extensively about their life under Communism. But when that wall fell, we all thought that this was the end of an era of oppression and fear, and the start of a new era of hope, joy and prosperity. The Cold War was over... Long live peace.

Enter terrorism. I certainly did not see the rise of Islamic militants, the horrors of 911, the Bali bombing or numerous other atrocities. The Cold War was over, and this was the age of prosperity and peace. Didn't the jihadists get the memo?

Yet in many ways this is representative of the current age. The old attacks against Christians seem to have been supplanted by a subtler, often impossible to detect series of attacks. These attacks are aimed deep inside the minds and hearts of Christians, rather than at their physical bodies. In many ways these attacks are part and parcel of the new technological age we live in.

Attack us outright and we can see you coming, we can take defensive action and neutralise the threat. We saw this threat in Communism, and armies amassed their nuclear arsenals to a fine balance, a balance of threat and fear which kept the world in an uneasy peace.

But infiltrate us slowly from within, turn average, law abiding Muslim kids into terrorists, and we cannot see it coming at all. Subtle, an attack from within our societies, turning our people against us for causes that we do not fathom. Using our own against us behind our backs, slowly and subtly wrenching control from our grasp and beginning to control even our thoughts and fears.

A perfect description of a virus. Using our own cells against us while we remain blissfully ignorant.

This is the new threat to our society, and this is the new threat to Christians the world over, especially those in the compromising, self-serving, postmodern west.

This short book is a look at what I believe is a coordinated, world wide attack against believers, and the society in which we live. Unlike in the past, the enemy is not meeting us head on in some far away battle field. He is not posturing and threatening to nuke our cities and towns. No, this time he is deceptively and surreptitiously infiltrating our society and our very minds to turn the tide of battle in his favour.

As we look at these areas of our society, I'm sure you will begin to see a pattern. A pattern of isolating believers, working subtly through the media and social media to slowly turn our hearts and minds away from the God of the Bible. The truths upon which our nations are based are being compromised at an alarming rate, and all in plain sight, covered by a media whose bias has become more extreme and more aggressive against Christians.

These mind viruses are powerful because they use our own biology against us. In all these attacks, we need to look beyond the individuals involved, most of whom are pawns in a cosmic game, to see the real enemy...

*Ephesians 6:12 (ESV)*

*For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.*

Please do not read these pages and get depressed... I have read the end of the Bible, and I know who the winner is. These forces are worth studying not because we fear them, but because forewarned is forearmed, and we are key figures in the fight, looking to our Supreme Commander Jesus Christ for guidance, direction and strategy.

We must be aware, on guard and vigilant, but we need not fear this new form of attack. Whatever mind viruses the enemy plants in our society, whatever damage these things cause, however out of control the situation seems, we must remember that Jesus Christ is still Lord, and in the end, He wins!

# THE BATTLEFIELD IS ALL IN YOUR HEAD

You are an amazing creation. You might feel average, you might feel overlooked, but you are a unique creation, formed in the image of Almighty God. You are not an accident, you are a marvel, a beautiful creation, despite being marred and blemished at times.

*Psalms 139:14 (ESV)*

*I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.*

*Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well.*

The fact that you are so wonderfully put together, far beyond anything modern science can create, is testament to God Himself! However, I suspect that we mostly fail to understand and appreciate just how marvellous we really are!

## YOUR BRAIN, YOUR MIND

The most complex physical part of who you are is your brain.

Think of your mind as a computer. Most neuroscientists consider this a very poor analogy, because your brain is far more complex than any computer we know of. Its influences are far wider ranging and subtle than any influences we experience on our computers at home or at work.

But, for the purpose of this argument, let's consider your brain to be like a computer. Now before you start commenting on your spouse's hard drive capacity, or lack thereof, think about this... Just like your PC at home, or the phone in your pocket these days, there are loads of programs running in the background.

I recently upgraded my wife's computer, and the salesman told me about a new service called Signature Edition, where for \$200 the technician will go through your computer and remove all the unnecessary programs running in the background, so it runs much faster, leaner and meaner!

Whenever you boot up your computer, phone or tablet, many programs (most of which are entirely useless) start up. These do things like look for updates to software you're not interested in, enable the quick start of programs you'll probably never use, allocate memory in ways you don't understand and change the look and feel of software, so it's pretty. They all boot up automatically, and clog up the computer's available memory, making things run slower.

In your computer, so many things are happening "under the hood", the vast majority of which you have absolutely no idea about! And it's the same with our brains, and our minds.

## UNCONSCIOUSLY CONSCIOUS ABOUT THE SUBCONSCIOUS

What you see on the screen is a fraction of what is really happening. The screen is like your conscious mind, but far more is occurring “under the hood”...

### 1. CONSCIOUS MIND

This is like the headlines of a newspaper, summarising what's going on in a big, complex world. You can see it, manipulate and change it, but it's like the tip of the iceberg.

### 2. SUBCONSCIOUS MIND

This is what's operating under the hood that you cannot readily see or control. It's what over a hundred billion neurones are chiefly doing in the background to keep your body functioning, and this allows your conscious mind to operate, unburdened by the details.

If you had to spend all day thinking about what your subconscious does, things like breathing, making your heart beat, digesting food and so on, you wouldn't get much done in your day, would you? Graciously God has given control of these important things to the subconscious mind.

*Proverbs 23:7 (KJV)*

*For as he thinks in his heart, so is he:*

In Hebrew the word think means to think, to reason to split open or to calculate, and so the ESV renders the verse, “he is like one who is inwardly calculating.” Inward calculations for millions of actions are happening all the time in our minds, on a scale that would blow our minds, but most of these we don't even consciously recognise.

But here's the cool thing... what we call learning or training occurs when many complex tasks, which start as conscious thought, then make the journey into the subconscious mind. This can become really powerful. Think about driving a car, playing an instrument or learning a foreign language. When you can do these tasks in the background, your conscious mind is free to think and explore new possibilities.

We call this process learning, and all our lives we have been doing it and using our subconscious to our advantage.

Think about how you felt the first time you tried to drive a car. Check the mirrors, foot on brake, let the clutch out, indicator on, etc. within a few weeks you could do all this subconsciously, and soon you could drive while you listen to the radio, talk to a friend's and check your cell phone (don't do it!).

## YOUR SOFTWARE IS WHERE?

These things you learn, which initially take time and effort but soon are totally committed to the subconscious, become something like what we now call software or apps. So as a worship leader, singer and musician, I'm loaded with music programs. An accountant or bookkeeper is loaded with accounting software and spreadsheets, and some of you are so much fun to be with, you are mostly loaded with games!

The problem is that, like most software, all of your processors, conscious and subconscious, are prone to viruses. Viruses are external programs introduced to your computer which in some way modify the way you use your software.

In this book we are going to explore the viruses the world and the devil might implant into our minds, how these can affect almost every area of our lives and how we can destroy them and protect our minds with God's anti-virus program.

But before we explore the viruses themselves, let's have a look at how the programs we all have running in the background (subconscious) can have a positive or negative affect in us.

These background programs are not viruses in themselves, but they can be infected by viruses.

We have spoken about how learning becomes powerful when it transfers from the conscious mind to the subconscious (in the process we call learning or training), but how can we apply this knowledge to our everyday life?

When your subconscious mind takes over tasks, tasks become automatic or ingrained. This power can be good or bad and this is the power behind what we know as good habits, and the danger behind what we call addictions.

The ability to form a habit, good or bad, is written into each of our software. But it's like the force in Star Wars, you can use it for good, or give in to the dark side!

## GOOD HABITS- USE THE FORCE, LUKE!

Recent studies suggest that it takes 1-3 months to establish or break a habit, and that sounds pretty long right? Marketer Matt Cutts suggested trying something for a month to see if you can change your lifestyle, and I believe that is a great place to start.

Whatever the term, establishing good habits is an essential element in growth. Godly habits such as having quiet times, praying or even attending church should be fairly easy to establish if we are determined to follow Christ, because when we decide to do things His way, He gives us Holy Spirit power to use for good!

Your software, if you like, forms your character, and some of it you probably don't like it very much. Character changes are hard to achieve by ourselves, because we have to rewrite the code to bring about change. Thank God that He has given us the Holy Spirit to work within us, rewriting aspects of our character software to make us more like Jesus. If we have the Holy Spirit within us, then we can rely on His strength and power, not our own.

To commit something to subconscious thought requires the repetition of actions, and this is what creates habits. That's why the Bible says,

*Philippians 4:8 (ESV)*

*Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.*

Simply willing yourself to think godly thoughts won't cut it in a world that constantly throws ungodliness at you! Making a conscious decision to only let godly thoughts into your mind is a sure-fire way to win the battle of your mind, and see positive character changes occur in your life!

If you want to see true character changes in your life, if you want to overcome character flaws like dishonesty, anger, envy, worry or greed, then the prescription is godly thinking to only allow those good things into your mind, and repeat this every moment day after day until it becomes a habit.

## TIME TO DRAW THE LINE

If you want to establish a godly habit, you must start with a conscious decision, and draw a line in the sand to take your stand!

Floating along with popular opinion, listening to news, talking to friends at school or work will never result in lasting change. Filling your mind with TV, movies, books or songs that are worldly takes all the power out of your life!

We must realise that our body, mind and soul all belong to God, and we must be obedient to Him. Our calling is to resist the enemy, not give into or be controlled by our worldly lusts and desires, apps that are already within us working subtly in the background.

*Romans 12:1-2 (ESV)*

*I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.*

How do you renew your mind? How do you establish powerful, godly, life changing habits in your life? You renew it daily, you fill your conscious mind with the things of God, and then, as you repeat this day after day, it leaches through into your subconscious and becomes a controlling part of your life!

Establishing good habits is like using the force, Luke, for good and not for evil. It takes time and effort, and it takes sacrifice to pursue, but the result is powerful and life changing. Even better, it makes you into a powerful force for Jesus, and you have the opportunity to influence those around you in all kinds of positive ways.

## ADDICTION... YOU CANNOT ESCAPE THE DARK SIDE, LUKE!

A habit is not a black frock that nuns wear, it's a behaviour that become automatic. It can be positive or negative, and here's the thing, you can choose to further drive habits in or out of your subconscious mind.

Many people around us don't rule their subconscious mind, it rules them! When they do things that are destructive to their lives, but driven by the subconscious mind, we call them addictions. Yes, it's the dark side of the force that so many cannot escape, no matter how hard they try!

Webster dictionary defines addiction as a "compulsive need for and use of a habit-forming substance," but we know addictions can go beyond heroin, meth, alcohol or smoking to include things like sex, computer gaming, gambling or hoarding. Addicts feel they have no choice but to obey the subconscious command, but ex addicts know that, with the right help and effort, you can break the pattern of addiction.

You may never lose the attraction to the substance or behaviour, but you can overcome the compulsive need to obey! The conscious mind can change and overcome the subconscious mind in the same way that a computer expert can bring up on screen and stop programs or viruses that are working in the background adversely affecting our computer's performance.

To do this you need a computer software expert, and I happen to know one... Jesus Christ.

The problem with addiction is that the subconscious mind is dictating to the conscious mind what it should be doing, and exerting control over it. The subconscious program or app might have been present originally in your software, as it is in most of us, so you cannot just delete the entire app. It is part of you, and it has turned rogue against you!

And while it might take 1-3 months to establish a godly habit, the devil knows he can turn an action into an addiction in far less time than that. Why? Because these unhealthy habits centre on pleasure, and when a person we elevates pleasure above what they know is right, they can easily and quickly fall victim to addiction!

But don't get me wrong... pleasure comes in all kinds of forms, some good and some bad. However, we must be vigilant even when it comes to good pleasures, lest they become destructive addictions in our lives. So beware, because even good pleasures like work satisfaction, surfing or shopping can become addictive and thereby destructive, if they begin

to control you rather than you controlling them. You might enjoy them now, but eventually you will find them empty, hollow and lifeless.

*Ecclesiastes 2:10-11 (ESV)*

*And whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I kept my heart from no pleasure, for my heart found pleasure in all my toil, and this was my reward for all my toil. Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had expended in doing it, and behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun.*

## CHOOSING ADDICTION

Some experts classify addiction as a physical disease. It is not... there is no conclusive science supporting that theory.

Making addiction a disease is an attempt to absolve an individual of having to take personal responsibility for their actions. Addiction is not inherited from your parents, although some argue a predisposition may be, and it is not something that is socially thrust upon you without any control by you.

The reality is that addiction is about choice. Addictions are habits created by choice, and it takes choices, the right choices, godly choices, difficult choices to deconstruct them.

Some may have more addictive personalities, and yes, there may be a predisposition towards a particular addiction, either physical or social. But just because there is a predisposition or natural inclination it does not mean that you are condemned to do the addictive action! You still have a choice, and ultimately you reap the fruit of the choices you make!

Sometimes there is a physical dependency to break, but often the psychological dependency is the harder one to break. And the basis of this psychological dependency is choice.

News Flash! You can control your urges! Your dad may have been an alcoholic, and you may be drawn to alcohol and the excessive consumption of it. But you still have a choice, right?

I'm sick of hearing the flawed argument that addicts, gay people or abusers are preprogrammed to act that way, therefore they must. They may have tendencies, but ultimately, they make a conscious choice to act on those tendencies or not.

You can control your behaviour if you choose to, despite the mantra some experts preach. Some addictions have become socially acceptable, and so the argument is that it comes naturally to them, and we must allow them to express what comes naturally, right?

This argument is commonly used in the transgender and gay marriage debate. It is just the way they are, the way fate has programmed them, it is in their genes, even though we cannot conclusively find it, so they have a divine, society sanctioned, God-given right to

express this tendency. I notice that the same argument is not used in a less socially accepted addiction. Serial killers, for example, have a preprogrammed tendency, an inner desire to kill, but we don't let them murder people and then excuse them of it because it's in their nature? In the end, all addictions are still a choice, and we must ask ourselves are we setting people free from addictions, or enabling this subconscious pattern of behaviour to control them and ruin lives?

An addiction is a bondage that starts as a choice, but then leads to excess and then dependency...

*Ephesians 5:18*

*And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit,*

That first drink, that first cigarette, that first sexual encounter... if you do it more and more it can give rise to an addiction. Addictions generally start with a choice then move into excess, and the only way to break the bad habit is another choice... a good not bad choice!

Breaking an addiction is certainly not as simple as making a single choice, but it starts with making a choice. To fully break an addiction, it takes hard work, dedication and faith to stick to the right choice. The allure, the attraction of that bad habit rarely disappears. Most often it is always there, drawing you forever. But you can make the choice, and if you look to God's power not your own, He can and will establish you. You will still probably find it hard to overcome addiction, but God can break any bad habit.

## YOU HAVE TO SERVE SOMEBODY

God created us with free will, and we humans value freedom. We insist on being free to make our own decisions, even if many of them are potentially destructive! We want to be free, but here's the crazy thing... ultimately, you have to serve somebody (It may be the devil, or it may be the Lord... thanks Bob Dylan)

Every software program runs on an operating system. Some of you are Apple, and some are Microsoft. Apple is more stable, but Windows is cheaper and far more universal. Programs and apps don't exist by themselves, they function in and are slaves to your operating system of choice.

So the choices you make in your conscious and subconscious mind depend on who you are a slave to. You cannot just be free... you need to choose whom you will serve...

*Romans 6:16 (ESV)*

*...you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?*

*Romans 6:21-22 (ESV)*

*But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life.*

If you struggle with addiction, with breaking bad and destructive habits, then stop being a slave to them, a slave to sin, and instead become a slave to righteousness, because then the power of God can break those habits off you!

Accepting Jesus Christ into your life is like changing the operating system, because it affects all the software, apps, actions, habits and character of your entire life. You can try and overcome addictions and destructive apps by yourself, and you might have some degree of success, but it will never be as effective as installing a completely new operating system... asking Jesus into your life!

Some of you have previously asked Christ into your life, but you're not walking with Him in obedience. You might have asked the Lord for a new operating system, but your good apps cannot function correctly because the RAM is being fully utilised by bad programs, habits or destructive addictions. You also need to come to Christ and ask His forgiveness and trust Him for His power to begin to break off these bad habits and addictions.

## MAKE ONE GOOD DECISION NOW

When you make one good, righteous choice and follow through with it, it leads to another and another and pretty soon you break the power of those bad habits, and you build the right habits into your subconscious!

David Gushee said, "Right attitudes, dispositions, perceptions, and motives both create the conditions for making good choices and also are the fruit of good choices. There is a kind of moral feedback loop functioning here. The way you become a good person is by making good choices. This pattern of making right choices trains your will to exercise your freedom rightly over and over again."

Today if you want to reprogram yourself, it all starts with a choice. Remember, your mind is like a computer... and you get to choose your operating system. You ultimately stand or fall not based on what your out of control subconscious tells orders you to do, but based on the decisions your conscious mind makes. So, what's it going to be? Jesus Christ or the world? Blessings or cursing? Life or death?

*Now choose life, that both you and your descendants may live. (Deuteronomy 30:19).*

It all starts with a decision. If you are struggling with any bad habit or addiction, or if you are struggling to establish the good habits you need to grow in the things of God, then stop right now and make that one, great godly decision upon which future decisions can hang!

Give it all to Jesus now. Decide right now that enough is enough, and that you are not going to put up with being dictated to by your rogue subconscious any more.

Why not take a few seconds right now and pray this prayer...?

***Lord Jesus,***

***I know that I have sinned, and turned against you. I know that I have said and done things that have hurt you, hurt myself and hurt others around me.***

***Right now, I repent of what I have thought, said and done, and I ask you to forgive me, and begin to purify my life. I ask you into my life right now, Lord, to be my Lord, my Saviour and my Dad,***

***Fill me with your precious Holy Spirit, and I ask you to help me make right and godly decisions in my life. I give you full access to my mind's operating system and ask that you have your way, and reprogram it the way you want to change it.***

***I commit myself totally to you, to be faithful and true and to serve you with my life , now and forever.***

***Amen.***

## GOING VIRAL- THE ACTIONS OF A VIRUS

We have established that your mind is somewhat like a computer, and we talked about the programs running in the background as being like your subconscious. We discovered that when your subconscious controls your conscious, it can either be good forming a good habit, or destructive causing addiction.

The way you overcome addictions and bad habits is by controlling your subconscious, but given that the subconscious is operating “under the hood”, you cannot do that directly.

When you boot up a computer, what you see on the screen is not what is actually running in the background. In order to bring about change to these background processes, the computer technician has to somehow get these “under the hood” programs onto the visible screen of your conscious mind.

You can only bring positive change to your subconscious mind via your conscious mind. That’s why I suggested that addictions and bad habits can be overcome, and good habits can be formed, by the conscious choices we make. It all starts with a decision, and it is a conscious decision.

But like many computer programs, our subconscious mind (and eventually our conscious mind) can also be affected by viruses. So, what is a virus and how does it affect us.

### VIRUSES- MEDICAL, MICROCHIP AND MIND

Computer viruses are named after medical viruses, so to understand the software version of a virus it is helpful to examine the medical virus. All of us have, at some stage, felt the effects of a virus in ailments like influenza, cold sores chicken pox.

Viruses are not bacteria, but are far more sinister and much more difficult to control and cure. So, what is the difference?

Bacteria are living microorganisms that infect and attack your body’s cells. They reproduce themselves and either engulf other cells or poison them with the toxin they produce.

Viruses, on the other hand, are just tiny parcels of DNA. They inject themselves into your actual body cells, and take over the cell machinery, thereby using your own cell material to reproduce itself? It attacks you by using your own cells against you! They use you to attack you, so the question arises, how can you protect you from yourself?

Viruses are often constantly changing form, and because they use your own cells against you, usually far harder to kill. They require a living host to spread, and many cannot be

cured at all (such as HIV and the flu), but only the symptoms can be treated, until the body's immune system fights the viruses off. You become infected by somehow touching, breathing or interacting with an infected person. Many viruses are never really overcome, but live inside you waiting for the right time to reappear. That's why if you get cold sores, you are very prone to get them again.

I contracted malaria in Africa some years ago, and these days I generally have no recurring bouts of the disease. Sometimes I think it is gone, but apparently it lives in my liver, hidden away, waiting for an opportunity. When I am stressed, rundown or extremely tired, it occasionally pops out and troubles me. I fight it until it goes back into hiding again. It is like an Islamic militant sleeper cell, waiting for the right moment. The Manchurian Candidate of my body. Thanks African mosquito!

Computer viruses are similar, often piggybacking in on emails or hidden in programs. Click on the attachment, it fires up and affects programs you are currently running. You get infected by actively interacting with an infected program. It too can subtly sleep before attacking, just like a cold sore or malarial virus.

The third type of virus, and the one on which this book is centring, is what I like to call a mind virus.

Mind viruses, like other viruses, sneak into and infect your mind. They are planted there by the world and/or the devil. They affect the apps you're running in your life, both conscious and subconscious, and like the medical and microchip variety, mind viruses use your own personality and subconscious mind against you. They're also ever changing and fast evolving, so we need to be alert enough to recognise these viruses and deal with them!

So how can you be infected by them? You become infected by interacting with and then tolerating sin in your life. In all of the viruses we deal with in this book, you will find the pattern repeated again and again, because sin is a subtle enemy. Most often huge sins are not the cause, but the little, sly, cute sins are the ones that give rise to these viruses...

*Song of Songs 2:15 (ESV)*

*Catch the foxes for us,*

*the little foxes*

*that spoil the vineyards,*

*for our vineyards are in blossom."*

Little, cute, tolerable... beware of tolerating any sin, even the seemingly small ones, because they can ruin your vineyard if given enough time to work their evil magic.

## I'M GOING VIRAL!

We have seen how computer viruses infect and begin to control your apps and programs, but where do these things actually come from?

Somebody out there, some brilliant but twisted hacker out there, designs viruses. Most are given cute names like klez, Anna Kornicova or I Love You, and they can infect any computer if we don't have antivirus in place and up to date.

One of the latest viruses I heard of is called WannaCry, and it is what is called ransomware. It locks up data on your computer and only releases it when you pay of \$300 US. Some clever hacker has developed this and is using it to get rich.

But here's the thing... That virus is actually based on a code called Eternal Blue, which was developed by the US National Security Agency or NSA. In this brave new world of CCTV and computer viruses, you never know who is watching or manipulating you.

And like computer viruses, mind viruses are designed by a malignant Spirit called the devil. They are downloaded through society and often implanted into the mind of Christians without their conscious knowledge. When fired up, they can control our minds and hold us to ransom! They infect our subconscious mind often without us knowing it, and make us do things we don't want to do or give in to temptations we don't want to give in to, and the crazy thing is, we don't even know they are doing it!

This is the reason why we must be vigilant as believers. The enemy has uploaded these viruses into society, so the closer we align ourselves to the world or society in which we live, the more easily we are infected. The only solution to the problem is to be far closer to the Lord than the world, which is hard when you live in the world we face today.

So, let's begin our look at the social mind viruses the devil implants into our subconscious minds...

## VIRUS 1: “LOVE OF THE WORLD” VIRUS

# VIRUS 1: “LOVE OF THE WORLD” VIRUS

*1 John 2:15-16 (ESV)*

*Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world.*

Does John mean we can't feel affection towards anything in the world. Is he implying that I can't love a new car or a nice home? I can't love my wife, my kids, the Broncos, the Arsenal, Lady Gaga or Paul McCartney? We need to understand exactly what John is saying here, or we'd might as well just put on a robe and head off to a monastery!

In the past, this verse has been used by Christian leaders to stop people doing all sorts of now commonplace things like going to the cinema, wearing shorts or wearing makeup. The last one has worked on me! To this day I do not wear makeup!

But to understand this virus we need to unpack 2 words... love and the world.

## WHAT IN THE WORLD!

The Greek word used for the world here is *KOSMOS*, which has 3 meanings in the Bible. It can refer to the earth, but that's not the meaning here. It also can refer to the people living on said earth, but that also isn't the meaning here (such as in John 3:16, for God so loved the world). We need to love our earth, and Scripture clearly teaches us to love people, so what's the third possible meaning?

Sometimes the word “*KOSMOS*” is used to refer to the world system, the organised, evil system with its principles and its practices, all of which are under the authority of Satan. This includes all teachings, ideas, culture, attitudes, activities, etc., that are opposed to God.

*Ephesians 6:12 (ESV)*

*For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.*

A fixation on the material over the spiritual, a promotion of self over others, pleasure over principle—these are just a few descriptors of the world system John is talking about. The word “world” here means everything that opposes Christ and his work on earth. Jesus called Satan “the ruler of this world.”

*John 14:30 (ESV)*

*I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming.*

and Paul called him “the god of this world”...

*2 Corinthians 4:4 (ESV)*

*In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.*

## LOVE AND HATE- OPPOSTIES ATTRACT

Believe it or not, love and hate often go together. On a first-grade hospital excursion one child asked why everybody kept washing their hands. The nurse replied, “Because we love health and hate germs!” So what is John trying to say in this passage?

The Word for LOVE here is in Greek *AGAPE*, which refers to the highest form of love, unconditional love. So John is hitting his readers right between the eyes saying, “When you love things of the world to the point where you invest all your time, resources and thoughts into it, you're infected by the virus!”

John wrote this because some of the readers were Christians, but they had become too cosy with the world system. They had begun to compromise with the world, in hundreds of subtle, socially acceptable ways. They were giving too much ground to the world’s way of thinking and acting.

Then over time the things in the world began to look more and more glamorous. As the hair commercial says, “It doesn't happen overnight, but it does happen”. This compromise and consequent infection was slow, subtle and like a frog in a pot of gradually boiled water. Christians had taken their eyes off the Lord, and off things eternal and all they could see was the world.

And today, perhaps more than ever, we face the same slow, subtle slide into sin. And like the first readers of John’s epistle, we never seem to recognise it soon enough!

Look at our modern, so called enlightened world! Christians compromising, pastors preaching love without holiness and suddenly the minds of believers become infected with the LOVE THE WORLD virus.

*James 4:4 (ESV)*

*You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.*

If you love the world system, the money, the prestige, the success, and if you love these things of the world more than God, this virus is affecting you and according to a James, it's as if you actually hate God!

## THE ACTION OF THE LOVE OF THE WORLD VIRUS

Loving the world is the sin of allowing your appetites, ambitions, and conduct to be fashioned according to earthly values.

So how does this virus act, what are the symptoms of it, and are you infected?

Here are 7 tell-tale signs that you're infected with the LOVE OF THE WORLD VIRUS...

### ACTION 1: WHEN ALL THOUGHTS ARE CONSUMED BY IT

When the world, or any object in it, engrosses our thoughts to such a degree that it excludes serious reflection on the things of God, you are guilty of loving the world.

Dr Carl Tanzler was a German doctor working in Florida, when he became obsessed with a young TB patient Ellen Hoyos, showering her with gifts and professing his love for her. She died of the disease in 1931, but he was so obsessed with her he exhumed her body, preserved it as best he could and kept her in his home with him for 7 years. That is destructive obsession, where his love for her transcended common sense and decency!

You may not have done something like that, but I'm sure you've felt the effects of this virus at some time. We might call it obsession, or maybe stalking, but there are times when what we want, or who we want fills our minds constantly.

In these times it is almost impossible to concentrate on God, reading His Word is dry and boring and going to church is a chore, because all we want is that one thing, to the exclusion of God!

Let me be specific... it is not wrong to desire to be a success. It's not bad to be an ardent supporter of a football club, or a fan of a singer. It's not wrong to love a car, love your house or love your spouse. These are normal, wonderful feelings that bring us joy. But there is a line!

It becomes wrong when we exclude God and become obsessed with the thing or person. These simple loves become wrong when we want them so much we compromise our values to get them.

*Colossians 3:2 (ESV)*

*Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.*

When you want it more than you want God, you're infected!

## ACTION 2: WHEN CONVERSATION IS ONLY ON IT

Our conversation gives our heart away! What do you talk about a lot? What fills your speech? When the things of the world engross most or all of our conversation, we are loving the world.

*Luke 6:45 (ESV)*

*The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.*

In other words, what you are constantly talking about gives away what your heart is really obsessed with.

If your conversation rarely includes God, what you've read in His Word, serving the Lord, church activities, etc. then ask what you are actually talking about! If you talk more about worldly things than about God, you're infected!

## ACTION 3: WHEN YOU CANNOT OR WILL NOT GIVE IT UP

If we are unwilling to part with something when we need to, or unwilling to give it or anything in it up to God's purposes, we are loving the world. When we refuse to give up something God asks us to, it is a sign that we love it more than we love God.

One of the hardest things to give up to God is money... Enter the Rich young Ruler

*Matthew 19:21-22 (ESV)*

*Jesus said to him, "If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.*

He didn't just have great possessions, they had him!

There was one point when I was obsessed with the guitar. I had an itinerant ministry singing and playing and was using it for the Lord, but God recognised my obsession and asked me to give it up. I laid my guitar down and refused to touch it for 2 years, playing the keyboard, etc, instead. Then God gently showed me that it was OK to pick it up again, and I have used it ever since. It no longer obsesses me, it no longer controls me!

What is it that has you that you won't give it up for God? If you won't give up something or someone for the Lord, you're infected!

#### ACTION 4: WHEN YOU PRIDE YOURSELF IN IT

Pride is the original sin. If we pride ourselves in earthly distinctions, positions reputations or if we feel superior, if we expect others to treat us well and resent the smallest slight or criticism from others, or if we take offence easily, we are loving the world.

God feels strongly about pride... He hates it!

*Proverbs 16:5 (ESV)*

*Everyone who is arrogant in heart is an abomination to the Lord; be assured, he will not go unpunished.*

Even in the church pride is an issue! And the answer is not false humility, which is often how prideful Christians try and negate their pride. They gave me a badge for humility, but they took it off me because I wore it!

You can be proud of a job well done, or proud of your spouse, but that's not being prideful. When you become arrogant, when you are feeling or acting superior, then you're loving the world more than the Lord, and loving yourself and your achievements instead of acknowledging that every success we have, every good thing we acquire, every compliment we receive is from God, not us!

If you're arrogant or prideful, you're infected!

#### ACTION 5: WHEN YOU HAVEN'T GOT IT BUT LONG FOR IT

You don't have to have possession of something to have obsession with it! What do you long for? Companionship? A new car? Prestige? Money? Someone else's wife?

Discontentment with our portion of the world's goods proclaims a criminal love for it. If we secretly grieve because we are not blessed with every earthly convenience or experience that others possess, we are loving the world.

If we envy others, we are not truly trusting God that He knows the best way to distribute his own gifts, as he pleases and to whom he pleases.

*James 3:14-16 (ESV)*

*But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.*

Some rich people, all they talk about is money.... And some poor people too! And many of us are obsessed with the pursuit of money.

Sometimes I've found that poor people are more obsessed with money than rich. Everything they talk about, think about and everything they do is about getting more money, or how much money they don't have! You don't have to actually have something to be obsessed by it!

What do you long for in your life? If you cannot answer more of Jesus and His Word, then it's a symptom of loving the world. If you're full of envy, you're infected!

#### ACTION 6: WHEN YOU PURSUE IT MORE THAN GOD

When we pursue the world with greater zeal and enjoy it with higher relish than we do serving God and enjoying his favour, we are loving the world.

So how much do you want something, and what are you prepared to do in order to get it?

*1 Timothy 6:10-11 (ESV)*

*For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving (longing) that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs. But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness.*

I read about a study performed one time on a University campus. Students were asked how much it would take for them to sleep with someone they didn't know. Some guys said, "Only a few bucks if she is good looking", but most held out for higher monetary values. "One hundred thousand dollars", "Wouldn't do it for less than a million."

Then the person running the study said this... "Whatever the figure, you're still a prostitute!"

Timothy encourages us to pursue righteousness, godliness, faith love, steadfastness and gentleness. Pursuing anything else, however good, however satisfying or however fun, reveals an idol in our hearts! If you're pursuing something that's not of God, you're infected!

#### ACTION 7: WHEN YOU USE ANY MEANS TO ACQUIRE IT

As believers we have a standard... we must be Holy because He is Holy.

When we seek to obtain or retain the world's objects in a wrong or ungodly manner or by questionable means, we are loving the world.

*Proverbs 11:3 (ESV)*

*The integrity of the upright guides them,  
but the crookedness of the treacherous destroys them.*

When you love Jesus, the end does not justify the means! If you are faithful to Him, if you are honest and have integrity, then you can rest assured that He is working on your behalf.

However good you may think the cause is, you cannot lie, cheat and steal and expect God's blessing! There is no such thing as a white lie... they are all shades of grey when you hold them up against God's perfect standard. You might seem to prosper now, but you will give an account! If you're prepared to compromise your Christian walk and principles in order to get somewhere, or get something, you're infected!

## THE INCOMPATIBILITY OF THIS VIRUS

*1 John 2:15 (ESV)*

*Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.*

You cannot say you love God but live like you love the world! The two are incompatible. They are like oil and water, fire and ice, myself and classy dressing!

Imagine proposing to a girl and she says, “Yes, I’ll marry you, but I love and am devoted to my ex-boyfriend far more than you and I am never going to stop loving him, and putting him first.” Would you go ahead with it? I wouldn’t!

*Matthew 6:24 (ESV)*

*“No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.” In fact, you cannot serve God and anything else!*

*1 John 2:16 (ESV)*

*For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world.*

Verse 16 defines what the world system consists of with three parallel phrases:

### 1. LUST OF THE FLESH

The word desires is actually the word “lust”, from the Greek meaning to be hot after or burn for something. In our world we think of lust in a sexual way, and certainly that is a powerful lust, but John is thinking way beyond that.

Lust of the Flesh means a burning desire for anything that satisfies your flesh, to the exclusion of what God wants you to have.

It is becoming a slave to pleasures, becoming prisoner of your own desires. You might think you're free to satisfy your lust for everything, but no matter how nicely you decorate your cell, you're still a prisoner!

Taken to the extreme, lust of the flesh makes us become “gluttonous in food, . . . slavish in pleasure, lustful and lax in morals, selfish in the use of possessions; regardless of all the spiritual values; extravagant in the gratification of selfish or material desires.” And it is closely linked with...

## 2. LUST OF THE EYES

“The lust of the eyes” describes someone who is captivated by an outward show of materialism. See a new car, must have it. See a dress, must have it. See a woman, must have her. See a position, must have it.

Cars, houses, dresses, positions, etc., are not in and of themselves sinful. But the inordinate desire to have what we see is sinful. An inordinate desire to have anything contrary to God’s will is sinful. It’s lust of the eyes. In our instantaneous society, we want it , and we want it now!

Our society, the world if you like, spends billions of dollars trying to stimulate the lust of the flesh and the eyes. If it’s not sex, it’s cars, houses or the latest gadget. We think that pleasure is our God ordained right, and we will pay any price to have happiness.

## 3. PRIDE OF LIFE

The third phrase, “pride of life,” describes the arrogant spirit of self-sufficiency. It expresses the desire for recognition, applause, status, and advantage in life. The phrase describes the pride in what life can offer you.

This is definitely part of our modern life, as evidenced by the single thing that sums up our modern world... the selfie! OK, we all take selfies now and then, maybe with a great scene behind us or with a celebrity, but some young people, notably females, are completely obsessed with themselves and the phone camera!

In an airline lounge in China I watched a young Chinese girl take her own picture more than 200 times, each time with slightly different facial expression. Nothing sums up our society like that kind of obsession with ourselves. Our pride knows no limits!

We have a self-serving attitude in everything in our society, and it’s all about me!

It’s like we are standing in the old house of mirrors, with mirrors positioned on either side of us. Everywhere you look as far as the eye can see, is images of us, ad infinitum. In those mirrors we see me, me, me, I, I, I?

So all of these things are the symptoms of a mind viral infection called the LOVE OF THE WORLD VIRUS.

How can we protect ourselves from this mind virus? Fortunately God has His own antivirus...

## GOD'S ANTIVIRUS

You have the power to choose what you become obsessed with. You can follow a team, or be a crazy fan. You can love a person, or be consumed by your love of them. The choice is yours. David wrote...

*Psalms 69:9 (ESV)*

*For zeal for your house has consumed me,*

And later Paul encourages us...

*Romans 12:11 (ESV)*

*Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord.*

God's antivirus to cure the LOVE OF THE WORLD virus is simple... love the Lord more! But how can you do that? How can you fall in love with the Lord more and more every day?

How do you love the Lord more than the world? The way to combat this virus, to protect yourself from it and to refuse its influence in your subconscious is simply this.

Fill your conscious mind with the things of God, things that place God and His values centrally into mind.

*Philippians 4:8 (ESV)*

*Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.*

The best antivirus program for your mind to combat and protect against this virus is to fill your mind with good and godly things. If you suspect that you're infected, turn off the TV, get off Facebook, stop reading 50 Shades of Grey and start reading the Bible, listening to Christian music and coming to church.

Don't just surround yourself with godly thoughts, immerse yourself in them, until your zeal for God far exceeds the pull of the world.

*Colossians 3:2 (ESV)*

*Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.*

Every one of us here feel the pull of this virus, without exception. What is it that is pulling you right now, and how is this virus infecting you? What is it that caresses you, obsesses you, or possesses you?

## VIRUS 2: THE LONELINESS VIRUS

## VIRUS 2: THE LONELINESS VIRUS

Mind viruses are those influences in our society that infect us and begin to change the way we talk, act and believe. We have seen how these viruses affect and infect your subconscious mind, leading to addictions and wrong thinking about many things.

Mind viruses can affect every aspect of how we are living, and I believe that the enemy is out to specifically target Christians and Christian leaders to gain control of how we are living.

This next virus is an enigma, because it is on the rise despite technology working against it. It is active, it is increasing and it is so subtle that many Christians are infected and do not even realise it!

### ONLY THE LONELINESS VIRUS

We are social creatures... always have been, always will be.

So here is the irony... we live in the most connected generation in history, yet we are lonelier and more depressed than ever before! Why? Because the enemy has created a virus that infects many of us, and society is the way he subtly infects us with this virus...

The Loneliness Virus.

I met a 40-year-old lady this week who told me that, after her 10 year and 2 child de facto relationship had collapsed. She was alone and miserable, so she is putting herself out there on dating websites, fighting off sleazy guys who only want sexual relationships, not an actual relationship. She is lonely, and she is one of millions infected by the loneliness virus.

Look at our Songs, movies, TV shows, books... life imitates art in that loneliness is all around.

### WELCOME TO HEARTBREAK HOTEL

*Since my baby left me, I found a new place to dwell  
It's down at the end of lonely street, called Heartbreak Hotel  
You'll be so lonely you could die.*

Loneliness is a virus that has always been there. Technology should have solved the problem, but instead it has created even more loneliness than ever before.

You hold in your hand a universal communication device. You can talk to or write texts to anybody, anywhere, any time. So clearly loneliness is not simply a function of not having the ability to communicate.

I mean, we have email taking seconds instead of snail mail taking weeks or months. We have cell phones to call each other, instead of trying to find a phone booth like Superman.

You can have 600 Facebook friends, and be the loneliest person in the world. All this technology, all this communication and still we struggle with a feeling of being separate.

The fact is, from birth we as human beings crave attachment and connection. Without attachment or relationship, infants will fail to thrive. Without a feeling of connectedness, adults may yield to depression. Because God created people in His image, He made them relational.

Right back at creation God said,

*Genesis 2:18 (ESV)*

*Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him."*

When God saw Adam alone in the Garden of Eden, He described it as "not good" (Gen. 2:18). Despite God's own presence and relationship with Adam, God knew people also need human relationships. And nothing has changed, we still need both.

Human beings like you and I need both vertical intimacy (with God) and horizontal intimacy (with people) in order to feel fulfilled. Without these relationships, we are vulnerable to the complex set of emotions described as "loneliness."

So, loneliness is not just being alone. I like being alone, as do many of you, some more than others. In fact, there is much to be said for being alone, to spend time with God, to ponder the meaning of life, to relax and chill, sleep, maybe think a bit, maybe cry a little.

Being alone on your terms, by your choice, is not loneliness. That's solitude, and I like it, even crave it at times. Loneliness is when being alone is forced upon you, and it quickly leads to depression and its associated problems. So where did this loneliness come from?

When sin entered the Garden, genuine intimacy disappeared. Adam and Eve blamed each other, lied, blamed God and tried to excuse themselves. From that moment, genuine intimacy with God and even with other human beings was lost. Loneliness in people has its beginnings in sin, like all other evils we see in the world.

## WHY IS THERE AN EPIDEMIC? OR IS IT A TECHIDEMIC?

Any casual observer would agree that today, more than ever, the loneliness virus is rampant. Why is that, especially given we are technologically more connected than ever?

I think that's it... technology and lifestyle. While the technology connects us to people on the other side of the world, people we don't know and will never meet, we fail to connect socially with people right next to us in a coffee shop!

Truth is, more than ever before, we hide behind technology and the anonymity it offers. Couple this with a modern lifestyle that has cut the heart out of families, marriage and relationships, and you have a recipe for loneliness. Our society cannot even define what sex a person is and what a marriage is, so this further destabilises people's lives.

We are even told by society today that love and acceptance are the same thing. If we disagree with someone's opinion, apparently now we cannot love or be accepting of them, further isolating them and us! One young lady I know told me she is turning into a boy, and that if I love her I would agree with her decision.

I explained that I can still love her unconditionally, even if I do not agree with her. I said I did not agree with her decision to transgender, but nothing will stop my love for her. She was confused, because she has fallen for the lie that loving someone equals agreeing with them!

No wonder the modern world is so miserable... we've put a modern twist on an age-old problem!

In Christ, people can rediscover the pathway to genuine intimate connection, and they can catch glimpses of true and restored relationship with God and other Christians. Even as Christians we fail to appreciate this spiritual connection, and probably will not fully understand it until we get to heaven.

Therefore, loneliness continues to be the constant companion of the human race, regardless of technology, or of how rich, powerful or successful you are. Sometimes even regardless of whether you know and love Christ or not.

Many famous, much loved and adored people, from Napoleon to Elvis, and Marilyn Monroe to Janice Joplin, have publicly declared their struggles with loneliness. The wealthy, the powerful, the popular are not immune, and are so often lonely because with all the fame, fortune and trappings, they are infected with the same mind virus.

And remember, a virus gets into your body and uses your own cell's DNA against you. In the same way, this virus gets into your subconscious and uses your own thoughts, your own fears, your own sense of rejection, against you!

We know the Loneliness virus is out there, and is infecting millions of people, but how can we know if we are infected?

## SYMPTOMS OF THE LONELINESS VIRUS

*Psalm 142:1-7 (ESV)*

*With my voice I cry out to the Lord; with my voice I plead for mercy to the Lord.*

*I pour out my complaint before him; I tell my trouble before him.*

*When my spirit faints within me, you know my way!*

*In the path where I walk they have hidden a trap for me.*

*Look to the right and see: there is none who takes notice of me;*

*no refuge remains to me; no one cares for my soul.*

*I cry to you, O Lord; I say, "You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living."*

*Attend to my cry, for I am brought very low!*

*Deliver me from my persecutors, for they are too strong for me!*

*Bring me out of prison, that I may give thanks to your name!*

*The righteous will surround me, for you will deal bountifully with me.*

This Psalm is a beautiful illustration of the cycle of sadness, loneliness and discouragement we all face at some time, or if you're like me, you face pretty regularly.

David wrote this Psalm when he was on the run from King Saul, in the cave of Adullam...

*1 Samuel 22:2 (ESV)*

*And everyone who was in distress, and everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was bitter in soul, gathered to him. And he became commander over them. And there were with him about four hundred men.*

Birds of a feather, right? He wrote these words because he was surrounded by 400 people of like mind, oppressed, depressed, distressed and miserable. Even in that crowd, David was alone.

He was the leader, he was the one they looked to, so he couldn't let them see how he actually felt inside. Like many of you, he painted on a happy face and came to church. He smiled and said, "She'll be right, mate," but inside he was desperately lonely. You can put flowers on a grave to make it look nice, but inside there's still death and destruction.

So let's look at the symptoms of the virus that David expresses in this Psalm...

### SYMPTOM 1: FEELING OVERWHELMED

Verse 3, "*my spirit faints within me*". The Hebrew for this word faints means overwhelmed, swooning, made feeble, fainting or muffled. Circumstances are such that they overwhelm him and actually muffle his spirit. I experience this at times, and sometimes I'm overwhelmed to the point of numbness.

Some of you reading this will feel like that right now. Whatever is troubling you, whatever you struggle with within, you reach the point of overwhelm, like you're about to faint, and the joy of the Lord is not your strength, it's a distant memory, muffled and suppressed.

#### SYMPTOM 2: FEELING DESERTED

*Psalms 142:4 (ESV)*

*Look to the right and see: there is none who takes notice of me;  
no refuge remains to me; no one cares for my soul.*

Notice the lonely words David uses... total rejection, abandonment, isolation. No one cares he laments, because he's hunted by Saul, abandoned by friends, surrounded by the world.

Perhaps you feel like that right now. You ask, "Does anyone even notice me? Does anyone care? Does anyone even notice how I feel? I'm so alone."

#### SYMPTOM 3: FEELING DEPRESSED

*Psalms 142:6 (ESV)*

*Attend to my cry, for I am brought very low!*

The phrase "Brought low" in Hebrew literally means to be in a valley experience, emotionally so low, a "walking through the valley of the shadow of death" experience. That's the lowest ebb of human existence, the bottom of the pit, where all hope is gone.

To put it in 21<sup>st</sup> century terms, he is depressed, so low he needs Zo-loft! We would rather medicate than meditate on God's Word and promises!

#### SYMPTOM 4: FEELING HOPELESS

Verse 6 continues... *Deliver me from my persecutors, for they are too strong for me!*

At this point he is feels so alone that he is without hope. Those against him are too strong, those with him too down, he feels lonely, depressed and at his lowest point. The walls are closing in, and in the next verse he cries,

*Psalms 142:7 (ESV)*

*Bring me out of prison, that I may give thanks to your name!*

Some of you reading these words feel like you are in prison. You try and cheer up. You dress the prison up with nice curtains and furniture, but in the end, it is still a prison!

Today is the day you begin to dismantle your prison, because today Jesus says...

*Luke 4:18 (ESV)*

*“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.*

*He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed,*

Is the loneliness virus oppressing you today? If so, there is an anti-virus that can provide the cure you have been looking for.

## WHAT IS THE CURE FOR THE COMMON LONELINESS VIRUS?

The cure for this potentially devastating and debilitating virus is multi step, but if you apply this anti-virus you can and will overcome the virus of loneliness in your life. The answer is not to join a social network, or dating site, because with all the tech, we still need real people and real relationships, right here where we stand, right now! Let’s get back to that Psalm...

### STEP 1: RECOGNISE YOUR EMOTIONS

*Psalms 142:3 (ESV)*

*When my spirit faints within me, you know my way!*

*In the path where I walk they have hidden a trap for me.*

David recognises and even visualises the rough, difficult, dark path, the valley of the shadow of death. Later he visualises a prison, and what he is doing here is recognising his emotions. When you visualise, it bypasses the intellect and goes to the heart. That’s why songs and movies are so powerful and tug at your emotions.

So, if you feel lonely and broken-hearted, don’t suppress it, recognise it as a valid and very real emotion.

We often fake it, don’t we? We come to God with pious platitudes not honest openness. Listen, God is not interested in religious prayers, He responds to broken and contrite hearts. We have the greatest friend, the One who created and redeemed us, who longs to meet our every need, spiritual, emotional and physical, and we can’t even open up and be honest with Him. We cannot fool Him you know!

*Proverbs 18:24 (ESV)*

*A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.*

Step 1 is recognising your emotions and how you feel, and this must lead to step 2, being honest and telling God how you actually feel, even if it’s ugly. He’s big, He can take it!

## STEP 2: VERBALISE YOUR EMOTIONS

*Psalms 142:1-2 (ESV)*

*With my voice I cry out to the Lord; with my voice I plead for mercy to the Lord.  
I pour out my complaint before him; I tell my trouble before him.*

David does the same in verse 5, and 7. He verbalised how he felt, he didn't dress it up and pretend, he didn't toughen up and soldier on, he offered cries and complaints not a stiff upper lip! And he is not the only one...

*Habakkuk 1:2 (ESV)*

*O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not hear?  
Or cry to you "Violence!" and you will not save?*

Habakkuk didn't hold back and sound all godly, he let God know how he felt.

It's ok to tell God that you are lonely, that you are down and miserable, because He can take it and He won't take offence. But bear in mind that your anger, frustration and lashing out at God isn't what impresses Him... your faith does!

So, hey, go on, open up and tell God how you really feel. Does it make you feel any better? Whether it does or not, you've been honest enough to tell God how you feel. Now you are done with that, we can move on to the next step...

## STEP 3: RECOGNISE HIS PRESENCE

*Psalms 142:5 (ESV)*

*I cry to you, O Lord; I say, "You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living."*

This is the turning point... the moment when, having recognised our feelings and emotions, having verbalised them, having ranted and raved and got it out of our system, we then need to take our eyes off how we feel and place them firmly on Christ, our provider and our sustainer.

We need to hide in the shadow of His wings, we need to turn our eyes upon Him, we need Him to wrap His big strong arms around us and tell us that He loves us. And He does, you know...

*Psalms 34:18 (ESV)*

*The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.*

When you are overwhelmed by loneliness, stop and recognise that He is with you. He cares, He loves you, He wants the best for you and He will walk the road with you, as in Psalm 23.

I remember when my girls hit puberty. Suddenly, instead of logical processing of problems we got the waterworks. I remember as a father reaching the point where it was all too much

emotion for me, so I would walk away and say, talk to your mum! But God never does that. He is always there, He is always ready to listen, to save and to care for you. He never leaves you. He always walks with you, through the good times and the bad.

#### STEP 4: RECOGNISE HIS PAST PROVISION

Look back at your life. How many times has God sustained you, provided for you, blessed you?

*Psalms 77:11-12 (ESV)*

*I will remember the deeds of the Lord; yes, I will remember your wonders of old.  
I will ponder all your work, and meditate on your mighty deeds.*

We rarely stop to remember how we have been blessed, do we? When we recognise His provision in our lives in the past, our faith is strengthened, and we recognise with Paul that...

*Philippians 4:19 (ESV)*

*my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.*

This includes emotional needs. This includes His promises. If you look back, remember the times He has been there and loved you through some tough times, and this will fill you with hope for the future.

#### STEP 5: RECOGNISE HIS PROMISES

If you are lonely, God makes you a promise...

*Psalms 68:5-6 (NIV)*

*A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling.  
God sets the lonely in families, he leads out the prisoners with singing;  
but the rebellious live in a sun-scorched land.*

We live in a sun-scorched land, full of loneliness and pain. But God promises to set the lonely in families, and your church should be a family, here for you when you need them.

However, a church cannot meet all your needs, but God can. What we must do is take our eyes off our circumstances and feelings, and place them firmly on God and His promises! Search the Scriptures for the promises of God, and cling to them, because they will never fail! If you can find a Gideon's Bible, they will often have a section in them on where to look when you are feeling down, so research and thank God for His great promises and His faithfulness!

#### STEP 6: REACH OUT AND SERVE OTHERS

I know this might seem crazy, but when you are lonely one of the best things you can do is to serve others. Why? Because it takes your eyes off yourself as you serve others.

And the church is a great place to do that.

*Hebrews 10:24-25 (ESV)*

*And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.*

If you're lonely today, please don't pull away from church and other believers. The action of the loneliness virus often causes people to isolate or pull away from church, friends and those who love them.

Let other believers stand with you, let them open their arms to you. So many isolate themselves when they are feeling down, and that just drives the virus further into your subconscious.

Don't run, find a church and open up to those who will love you. I know you're fearful, but the church is family, they will love you. Sure, every family has an annoying sister or a weird uncle, but as unworthy and inadequate your church might be, many want to share the journey with you.

If you open up, if you have a heart to serve others, your loneliness will begin to dry up!

#### STEP 8: REACH OUT TO HIM

But we must also recognise that no person, no pastor and no church can ever be all that we need. No person can ever fully take our loneliness, so pressuring people around us to fulfil our needs is foolishness. They cannot possibly do it.

Only one person can be all that you need, and only one can take away the loneliness you feel. Yes, surround yourself with good people who love you, and church needs to be part of that, but ultimately there is only One who can fully cure the virus of loneliness ...

*James 4:7-8 (ESV)*

*Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.*

Drawing near to God is the ultimate cure for loneliness. Can you trust Him to build the right human relationships into your life?

*John 14:16-18 (ESV)*

*And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.*

*"I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you."*

Lonely people either draw away from God or towards Him. It's a simple choice. So, what will it be today for you? Towards God, or away. Choose life today, choose to draw near to Him!

## THE MISSING LINK

So, what's the missing link in the battle against loneliness? How can you draw near to God and connect with Him? We have a great tool that enables us to do this, and it is probably right under your nose!

Here's a hint... it is His love letter to you. That's right, reading the Bible every day is the great key to conquering loneliness. All those promises, all that wisdom. This is God's anti-virus for the loneliness virus... Read His Word, and connect with His people.

Let me finish with the words of Paul. Let us take these in and believe them today, and let us live them...

*Romans 8:35-39 (ESV)*

*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written,*

*"For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered."*

*No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.*

*For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

## VIRUS 3: THE STRESS VIRUS

## VIRUS 3: THE STRESS VIRUS

Another virus which is infecting millions today, including Christians of all walks of life, is the Stress Virus. Like the other viruses, our society produces it then implants into our subconscious, so that our actions, thoughts and feelings are controlled by the virus.

The Stress Virus is also incredibly subtle, but profoundly powerful in controlling our thoughts and feelings, and its effects vary from slightly influencing you to utterly controlling and ruining your life.

With this virus I am challenging myself, because of all the viruses we will look at, none of them affect me more than this one! Just this week I have suffered terribly at the hands of this virus, and felt it changing my thought patterns and it's almost like I am powerless to stop it! All of a sudden, I am unable to sleep, irritable and at the doctors with record blood pressure!

Today we look at the Stress Virus, and if you let this one control your life, it can and will kill you!

### THE STRESS PARADOX

Stress has always been a part of life, so this virus is nothing new. Our ancestors stressed about crops, money, ledgers and timetables, just like we do, but what has changed is the amount of stress... how much this virus has ramped up.

Modern man is infected by this virus and it is out of control across the globe. And here is the great paradox... those in the world who have more things, more comforts and more blessings, seem to have more stress also!

The stress virus is implanted into us by the enemy through our society, and can be characterised by the following..

S= Shocking moments in our life

T=Traumatic events that occur in our life

R=Repetitious pressure from something in our life

E=Errors that we make in our life

S=Strain from striving to succeed in life

S=Sales related pressure to gain money in our life

Gone are days of endlessly wandering by babbling brooks, planting crops, hours of fishing, thinking deep thoughts and being at peace.

Instead, enter the fast paced, urban world of mortgages, rent, job pressures, family conflict, schedules, appointments and ATMs. Add to that the kids going every which way, a few screaming matches, too little sleep, too much TV, fear of cancer, materialism, alcoholism, drugs and paranoia, then subtract family support and close friendships, divide by dozens of opinions on Facebook, multiply it by 365 days a year and you have madness, and the resultant stress!

In our society, stress isn't the exception, it's the rule, and it's the virus that infects us all!

*Luke 21:34 (ESV)*

*"But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap."*

How many of you here today are weighed down by the cares of life? This is the stress involved in living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

According to a Rev magazine article in 2003, the top 4 stressors are...

Money stresses. 49%  
Family responsibilities 22%  
Work deadlines and pressures 22%  
Commuting to and from work or school 7%

I'm getting stressed just thinking about the stress right now! In the middle of this insane, fast paced world, how can we possibly slow down and reduce the stress. God says this...

*Psalms 46:10 (ESV)*

*"Be still, and know that I am God.  
I will be exalted among the nations,  
I will be exalted in the earth!"*

## GETTING CAUGHT BY CORTISOL

Doctors tell us that, when we undergo stress, our adrenal cortex produces a powerful hormone called cortisol, which hypes us up and slows many bodily functions deemed unnecessary in the "fight or flight" mode. It should be a short term affect to help us cope with a fright.

The problem we face is that elevated levels of this hormone, which God designed to be short acting, occur when chronic stress happens, and so chronically elevated cortisol gives rise to elevated blood pressure, obesity, tiredness, heart attacks, diabetes, cancer and a

whole host of horrible conditions. It decreases memory, decreases concentration and decreases lifespan, because it was never designed to be perpetually active!

But the stress virus uses this to control our lives, subtly and in a way that we not only accept it without question, but we expect it as part of our lives! It becomes the accepted pattern of 21<sup>st</sup> century living.

*Romans 12:2 (ESV)*

*Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.*

Even in the church, we pile stress upon stress, and often emphasise programs over people. In my church I am trying to not do that, but if you know me at all, you would know that I am not only a pastor, I am also a practicing behavioural optometrist, a family man, a traveling evangelist and an avid internet marketer.

I confess, I am guiltier than most of piling too many stresses upon my life! When I preached this message at my church, no fewer than 5 people approached me and said, "Pastor, you need to slow down."

## STRESSED OUT- THE SYMPTOMS OF THE STRESS VIRUS

How can you tell if the stress virus is affecting you? You probably don't even need me to ask that!

We should first recognise that stress in and of itself is not a bad thing. It actually brings the best out in us, it causes us to reach higher, achieve more, become more. Study is stressful, but it makes you a better person. So not all stress is bad, but if all is stressed, it is bad.

So stress is not always a bad thing, but it should be a short term thing, little short bursts. It becomes destructive when it is never-ending and it starts to cause things like increased illness, overeating or drinking, abnormal sleep patterns, loss of interest in normal activities, fogginess in thinking, disorganisation, increased impatience or irritability, relationship conflicts or reduced performance.

The problem is not that we cannot feel stress, because we feel stressed much of the time. It's that we consciously accept this as normal, and do nothing to relieve the pressure!

Sustained stress is not, repeat NOT normal. It is destructive, and when you're an adrenalin junky like me, that's hard medicine to hear. I have discovered, taking in the church as well as working, etc., that I can deal with the level of stress I cope with for a time, but that I run down and eventually collapse. Stress kills, slowly but surely, if not handled right.

More than most Biblical writers, Paul felt stress. Like us, he felt it long term, and carried the burden of churches across Asia, and the threat against his own life. But he wrote this...

*2 Corinthians 4:16-18 (ESV)*

*So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.*

So in the stress of life, we need to not lose heart and handle it correctly! Failure to do so will cause us long term pain and even death.

Robert Murray McCheyne was a great Scottish pastor and preacher in the nineteenth century, who served his people selflessly until his health collapsed under the stress. Before dying at the age of 29, he said, "God gave me a message to deliver and a horse to ride. Alas, I have killed the horse and now cannot deliver the message."

## GOD'S ANTI-VIRUS FOR STRESS (I CAN'T STRESS THIS ENOUGH!)

What is God's treatment for this chronic infection of the stress virus that we all feel?

Removing all stress is an impossibility in our time driven, results driven culture, and removing yourself from society and becoming a monk is not really an option. We are called to be in the world, and not of it. So how can we possibly be surrounded by such incredible and often overwhelming stress and remain unaffected?

### STEP 1: CONSIDER GOD'S PERSPECTIVE

I remember being at a football match at ground level, and it looked like a bunch of guys crawling around the ground trying to find a contact lens. I had no clue as to what they were doing. When I walked up into the stand, I suddenly saw the true perspective of how they were kicking and passing and what they were trying to achieve. When we are at ground level, wrapped up in day to day stresses, we fail to see things from God's perspective, which would make a lot more sense!

One of the best antidotes to stress is seeing God's purposes in the difficulties and stresses He allows in our lives. What our Good God wants to do is to conform us to the image of Christ. He may use certain situations to develop the fruits of the Spirit in us. Knowing that God uses every situation, even the petty, irritating situations of life, even the stressful ones, to teach us to become more like Jesus helps us to feel less stressed by things we cannot control.

As 2 Corinthians says, concentrate on the eternal, not the temporal.

*2 Corinthians 4:18 (ESV)*

*as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.*

When we face stress, all we see is the stress. We usually cannot see the reasons why, and we certainly don't see the big picture. God on the other hand sees and understands everything. He's the Creator of the universe, the sustainer of life, the Creator of you, and He loves you and wants the best for you.

Question... From God's perspective, can He possibly use the stress you're under for good?

*Romans 8:28*

*And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.*

So here's how God can and will use stress in our lives in a positive way...

#### A. STRESS GETS OUR ATTENTION

CS Lewis said "Pain is God's megaphone," and I can attest that this is often the case. Pain is protection, such as when you put your hand into a fire, and so stress and the pain it causes can be the way God tells you to slow down or how He moves you away from something dangerous.

*Psalms 147:3 (ESV)*

*He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.*

#### B. STRESS REFOCUSSES OUR PRIORITIES

Everyone has priorities, but they are not always God's priorities. Even when we realign with His priorities, it doesn't take long before we lose those priorities, before things that are urgent supersede things that are actually important.

*Haggai 1:7 (ESV)*

*Thus says the Lord of hosts: Consider your ways.*

Stress can help us stop living our life and consider our ways. Stress can help us refocus on what is really important, eternally important not just the tyranny of the urgent!

#### C. STRESS CAN TURN US BACK TO GOD

Call it human nature, but when things are going along well and we are stress free, we often drift away from God, but when stress builds and we get desperate enough, we turn to Him!

*2 Chronicles 15:4 (ESV)*

*but when in their distress they turned to the Lord, the God of Israel, and sought him, he was found by them.*

Stress can be used by God to turn us back to Him, but sadly many turn away in their stress, drowning in anxiousness and even panic. Today you face a choice, and I'm going to ask you to turn towards, not away, from the Lord, believing He loves you and cares for you!

#### D. STRESS DISCIPLINES US

*Hebrews 12:5-6 (ESV)*

*My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.*

No one likes discipline, but often the Lord will use stress to discipline us. If stress is piling up around you, stop and ask God what you need to learn from all this. Learn the lesson and you may find that stress decreases or becomes more manageable.

Get this wrong, and you get to sit the whole exam again, so I recommend getting it right!

#### E. STRESS CREATES STRENGTH AND STAMINA

I bought a workout DVD and it doesn't work! I watched it 10 times and I don't feel a bit fitter! If you want to train your body and build strength and stamina, you need to place it under some sort of stress. That's how we train our bodies, and that's also how God trains our spirits.

*1 Timothy 4:7-8 (ESV)*

*Rather train yourself for godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.*

So if you want to become great for God, expect stress and see it through. Remember, quitters never win, and winners never quit.

So that's the first point in God's treatment for chronic stress, and He does use it for your good if you trust Him and obey Him and let Him mould you into His image. Seeing things God's way gives meaning to your stress, but there are more steps to coping with 21<sup>st</sup> century stress...

## STEP 2: GIVE IT UP TO JESUS

When it comes to the stresses that come against you, you need to learn to let go and let God! We tend to pile these upon ourselves, try and deal with them, get anxious and stressed about them, then start to collapse. If you're like me, you want to solve all the problems of the world, even when you can't.

Bill Newman talks about a time in a US town when mums were together, and the kids were silent. They investigated, and found the kids playing with a nest of baby skunks. One mum shouted, "Quick children, run!" So they each picked up a skunk and ran, and skunks don't like to be squeezed.

Listen, don't grab hold of your stress and squeeze, give it up and let go...

*Philippians 4:6-7 (ESV)*

*do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

Give that stressful situation to the Lord and stand back. But after you have given it up, remember you cannot then pick it up and take it with you!

## STEP 3: TAKE BREAKS

If you undergo a sustained amount of stress, taking regular breaks is a key.

My wife is enforcing breaks upon me, because we have bought a small caravan, and every few months we hitch it up and head off into the Australian bush somewhere. We all need breaks, and yes, that includes you!

I have noted with interest that I struggle to sit and do nothing. We set up the caravan, and my next question is, "What do we do now?" We sit, and read, and talk, and after a few minutes I ask, "So what do we do now?" It takes a good few days for me to truly unwind and actually sit and do nothing. When I get there, it does the soul good!

After sending the 72 out to minister, Jesus recommended this...

*Mark 6:31 (ESV)*

*And he said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat.*

I know things seem urgent, but trust me, the pressure, the stresses, the demands people make will all be there when you get back! When I take breaks, I discover that the Kingdom of God seems to continue just fine without Pastor Darin!

Jesus rested and relieved the stress. When I rest I often feel guilty because I think of the things I should be doing. That's stinking thinking, and that's a product of the stress virus. We need to come apart and take some time out to rest, or we will fall apart!

#### STEP 4: SURROUND YOURSELF WITH GOOD FRIENDS

You go like the company you keep...

*1 Corinthians 15:33 (ESV)*

*Do not be deceived: "Bad company ruins good morals."*

If you are stressed, don't surround yourself with negative people. Choose the people you talk to wisely, and gather positive, uplifting and godly people around you. Limit your exposure to people who irritate or drain you (even if they appear to need help).

I have done this in my life, and I can tell you having some of my friends praying with me instead of feeding my negativity makes all the difference in times of great stress.

#### STEP 5: GUARD YOUR HEART

*Proverbs 4:23 (ESV)*

*Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.*

The Hebrew word for keeping your heart with vigilance means to guard, to watch over and to blockade. When we face stress, we must guard our hearts vigilantly. Why?

Stress has a way of orienting us toward all the things that are wrong in our lives. We need to guard our hearts and minds against negativity and pessimism.

There are times when we will not understand God or His ways, for His ways are higher than ours, (Isaiah 55:8), but He gives us enough information about His character so that even when we do not understand the problems we face or the stress we are under, we can rest in His faithfulness and His holy goodness.

In the midst of our stress and pain, He delights in us when we trust Him, especially when we do not understand. We guard our heart during stressful times by checking our thinking and taking every thought captive...

*2 Corinthians 10:5 (ESV)*

*We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ,*

So guard your heart in times of stress by taking every negative thought captive and not tolerating even a single one! Zero tolerance to negative thoughts,

## STEP 6: CULTIVATE A THANKFUL HEART

The greatest sin of the western world is an ungrateful spirit. We live in a society that is basically ungrateful for the many blessings we share. Australians whine and moan about everything, and yet we are given money to not work, free medical, subsidised housing, the right to free speech, glorious weather and the list goes on. We need to learn to have a gratitude attitude, even when under stress.

*James 1:2-4 (ESV)*

*Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.*

If you are under stress, even extreme stress, be thankful, if not for the pain, for the many small mercies you have in your life. Have you got a car? A phone? A roof over your head? Food? Have you got relationships that matter, a church that loves and supports you? Let's be thankful in all things, not stressing about what we haven't got!

## STEP 7: PRIORITISE

Sometimes we get stressed out and the stress virus digs into our subconscious because we are majoring on minor things. At the end of our life, many of us will realise that we have spent most of our time on what matters least, and the least time on those things that really matter most.

We worry and stress about so many things, what we should do, eat, where we should go. Jesus tells us directly not to worry and stress about such things, but prioritise the things of God...

*Matthew 6:33 (ESV)*

*But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.*

Decide today what is really important in your life, choose your priorities, and live for them. Life is full of choices. When we become more intentional about the way we spend our time and energy, we learn to say no to things that are just not that important.

And in eternity only 3 things live forever... God, His Word and the souls of men and women. Invest in those things, and make them the priority. So weigh every action in the light of eternity, and choose to pursue only those things that will last in eternity. Invest your time in the Lord, in His Word, and in the lives of men and women and children around you.

And if you seek Him first, watch as the other things in life come to you without all the stress involved in bringing them in!

## STEP 8: RECOGNISE AND REMEMBER OUR LIMITS

*Psalms 139:2-4 (ESV)*

*You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar.  
You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways.  
Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O Lord, you know it altogether.*

Often our lives become filled with stress because we refuse to accept our human limits. We are not God. We are not all-knowing or able to assume total control of every stressful situation we face. We are human beings. We need to sleep, eat, and relax. Yet, at times we live our lives in a way that ignores these realities, which can result in a host of stress-related ailments.

When we are feeling overwhelmed, perhaps that is a reminder that we are not living within the limits and boundaries that God has created for us. It may be time to re-evaluate, cut back, say no, or slow down. I preach to myself here, and have recently given up a consulting job and my business group to be able to pastor my church properly without killing myself!

Did I take a financial hit to do this? Yes, of course! Next question is, can I trust God to meet that shortfall? The answer is the same... of course! Choose carefully what you feel God wants you to give up, and trust Him with your life and livelihood.

## STEP 9: COME EACH DAY TO THE LORD

This next and final step is the most important, and is in fact the main reason why I have withstood much of the stress that has been thrown at me by this virus.

Remember, stress can affect the body, mind, and spirit. We must pay attention to each area to reduce the effects of stress on our overall well-being. If we do not learn to control stress, it will eventually control us.

To protect our bodies, we need to get adequate rest, exercise regularly, eat well, and learn to breathe deeply. To protect our minds, we should think truthfully, refuse to make mountains out of molehills, and set priorities. Finally, to protect our spirits, we need to meditate on God and His Word, learn to trust God, and pray without ceasing. We need to... meet with the Lord every single day!

If you are overwhelmed with stress, you are carrying a burden you shouldn't be!

*Matthew 11:28-30 (ESV)*

*Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*

Some of you here are carrying stresses and burdens you shouldn't be. You're like an ox dragging a load that's too heavy, with an ill-fitting yoke that rubs and pulls and causes pain and discomfort.

Many people long for rest, long for relief from the constant stress this virus inflicts upon them. Today, Jesus' words call out to you, saying, "Give me your impossible burdens. I will carry them." Jesus says that He will take from our shoulders the heavy burdens that are burning us out, the stress

we face in life that this virus tells us “we just have to handle”, and replace them with an easy yoke, a light burden.

Submission to Christ does not place us in bondage to a harsh taskmaster but under the loving care of a gentle and lowly Saviour.

Jesus is in touch with the stress and burdens of life that we carry and understands how much they hurt and exhaust us. When we give our troubled hearts to Him, He gives us rest for our souls. That kind of rest will cure our stress burnout and renew our enthusiasm for Him. The kind of rest that can face any stress in life, knowing that He will bear it for us, and we need not bear it alone!

Some of you reading this need to start handing these burdens over to your Master, and the only way to do this is to spend time with Him. Not once a month, not weekly at church, but every single day.

Open His Word, read it daily (do the Bible reading plan), pray constantly, releasing the burdens consciously over to Him. This needs to be a deliberate, daily, ongoing process, but if you commit yourself to daily handing the stresses over to Him, within a week you won't know yourself.

So, dear reader, please stop right now and answer the Father's call...

*Matthew 11:28-30*

*Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*

What are you bearing right now? What pain, what pressure, what stress? It is time to use God's anti-virus and hand those stresses over to Him.

## VIRUS 4- THE TOLERANCE VIRUS

## VIRUS 4- THE TOLERANCE VIRUS

We've looked at several mind viruses which are common in our modern society, but of all the viruses we will look at this one is perhaps the most virulent virus of this present age.

Remember, mind viruses are those programs the devil implants into our psyche via our society which influence the way we live, the things we do and the attitudes we have.

These viruses are small programs planted in our culture and society that can dramatically affect our thoughts, words, actions and feelings. They do this by affecting our subconscious, which means that often you won't even be aware of the effects of this virus, but it is influencing and even taking control of your life!

We've looked at the love of the world virus, rampant consumerism which we all experience. We've seen that, despite technology and social media, the loneliness virus affects more people than ever before. We've also examined the stress virus, which affects us all and kills some of us.

But now let's look at a virus gaining power, fuelled by the spirit of this age, and to date this virus is winning because it affects not only you and I but also those with power and position.

It is the TOLERANCE VIRUS, and it is affecting leaders, parents, Christians and even pastors (I write with much shame)!

### FAIRNESS, JUSTICE OR DROPPING THE STANDARD?

The constant mantra in the media and social media is that we must be tolerant. We must tolerate everybody's views and opinions, and challenging them is the cardinal sin against society. Fairness for all, regardless of what they say, do or believe. The Aussie way is to give everybody fair go, and if you do not do this, you're a bigot, an extremist, totally prejudiced.

If what I say here offends you, chances are you are infected by this mind virus! The pressure to accept this virus from our society, especially the media, is greater than ever before.

*Luke 17:26 (ESV)*

*Just as it was in the days of Noah, so will it be in the days of the Son of Man.*

A couple of prowlers broke into a department store in a large US city... They took nothing. But what they did was more ridiculous than stealing goods. Instead of stealing anything, they changed the cost of everything. Price tags were swapped. Values were exchanged. These clever pranksters took the tag off a \$395 camera and stuck it on a \$5.00 box of stationery. The \$5.95 sticker on a paperback book was removed and placed on an outboard motor. They broke in and repriced everything in the store!

Crazy? You bet. But the craziest part of this story took place the next morning.

The store opened as usual. Employees went to work. Customers began to shop. Many bargains were had. The store functioned exactly as normal for four hours before anyone noticed what had happened.

You might think life goes on as normal, but I believe we face the greatest moral crisis in our history. Right now in our society, they're trying to change the tags and we need to recognise and take a stand against the virus of this age!

## THE TOLERANCE VIRUS- TODAY MORE THAN EVER

I recently heard Pastor James McPherson speak on tolerance and I believe he really has a perspective on this virus. The thing is, you as believers need to have your eyes open to the sinister, powerful and destructive nature of the tolerance virus.

You also need to see behind the current issue of the day to the sinister, evil agenda that is driving it!

I cannot recall a more emotionally charged issue we have had to face as a church than same sex marriage. But step back and recognise that this is not the entire issue, it's just a symptom of this virus. Trust me, the agenda of destruction of the family and the church goes far beyond gay couples acquiring the title of "married."

This mind virus tells us, via the media, politicians, our friends and all over Facebook, that we must be tolerant.

We are told that all people, from gays to transgenders to Muslims to environmentalists, have a right, an almost divine right, to express themselves and be whatever or whoever they want to be. Tolerance preaches that we must accept them, everything they say and everything they want to do, because that's who they are.

Here is the joke... Our media is tolerant to every group and opinion. From gays to transgender to sex workers, and from Muslims to atheists to New Agers. They preach and practice tolerance, towards everybody...

Except Christians!

And folks this is going to get worse before it gets better. I believe that we will see more persecution of Christians in our country in the next 5 years than we have seen in the past 200 years.

So a Muslim girl shares her beliefs on Facebook and gets comments like, "You're so brave to share your heart, good for you."

Then some Christian shares an opinion and its, "You're a bleep, bleep prejudicial bigot!"

Christians have not attacked, sworn at, slandered or mocked supporters of gay marriage. Yet media people like Tim Minchin can produce a song full of swearing and cursing attacking Bible based Christians called "I Still Call Australia Homophobic!" He can call us all sorts of despicable, sexually based insults but we, apparently, are the bigots, not the guy swearing and cursing at us!

In fact, things have degraded to the point where perhaps the greatest sin of the modern world is not sexual deviancy, paedophilia, robbery, adultery or murder... It's having an opinion that is different to the perceived majority, or rather the loudest minority.

Society will tolerate slave labour if the products are cheap enough, Muslim customs and eating habits if it pays well enough, and blatantly hyper-sexual gay mardi-gras, but it will not tolerate a Christian with an opinion.

What a joke! They call us narrow minded, prejudice, bigoted, sexist, racist or just plain ignorant, yet one brief look at the media and you'll see that one side is slandering, mocking, reviling, and attacking without mercy or respect... And it's not Christians, it's the ones preaching tolerance and "love is love!"!

And all the time the big winner is Satan as this tolerance virus digs itself deeper and deeper into our collective subconsciousness!

## STOP LIMPING?

Let's look at 1 Kings 18, at Elijah and the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel. You probably know the story, but I want to highlight something before the big showdown, and contrast how two men of God faced the degradation of society in their day...

Elijah was standing against great evil, Baal worship. This was manifested and promoted by King Ahab and his nasty wife Jezebel, who were slandering him, attacking him, and were even hunting him down!

*1 Kings 18:10 (ESV)*

*As the Lord your God lives, there is no nation or kingdom where my lord has not sent to seek you.*

Obadiah faced the same enemy, in an entirely different way. He was part of the royal court, caught up in all the goings on in the palace. He was a good man who loved God, but as part of the royal court, he faced a decision. He loved God, but also loved his life of luxury serving in the royal court. This unwillingness to part with or upset the life he lived prompted a different response to the fiery Elijah. It made him weak and afraid of causing waves, so he never publicly stood against the excesses of the King and Jezebel. But he did hide and feed 100 of God's prophets.

*1 Kings 18:13 (ESV)*

*Has it not been told my lord what I did when Jezebel killed the prophets of the Lord, how I hid a hundred men of the Lord's prophets by fifties in a cave and fed them with bread and water?*

Obadiah did not oppose publicly like Elijah, but as part of the establishment, without forsaking his privileged position, he did what he could.

Isn't this the kind of choice we face today in the face of the tolerance mind virus? Some will always give in and compromise, while others stand up and say no, and find themselves being mercilessly attacked. Still others, afraid of offending people and not wanting to be attacked, float along and try to quietly, timidly and winsomely do what they can to not conform.

They try and stay comfortable, but do their little bit to oppose public opinion, without directly confronting the issues and making an uncomfortable stand.

Listen, if we are to ever combat this virus, we must have an opinion, and it must be Biblical. Not my opinion, not yours, not Pauline Hanson or Bill Shorten or the prime minister or anybody else... the Bible is our standard!

If the Bible is our standard, and we see people attacking, flaunting and opposing what we know is truth, then floating along quietly is not really an option. If you think it is an option, consider what God said to Ezekiel, because this is serious stuff...

*Ezekiel 33:8 (ESV)*

*If I say to the wicked, O wicked one, you shall surely die, and you do not speak to warn the wicked to turn from his way, that wicked person shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand.*

Staying silent in the face of the opposition stirred up by this virus means that the blood of those sinning is on your hands! It is a big price to pay for a bit of peace!

OK, back to the big showdown on Mount Carmel. When opposing the evil prophets of Baal, and the King, his evil wife, and the entire corrupted nation for that matter, Elijah said this, and it is still powerful today...

*1 Kings 18:21 (ESV)*

*And Elijah came near to all the people and said, "How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him." And the people did not answer him a word.*

That Hebrew word limp is apt, because it means "to dance". How many Christians are dancing between God's opinion and the world's? How many today are flipping from one side to the other, tossed here and there by the latest opinion on Facebook.

Today must be the day we stop dancing, the day we stop limping, the day we drive a flag into the sunburnt soil of this country and say “Enough!”

And listen, if you are reading Facebook and watching the news more than reading your Bible, you have no chance because you won't even be sure of God's opinion!

## HOW DO YOU TEST A SOCIAL IDEA?

You can ridicule people, you can kill them, you can silence them, but you cannot silence an idea, good or bad. So how do you examine a social idea to see if it is true or not? One great way is to take the concept to the logical extreme and see if it holds true.

For example, the idea that salvation is available to all who repent...

*2 Peter 3:9*

*The Lord is not slow to fulfil his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.*

So, if you repent can you be saved? Yes.

What about if a murderer repents? Yes.

Ok, what about a mass murderer, say Ted Bundy? Yes, apparently, he did that.

Ok, what about Adolf Hitler? The answer again is yes, just or not, God's promises holds true.

Now let's apply the same test to, say, the argument that being gay is natural and therefore you have a right to express it, anywhere, anytime...

The argument is that it's OK to be gay because that's how you were born and you always have a right to express who you really are. That's fine. Let's push it a little further.

Does that mean if you're a paedophile, you should also have the right to express that? How about if you're a psychopath, perhaps you have the right to kill whoever you want, right? I mean, you're just expressing your inner, natural tendencies, right?

Clearly, the argument that being born a certain way gives you absolute right to express it doesn't hold. The argument fails the social test.

Now before some of you get offended, believe me, I'm not trying to upset you or to equate gayness with mass murder! We are not talking about the issue here, but the logic behind the issue, which changes depending on the social view or said issue.

All I am suggesting is that having certain “natural” tendencies does not give you the divine right to express and pursue them anywhere, anytime. It is not logical. In fact, throughout

the centuries good and decent social behaviour in our society has been built on people not giving full vent to their inner tendencies. But apparently all that has changed today!

## SYMPTOMS OF THE TOLERANCE VIRUS

So, what are the symptoms of this virus we see today?

### SYMPTOM 1: WE DON'T BELIEVE FACTS, WE BELIEVE SLOGANS

Advertising has known for years that slogans get into your subconscious mind, just like a virus. Many people put their minds on autopilot and just believe slogans that master manipulators have designed to let the virus into our minds. This is the secret sauce that the tolerance virus uses to infect your mind.

Slogans bypass your conscious mind and influence your subconscious. And they do it exceedingly well.

Let's test this...who do you think of when I say,  
"Lower prices are just the beginning"?

How about, "Just do it"?

Here's one you must know... "Finger lickin' good". Or maybe, "You can't beat the real thing".

Even over the decades the effects can be felt. Here is a slogan from years ago that I still remember...

"It puts a Rose in every cheek". Or how about, "A little dab will do ya"?

OK, so slogans are powerful, but here is another one, a modern one, a topical one...

"Marriage equality". So, does that mean I can have 5 wives? Does it mean I can I marry my 5-year-old niece?

See what I mean, we do not think about the real issue, we just mouth the slogan. We don't think this through, we just swallow what the tolerance virus dishes up! Here's another...

Love is love: does that mean I can marry my cat?

Al Gore famously said, "The science is settled" in his movie on climate change. But thousands of scientists say it is far from settled!

## SYMPTOM 2: WE BELIEVE CELEBRITIES AND FAMOUS PEOPLE

Another interesting fact of modern life is that we listen to the opinions of celebrities and sports people, as if they are experts in every.

A famous singer has a political opinion... a famous sports person has a comment on a moral issue.

What in the world makes us think that the opinion of a famous person qualified in one area automatically qualifies them in a completely unrelated area!

Bruce Springsteen thinks Donald Trump is a moron. He's entitled to his opinion, but he doesn't hold a political science degree. It is one opinion, from someone unqualified to offer an opinion we should listen to.

Hugh Jackman says, "Australia is at its best when we value equality over prejudice and fear. Gay marriage will benefit marriage by allowing it to embrace more loving committed couples who uphold its values." Great actor, but is he the moral compass of our country?

And while we're on it, notice the choice he gives you... equality, or prejudice and fear. You're either tolerant or a prejudicial, fearful bigot, and heaven forbid you express an opinion contrary to what the celebrities believe!

Many Christians fall victim to the tolerance virus, not because they don't believe in God or want to make a stand for Him, but because they are just too confused by the biased media barrage to know what they believe about anything!

*Ephesians 4:14-15 (ESV)*

*so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,*

## SYMPTOM 3: OUR OPINIONS CHANGE EVERY YEAR

If you are governed and influenced by the tolerance virus, your opinions will change every year, depending on who is in power, or who is speaking out.

Society changes its opinion year by year, even day by day, and you will fall victim to the virus if popular opinion is the yardstick you use.

Moral standards are in decline in our society because people like you and me no longer give them strength. What used to be called perverted is now an alternative lifestyle, what used to be hard core porn is now acceptable in movies.

The tolerance virus uses movies and TV, books, songs and the Internet to change the way we think. It uses media to constantly tell you you're either tolerant of everything, or a prejudicial bigot! But,

*Hebrews 13:8-9 (ESV)*

*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings, for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace,*

The sad fact is that today we no longer have truth, we have only the truth of the moment, which is fashion!

Someone once tried to insult me for my Biblical opinions saying, "The problem is that instead of looking at the Bible through society, you look at society through the Bible!" I thanked them, because this is exactly what we need today.

If you look at the Bible through society, things change every year. But the Bible stands forever, and looking at society through the Bible gives a stable perspective!

#### SYMPTOM 4: WE ARE EASILY OFFENDED

Get on Facebook today and say that you do not support Gay marriage, and watch how aggressively and caustically you will be attacked, in under 10 minutes, by people you've never heard of!

Our society is becoming as unforgiving as Islamic militants. Remember Salmon Rushdi? He wrote a book called the Satanic Verses, offended The Islamic faith, and had a death sentence pronounced on him.

I recently saw a poster saying, "Beheading for all who insult the prophet!" Did you know more than 100 Australian young men have gone off to join these jihadists? And our media implores us to be tolerant of this religion of peace!

Fiona and I have been attacked on social media several times in the last 6 months, despite being totally innocent. We've been told we are hypocrites, we've been sworn at told we are unworthy of being pastors and even threatened physically.

And it's not just Christians being attacked. One football blogger recently had death threats made against him because he passed an opinion on a player's performance.

As a society, we are so easily offended and that's part of the action of the tolerance virus! And what's more, people are taking offence on behalf of others, not themselves.

The people offended and attacking Christians on the gay marriage issue are not even gay themselves! According to Roy Morgan research, just over 3% of Australians consider

themselves gay, but in a recent vote, 58% of Australians voted to legalise same sex marriage!

*Proverbs 19:11*

*Good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offence.*

A sign of Christian maturity, indeed any maturity, is that you are not easily offended. And when you are offended, another sign of maturity is that you respond in a measured, godly way, not in a raging rant on social media!

#### SYMPTOM 5: WE LOVE NOVELTY

Today we love novelty so much that trivial pursuit is not just a board game, it's a lifestyle!

In a world filled with war, terrorism, moral issues and finances to speak about, today's tolerance virus wants you to overlook the big, important issues in life and focus on the trivial novelties of this world.

When dozens of Christians were killed by Muslim extremists in a 2017 bus attack, it barely rated a mention. But a guy convincing his sister of a zombie apocalypse, or a rescued goat who wants to wear a duck costume goes viral and gets thousands of clicks.

While the Internet was nearly broken by stories about Harambe the gorilla, Kim Kardashian new look and a soccer mom wearing a Chewbacca mask, we hear barely a peep about the confirmed 1207 Christians murdered in 2016 alone by Muslim extremists.

In fact, we champion being tolerant to Muslims and gays, but how tolerant are Muslims to Christians or gays in Muslim countries. The answer is, not very. Here's a fact...of the top 10 countries where you can be killed for being gay (forget the marriage thing), all 10 are Muslim.

*Colossians 3:2 (ESV)*

*Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.*

#### SYMPTOM 6: WE CANNOT SEPARATE LOVE FROM APPROVAL

Another symptom of the tolerance virus running rampant is that we cannot separate love and approval.

Our society offers only this choice... do you approve of everything I do, or do you hate me? This extreme thinking overlooks the true nature of love, and the substance of Christ's love for all of us... Unconditional love!

How many of you recognise that you can love your children, but not agree with everything they do and not give them everything they think they want? Otherwise our kids would live on chocolate and ice-cream, right?

A young girl who was trans-gendering, asked me if I still loved her, and if I would support her decision. I answered, "Yes and no. Yes, I love you unconditionally no matter what, but no, I do not support in any way your decision." I explained that my love for her is independent of my agreeing with her.

*Romans 12:9-10 (ESV)*

*Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; (IT DOESN'T SAY TOLERATE EVIL) hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honour.*

Frankly, if we're honest we must admit that we in the church have not excelled at separating love and approval. If we disapprove of something, we tend to reject the person, just as they choose to reject us.

Look at that verse... we need to love those we disagree with, unconditionally, but that does not mean we must approve of them, their decisions, their sin or their lifestyles.

We say we hate the sin and love the sinner, but in practical terms this has always been difficult.

According to our society, which is heavily infected by the tolerance virus, to love a gay person or a Muslim or a Catholic or anybody else, we must approve of everything they do, or at least tolerate it. We have a glaring need today to separate love and approval.

Fiona and I once attended a dinner hosted by gay friends of ours. Yes, I am a pastor and I have gay friends! When they learned that I was in ministry, one of the gay guys took me aside and asked if I approved of his lifestyle.

Put on the spot, I prayed a quick prayer and said this.

"No, I don't approve of your lifestyle, but then again, my lifestyle is traveling around the world preaching about Jesus, which I don't think you approve of. So, if we both let our disapproval go, can't we just be friends?"

He said it was the best answer he had ever heard. We are firm friends to this day. Do I approve of his homosexuality? No. But do I count him a friend? Yes I do. If ever this man is to be won for Christ, someone has to not push him away but love and accept him. Not his lifestyle, but him himself!

In reality, my approval or disapproval of his homosexuality meant little.

What my friend really wanted, and what I gave him, was love, acceptance and respect.

That's what most people want. You can love these folk, care for them, respect them and honour them without approving of their lifestyle choices. The tolerance virus doesn't say this, but Christ does, and who are you going to believe?

## THE PROBLEM IS THAT WE ARE THERMOMETERS NOT THERMOSTATS

Christians are called to be salt and light to a dying world, but instead of setting the moral temperature we are just measuring and reflecting it. We are no longer thermostats, we are simply thermometers, reflecting the moral temperature around us. We abdicate responsibility and allow others to set the moral climate. We just reflect it.

*Isaiah 58:1 (ESV)*

*Cry aloud; do not hold back; lift up your voice like a trumpet;  
declare to my people their transgression, to the house of Jacob their sins.*

How can we sit by idly, quietly conforming to the world, then wonder why the moral fabric of society is falling apart? Look at any civilisation or culture in history, the Romans, the Greeks, the Babylonians, right through until today, and you will find that the decline of their civilisation is always preceded by a moral decline.

And our nations will be no different! We're practically there now!

*2 Timothy 3:12 (ESV)*

*Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,*

It's time that we, the people of God, stood up and said enough is enough, even if we are attacked and insulted! But we need to do so in love, in genuine, respectful, honouring love.

We can say, "I don't agree with you, but I still love you."

## SO HOW CAN WE TREAT THE TOLERANCE VIRUS?

According to Pastor James McPherson, our society has deified tolerance and demonised intolerance. Tolerance is holy, intolerance of anything is a cardinal sin!

We are told that tolerance is always right, and our media is tolerant to everybody, from gays to transgenders, from Muslims to atheists. Tolerant of everything, that is, except a Christian with an opinion.

But, argues Pastor James, we need to be tolerant of people, but intolerant of ideas. What does this mean?

Tolerance must be applied to people. Jesus, our great example, loved and accepted people, and was roundly criticised by religious people for dining with sinners...

*Luke 15:2 (ESV)*

*And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."*

Jesus then goes on to share the parable of the lost sheep. Clearly, He tolerated sinners, prostitutes, etc. He cared, He loved, He reached out to them, He didn't despise them, He didn't reject them and He never drove them away!

Tolerance must always be applied to people.

Intolerance, on the other hand, must never be applied to people, but only ever applied to bad ideas.

Intolerance is not always wrong, in fact it is often right...

The reason our roads are somewhat safe is that police are intolerant to speeding and running red lights. Imagine if they tolerated such behaviour... the roads would be bedlam.

Christ dying on the cross doesn't mean that God suddenly tolerates sin. He is Holy, which means He is totally intolerant of sin, but Jesus hung on nails for 6 hours one Friday and gave His life because He was tolerant of people... nails didn't hold Him there, love held Him there! He loves us, despite what we have done, but that doesn't mean He gives us licence to continue in our sin! He tolerates us, but is intolerant to our sin.

We will never cure the tolerance virus in our society by being tolerant of bad ideas, or by being intolerant of people. We will not win this moral battle by abusing people more than they are currently abusing us. There is only one way ahead for us as a church...

## WE MUST COUNTERACT THE SPIRIT OF THE AGE...

It is time we figured out who the real enemy is. It is not gay people, it is not trans gender people, it is not the media, the politicians or any person attacking us. The real enemy is the same one our ancestors faced in the Garden of Eden...

*Ephesians 6:12 (ESV)*

*For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.*

The spirit of the age preaches tolerance, but then attacks aggressively those who oppose their message. Attacking back against those who attack us achieves nothing... we have to find a better way.

*2 Timothy 1:7 (ESV)*

*for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control. (sound mind)*

Christian, we are not to cower in fear when these tolerance issues come up. We are not called to approve of everything that God doesn't either. According to this verse, we are to show love towards all, show power in our unity and solidarity together, and show a sound mind... A sound mind is intolerance to evil ideas and not threatened by external pressures, but this must be set alongside our tolerance towards even those who sin, and even those who attack us!

You can't beat this virus by attacking them back more than they attack you! Our greatest strength, and the only thing that will make the world sit up and take notice, is the love of Christ.

For too long we have been intolerant of people because we have a firm belief in the things of God. We've hated both the sin and the sinner. We haven't said that, but that's how we have acted. So, we must never stop standing for what God says is right, but we must temper this with love and respect.

The alternative, sadly pursued by many Christians and church leaders, is that we limp between two opinions, unsure of who we are and what we believe, changing our views every few weeks and becoming spineless and weak willed...

*Ephesians 4:14-15 (ESV)*

*so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,*

Brothers and sisters, we need to stand unmoved by the seas that rage around us. But we need also to stand in love; unshakable, unconditional, all accepting love that reaches out to this lost world and shares the good news about Jesus Christ, without compromising the truth that is so clear in Scripture.

Seek God, and let your conscience and God's Word show you the truth. Do not let the media or politicians dictate the truth to you, but let the never changing Word of God make His will clear to you.

For me, as a pastor, I will not be marrying gay couples and we will not be allowing them to marry in our church. I will hand my marriage licence in, and we will reserve the right to use our church only for our church members.

However, I will continue to reach out to and love friends who are gay, transgender, Muslim, Hindu or anything else. I will continue to be committed to loving them and praying for them, respecting them as people and treating them with respect, even when they venomously attack me and slander me. I will keep loving and accepting them, but I will never agree with and accept their lifestyle because to me, God's Word is clear.

## THE CHALLENGE FOR THE CHURCH

*Romans 12:2 (ESV)*

*Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.*

Today in Australia this tolerance virus wants you to conform to the pattern of this world. It has gained such power it will say to us, "It is the law, and you must obey!"

So, I believe the church needs to gain a sound mind and sort out where we stand now, before excessive pressure is thrust upon us. The challenge is this... Will you be transformed by the law, the media or a humanistic argument, or will you instead be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

Here's how you can renew your mind...

### COMMIT TO READING HIS WORD DAILY

Will you commit to knowing the mind of Christ more by reading His Word? If you study His Word daily, you will make sound decisions on moral issues and avoid much of the confusion created by the tolerance virus.

### COMMIT TO LOVING ALL PEOPLE UNCONDITIONALLY

Will you commit to loving those who persecute you, no matter how vile or venomous the slander is? Only Christ's love can change society and win souls for eternity.

And yes, they are going to attack you! Yes, your unconditional love will confuse some, infuriate others and make others hate you. But some of them will be won to Jesus by your love, and we will be able to spend eternity with them. Isn't someone's eternity worth more than your comfort and social acceptance? Will you suffer slander and attacks to save some?

We should all answer, "Yes!" I mean, it happened to our Lord, so let me finish this virus with the words of Jesus to those of us who will suffer for Him.

*John 15:18-21 (ESV)*

*"If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me.*

# CONCLUSION:

## GOD'S BROAD-SPECTRUM ANTIVIRUS TREATMENT

The viruses we have discussed in this book are not exhaustive by any means. They are all there, present and silently influencing us. They bypass our conscious mind and exert influence and direction via the unconscious mind, so often we are unaware of what they are and how they are silently, surreptitiously changing us.

But fear not, God has an antivirus regime which can protect you and your mind, conscious and subconscious from the influence of these mind viruses.

It is called His Word.

If you fill your mind with the right things, your mind will be insulated against the attacks of these viruses...

*Philippians 4:8 (ESV)*

*Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.*

This means that we stop putting things like Facebook, movies and TV into your mind and start putting the Bible, Christian books, teaching and the right movies into your mind instead.

I'm not suggesting you should never watch a TV or movie, or never open your Facebook app, but just avoid things that pull you down instead of building you up. So, be careful about what you allow into your mind. Choose wisely, and choose what Jesus would approve of.

In addition, you need to read His Word every day. Get serious about it. Yes, I said every day, day in and day out!

I get up every morning, have a shower (because I am not lucid without this), make a cup of coffee (ditto) and sit in the same chair with my Bible and commentary books. This happens almost every day, and I love it. God speaks to me daily, and I am inspired to live my life for Christ because I know Him so well, and meet with Him every day.

I suggest this for you. Try it for a month, and see how your mind feels. You will be protected from the influence of mind viral infection, and be able to live a life of victory.

In these difficult times, let us not cower away in the corner, or join the morally corrupt majority. No, this is our hour, this is our time.

This is our moment to shine!

*Matthew 5:16 (ESV)*

*In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.*

If you want a solid growing and powerful relationship with the Lord, the best thing you can do is read His Word every day. Below is our Bible Reading Plan, which enables you to read the highlights of the whole Bible by reading just two chapters a day. This has transformed the lives of many people in our church, and it will transform your life too!

For more free teaching from Pastor Darin Browne, in audio and written form, please visit

[www.ignitechurch.org.au](http://www.ignitechurch.org.au)

or email

[pastor@ignitechurch.org.au](mailto:pastor@ignitechurch.org.au)

## "Ignite Your Bible" Reading Plan Ps Darin Browne

Jan			Feb			Mar			Apr			May			Jun		
1	Genesis 1	Psalms 1	1	Genesis 21	Psalms 10	1	Genesis 33	Psalms 26	1	Deuteronomy 27	1 Corinthians 1	1	Judges 1	Psalms 41	1	1 Samuel 11	Job 1
2	Genesis 2	Psalms 2	2	Genesis 22	Psalms 11-12	2	Genesis 34	Psalms 27	2	Deuteronomy 28	1 Corinthians 2	2	Judges 2	Psalms 42-43	2	1 Samuel 12	Job 2
3	Genesis 3	Psalms 3-4	3	Genesis 23	Psalms 13-14	3	Genesis 35	Psalms 28	3	Deuteronomy 29	1 Corinthians 3	3	Judges 3	Psalms 44	3	1 Samuel 13	Job 3
4	Genesis 4	Psalms 5	4	Genesis 24	Psalms 15	4	Genesis 36	Psalms 29	4	Deuteronomy 30	1 Corinthians 4	4	Judges 4	Psalms 45	4	1 Samuel 14	Job 4
5	Genesis 5	Psalms 6	5	Genesis 25	Psalms 16	5	Genesis 37	Psalms 30	5	Deuteronomy 33	1 Corinthians 5	5	Judges 5	Psalms 46	5	1 Samuel 15	Ecc 1
6	Genesis 6	Psalms 7	6	Genesis 26	Psalms 17	6	Genesis 38	Psalms 31	6	Deuteronomy 34	1 Corinthians 6	6	Judges 6	Psalms 47	6	1 Samuel 16	Ecc 2
7	Genesis 7	Psalms 8	7	Genesis 27	Psalms 18	7	Genesis 39	Psalms 32	7	Joshua 1	1 Corinthians 7	7	Judges 7	Psalms 48	7	1 Samuel 17	Ecc 3
8	Genesis 8	Psalms 9	8	Genesis 28	Psalms 19	8	Genesis 40	Psalms 33	8	Joshua 2	1 Corinthians 8	8	Judges 8	Psalms 49	8	1 Samuel 18	Ecc 12
9	Genesis 9	Mark 1	9	Genesis 29	Psalms 20	9	Genesis 41	Psalms 34	9	Joshua 3	1 Corinthians 9	9	Judges 9	Psalms 50	9	1 Samuel 19	Proverbs 1
10	Genesis 12	Mark 2	10	Genesis 30	Psalms 21	10	Genesis 42	Psalms 35	10	Joshua 4	1 Corinthians 10	10	Judges 10	Psalms 51	10	1 Samuel 20	Proverbs 2
11	Genesis 13	Mark 3	11	Exodus 14	Psalms 22	11	Genesis 43	Psalms 36	11	Joshua 5	1 Corinthians 11	11	Judges 11	Psalms 52-53	11	1 Samuel 21	Proverbs 3
12	Genesis 14	Mark 4	12	Exodus 16	Psalms 23-24	12	Genesis 44	Psalms 37	12	Joshua 6	1 Corinthians 12	12	Judges 12	Psalms 54	12	1 Samuel 22	Proverbs 4
13	Genesis 15	Mark 5	13	Exodus 17	Psalms 25	13	Genesis 45	Psalms 38	13	Joshua 7	1 Corinthians 13	13	Judges 13	Psalms 55	13	1 Samuel 23	Proverbs 5
14	Genesis 16	Mark 6	14	Exodus 20	Ephesians 1	14	Genesis 46	Psalms 39	14	Joshua 8	1 Corinthians 14	14	Judges 14	Psalms 56	14	1 Samuel 24	Psalms 61-62
15	Genesis 17	Mark 7	15	Numbers 9	Ephesians 2	15	Genesis 47	Psalms 40	15	Joshua 9	1 Corinthians 15	15	Judges 15	Psalms 57	15	1 Samuel 25	Psalms 63
16	Genesis 18	Mark 8	16	Numbers 11	Ephesians 3	16	Genesis 48	Romans 1	16	Joshua 10	1 Corinthians 16	16	Judges 16	Psalms 58	16	1 Samuel 26	Psalms 64
17	Genesis 19	Mark 9	17	Numbers 12	Ephesians 4	17	Genesis 49	Romans 2	17	Joshua 11	Matthew 1:18-2	17	Judges 17	Psalms 59	17	1 Samuel 27	Psalms 65
18	Genesis 20	Mark 10	18	Numbers 13	Ephesians 5	18	Genesis 50	Romans 3	18	Joshua 12	Matthew 3	18	Judges 18	Psalms 60	18	1 Samuel 28	Psalms 66
19	Exodus 1	Mark 11	19	Numbers 14	Ephesians 6	19	Deuteronomy 1	Romans 4	19	Joshua 13	Matthew 4	19	Judges 19	Lamentations 3	19	1 Samuel 29	Psalms 67
20	Exodus 2	Mark 12	20	Numbers 20	James 1	20	Deuteronomy 2	Romans 5	20	Joshua 14	Matthew 5	20	Judges 20	Philippians 1	20	1 Samuel 30	Psalms 68
21	Exodus 3	Mark 13	21	Numbers 21	James 2	21	Deuteronomy 3	Romans 6	21	Joshua 15	Matthew 6	21	Judges 21	Philippians 2	21	1 Samuel 31	Psalms 69
22	Exodus 4	Mark 14	22	Numbers 22	James 3	22	Deuteronomy 4	Romans 7	22	Joshua 16	Matthew 7	22	1 Samuel 1	Philippians 3	22	Isaiah 1	Psalms 70-71
23	Exodus 5	Mark 15	23	Numbers 23	James 4	23	Deuteronomy 5	Romans 8	23	Joshua 17	Matthew 8	23	1 Samuel 2	Philippians 4	23	Isaiah 6	Psalms 72
24	Exodus 6	Mark 16	24	Numbers 24	James 5	24	Deuteronomy 6	Romans 9	24	Joshua 18	Matthew 9	24	1 Samuel 3	1 Peter 1	24	Isaiah 7	Psalms 73
25	Exodus 7	Galatians 1	25	Numbers 25	2 Timothy 1	25	Deuteronomy 7	Romans 10	25	Joshua 19	Matthew 16	25	1 Samuel 4	1 Peter 2	25	Isaiah 12	Psalms 74
26	Exodus 8	Galatians 2	26	Numbers 32	2 Timothy 2	26	Deuteronomy 8	Romans 11	26	Joshua 20	Matthew 17	26	1 Samuel 5	1 Peter 3	26	Isaiah 25	Psalms 75
27	Exodus 9	Galatians 3	27	Genesis 31	2 Timothy 3	27	Deuteronomy 9	Romans 12	27	Joshua 21	Matthew 18	27	1 Samuel 6	1 Peter 4	27	Isaiah 26	2 Peter 1
28	Exodus 10	Galatians 4	28	Genesis 32	2 Timothy 4	28	Deuteronomy 10	Romans 13	28	Joshua 22	Matthew 26	28	1 Samuel 7	1 Peter 5	28	Isaiah 27	2 Peter 2
29	Exodus 11	Galatians 5				29	Deuteronomy 11	Romans 14	29	Joshua 23	Matthew 27	29	1 Samuel 8	Habakkuk 1	29	Isaiah 29	2 Peter 3
30	Exodus 12	Galatians 6				30	Deuteronomy 13	Romans 15	30	Joshua 24	Matthew 28	30	1 Samuel 9	Habakkuk 2	30	Isaiah 30	Philemon
31	Exodus 13	Joel 2				31	Deuteronomy 26	Romans 16				31	1 Samuel 10	Habakkuk 3			

## "Ignite Your Bible" Reading Plan Ps Darin Browne

Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec												
1	Isaiah 36	Psalm 76	1	2 Kings 8	Psalm 90	1	2 Chronicles 10	Psalm 105	1	2 Samuel 1	Psalm 119:96-176	1	Jeremiah 1	Psalm 140	1	Acts 1	Psalm 143
2	Isaiah 37	Psalm 77	2	2 Kings 9	Psalm 91	2	2 Chronicles 11	Psalm 106	2	2 Samuel 2	Psalm 120	2	Jeremiah 5	Psalm 141-142	2	Acts 2	Psalm 144
3	Isaiah 40	Psalm 78	3	2 Kings 10	Psalm 92	3	2 Chronicles 12	Psalm 107	3	2 Samuel 3	Psalm 121	3	Jeremiah 12	Proverbs 26	3	Acts 3	Psalm 145
4	Isaiah 42	Psalm 79	4	2 Kings 11	Psalm 93-94	4	2 Chronicles 13	Psalm 108	4	2 Samuel 4	Psalm 122-123	4	Jeremiah 13	Proverbs 27	4	Acts 4	Psalm 146
5	Isaiah 43	Psalm 80	5	2 Kings 12	Psalm 95-96	5	2 Chronicles 14	Psalm 109	5	2 Samuel 5	Psalm 124	5	Jeremiah 17	Proverbs 28	5	Acts 5	Psalm 147
6	Isaiah 49	Psalm 81	6	2 Kings 13	Psalm 97-98	6	2 Chronicles 15	Psalm 110	6	2 Samuel 6	Psalm 125-126	6	Jeremiah 18	Proverbs 29	6	Acts 6	Psalm 148
7	Isaiah 50	Psalm 82-83	7	2 Kings 14	Psalm 99-100	7	2 Chronicles 16	Proverbs 16	7	2 Samuel 7	Proverbs 21	7	Jeremiah 23	Proverbs 30	7	Acts 7	Psalm 149
8	Isaiah 52	Psalm 84-85	8	2 Kings 15	Proverbs 11	8	2 Chronicles 17	Proverbs 17	8	2 Samuel 8	Proverbs 22	8	Jeremiah 26	Proverbs 31	8	Acts 8	Psalm 150
9	Isaiah 53	Proverbs 6	9	2 Kings 16	Proverbs 12	9	2 Chronicles 18	Proverbs 18	9	2 Samuel 9	Proverbs 23	9	Jeremiah 27	Hebrews 1	9	Acts 9	Jude
10	Isaiah 54	Proverbs 7	10	2 Kings 17	Proverbs 13	10	2 Chronicles 19	Proverbs 19	10	2 Samuel 10	Proverbs 24	10	Jeremiah 28	Hebrews 2	10	Acts 10	John 1
11	Isaiah 55	Proverbs 8	11	2 Kings 18	Proverbs 14	11	2 Chronicles 20	Proverbs 20	11	2 Samuel 11	Proverbs 25	11	Jeremiah 29	Hebrews 3	11	Acts 11	John 3
12	Isaiah 58	Proverbs 9	12	2 Kings 19	Proverbs 15	12	2 Chronicles 28	Revelation 1	12	2 Samuel 12	Luke 2	12	Jeremiah 30	Hebrews 4	12	Acts 12	John 4
13	Isaiah 60	Proverbs 10	13	2 Kings 20	2 Corinthians 1	13	2 Chronicles 32	Revelation 2	13	2 Samuel 13	Luke 4	13	Jeremiah 33	Hebrews 5	13	Acts 13	John 6
14	Isaiah 61	Colossians 1	14	2 Kings 21	2 Corinthians 2	14	Esther 1	Revelation 3	14	2 Samuel 14	Luke 5	14	Jeremiah 37	Hebrews 6	14	Acts 14	John 10
15	Isaiah 64	Colossians 2	15	2 Kings 22	2 Corinthians 3	15	Esther 2	Revelation 4	15	2 Samuel 15	Luke 6	15	Jeremiah 38	Hebrews 7	15	Acts 15	John 11
16	1 Kings 1	Colossians 3	16	2 Kings 23	2 Corinthians 4	16	Esther 3	Revelation 5	16	2 Samuel 16	Luke 15	16	Jeremiah 39	Hebrews 8	16	Acts 16	John 12
17	1 Kings 2	Colossians 4	17	2 Kings 24	2 Corinthians 5	17	Esther 4	Revelation 6	17	2 Samuel 17	Luke 18	17	Jeremiah 40	Hebrews 9	17	Acts 17	John 14
18	1 Kings 3	Psalm 86	18	2 Kings 25	2 Corinthians 6	18	Esther 5	Revelation 7	18	2 Samuel 18	Luke 19	18	Jeremiah 52	Hebrews 10	18	Acts 18	John 15
19	1 Kings 17	Psalm 87	19	Ruth 1	2 Corinthians 7	19	Esther 6	Revelation 8	19	2 Samuel 19	Luke 22	19	Ezekiel 1	Hebrews 11	19	Acts 19	John 17
20	1 Kings 18	Psalm 88	20	Ruth 2	2 Corinthians 8	20	Esther 7	Revelation 9	20	2 Samuel 20	Luke 23	20	Ezekiel 2	Hebrews 12	20	Acts 20	John 18
21	1 Kings 19	Psalm 89	21	Ruth 3	2 Corinthians 9	21	Daniel 1	Revelation 10	21	2 Samuel 21	Luke 24	21	Ezekiel 3	Hebrews 13	21	Acts 21	John 19
22	1 Kings 20	1 Timothy 1	22	Ruth 4	2 Corinthians 10	22	Daniel 2	Revelation 11	22	2 Samuel 22	1 John 1	22	Ezekiel 10	1 Thessalonians 1	22	Acts 22	John 20
23	1 Kings 21	1 Timothy 2	23	Nehemiah 1	2 Corinthians 11	23	Daniel 3	Revelation 12	23	2 Samuel 23	1 John 2	23	Ezekiel 11	1 Thessalonians 2	23	Acts 23	John 21
24	1 Kings 22	1 Timothy 3	24	Nehemiah 2	2 Corinthians 12	24	Daniel 5	Revelation 13	24	2 Samuel 24	1 John 3	24	Ezekiel 18	1 Thessalonians 3	24	Acts 24	Revelation 15
25	2 Kings 1	1 Timothy 4	25	Nehemiah 3	2 Corinthians 13	25	Daniel 6	Revelation 14	25	Psalm 129-130	1 John 4	25	Ezekiel 22	1 Thessalonians 4	25	Acts 25	Revelation 16
26	2 Kings 2	1 Timothy 5	26	Nehemiah 4	Psalm 101-102	26	Hosea 1	Psalm 111-112	26	Psalm 131-132	1 John 5	26	Ezekiel 33	1 Thessalonians 5	26	Acts 26	Revelation 17
27	2 Kings 3	1 Timothy 6	27	Nehemiah 5	Psalm 103	27	Hosea 3	Psalm 113-114	27	Psalm 133-134	Jonah 1	27	Ezekiel 34	2 Thessalonians 1	27	Acts 27	Revelation 18
28	2 Kings 4	Titus 1	28	Nehemiah 6	Psalm 104	28	Hosea 8	Psalm 115-116	28	Psalm 135	Jonah 2	28	Ezekiel 37	2 Thessalonians 2	28	Acts 28	Revelation 19
29	2 Kings 5	Titus 2-3	29	Nehemiah 7	Amos 3	29	Hosea 10	Psalm 117-118	29	Psalm 136-137	Jonah 3	29	Ezekiel 43	2 Thessalonians 3	29	Malachi 1	Revelation 20
30	2 Kings 6	Micah 5	30	Nehemiah 8	Zephaniah 3	30	Hosea 14	Psalm 119:1-95	30	Psalm 138	Jonah 4	30	Ezekiel 47	2 John-3 John	30	Malachi 2	Revelation 21
31	2 Kings 7	Micah 6	31	Nehemiah 13	Zechariah 4	31			31	Psalm 139	Nahum 1	31			31	Malachi 3	Revelation 22