
I N T R O D U C T I O N

THE NAKED EYE

It is early morning, and I am walking along the waterfront in Seattle near the Pike Place Market. Bracing myself against the damp, chilly air, I zip my leather jacket up to my throat but still feel the wind cut daggers through me. I will them to run me through.

Clouds fill all of the visible sky—dark, menacing, and turbulent. My hands are burning. I start to run. Can I outrun this? I run until my legs burn too. The sky matches my soul. Seattle is a good place to be sad.

I will never walk her down the aisle.

She will never have a baby.

She lost only one tooth.

She will never read a chapter book.

Memories from only thirty days ago race past like floodwaters and sweep me off my feet. It's as though I am in an abandoned movie theater inside my mind, being forced to watch archival footage from a horror movie that is my life. Frame after frame clicks by: Looking into her beautiful brown eyes. Hearing

the sound of her rich, raspy voice. Seeing her lie there on the counter. Little red socks. Emergency lights flashing in through the kitchen window. A waiting room. Snowflakes melting as they hit our tear-stained cheeks. Temperatures so cold they cause our fingers and ears to sting as we stand in a cemetery blanketed in white, everyone wearing dark peacoats. Staring at a small, white box. The sound of voices singing Chris Tomlin's "I Will Rise."

This can't be real.

These thoughts swim through my mind and try to strangle me. My heart is shattered into a thousand pieces, each shard jagged and razor sharp. The pain is surreal, deafening, and catastrophic. My eyes burn. I want to cry, but the tears won't come. I want to scream, but it won't help. I am afraid. But I'm not alone.

This is war.



Every moment of every day, you are in an invisible battle that ever rages on. As real as the ancient ones you read about in history class and as current as the clips shown on the evening news, it's as bloody as the French Revolution and as sinister as a suicide bombing. This is not something that could happen someday—it's happening right now. You've heard of the War of the Roses? This is the War of the Lenses.

Most of the time, we shuffle along quite oblivious to the great majority of what is actually happening. We drink our lattes and double-click our friends' pictures on Instagram, never giving thought to the fact that we are being watched. There are grades to get at school and money to make at work. Bills don't pay themselves. You probably need to organize the garage, don't you?

(I know I do. As much fun as it is having to channel my inner David Blaine to get out of my car, it would be marvelous to open my door more than ten inches.) All the while, unseen things all around us go unnoticed.

I eventually made it to where I was heading that day in Seattle: Starbucks. Not the one that is actually in the Pike Place Market and is the first store the company ever opened—the one just a block up the hill from it. The original one is cool to see at least once, if only just to marvel at the humble origins of a brand that has quite literally conquered the world, but not all Starbucks shops are created equal. Certain stores have Clover machines and serve a special Reserve menu of exotic beans from around the world. You can use the company's app to find these special locations. Even in pain I have standards. (Confession: I did name my youngest daughter Clover after the coffee machine.)

As I walked in, the vicious waves of sadness that had been slamming me onto the rocks and stealing my breath ever since I had left the hotel that morning subsided enough for me to compose myself. Outside the sky remained stormy, but inside me the downpour had been briefly suspended. I walked in and ordered, then sat down on a stool by the bar and waited for my coffee. I looked around and wondered if anyone knew how much I was hurting. Scanning the room, I saw many people but felt very, very alone. How many times had I sat next to people who were suffering but been completely unaware of the agony they were going through?

Nursing my black coffee, I pulled out my phone and navigated to an app that contained a selection of Bible verses to read in the morning and at night for each day of the year. A verse from Romans 3:22 caught my attention: "The righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe."

Feeling anything but full of faith, I chose to believe again. Right there on that stool, I took heart, shifting my weight onto God's shoulders. The prayer that followed wasn't pretty or put together; it was a text message from my gut that said I needed help: *Please fill me with your Spirit and give me strength right now. I believe.*

Big breath in. Big breath out.

I read a few more verses, then changed apps and dumped my thoughts into a note, venting my emotions and the things that had lit my mind on fire.

I left the cafe. Everything was the same as when I went in. Nothing was the same as when I went in. The details of my life hadn't changed, but I had. I had switched lenses, and so I saw things differently. I still saw what was there, but now that wasn't all I saw. I could see the invisible.

This is the war: every moment of every day, we must make the all-important choice of whether we will rely on the naked eye. Will we trust what we can see is there, or believe what God says is there? It's a decision we are continually confronted with. The apostle Paul put it this way: "So we don't look at the troubles we can see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever" (2 Corinthians 4:18 NLT).

WILL WE TRUST
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Making the choice to see the invisible is not always as dramatic as it was that morning in Seattle. Sometimes it's far more low-key, and that's when it can be the most difficult. Trials have a way of splashing cold water on our faces and rousing us from sleep. It is much easier to slip into cruise control when the sun is out and

the birds are chirping. For every person who has been destroyed by suffering, there are probably ten who have been wrecked by success. Trust me when I say this: the issue isn't whether your life is going well or falling apart; the question is, what makes you so sure you can tell the difference? Things are seldom as they appear.

PRESENT BUT NOT ALWAYS ACCOUNTED FOR

Gehazi needed glasses. Sorely outnumbered and about to die, he knew that he and his boss had just moments to live. At any minute the door would be kicked in and soldiers would spill in like ants through a crack to end their lives. If only he had taken that cruise on the Mediterranean. His life was over. Or was it?

Gehazi was the servant of a prophet named Elisha. Gehazi's master had been given X-Men-like superpowers by God that enabled him to hear from over a country away the things people whispered in their bedrooms. This made him dreadfully valuable to the king of Israel when it came to espionage and counter-terrorism. He was an old-school version of a surveillance drone, except without the billion-dollar price tag. Elisha's uncanny knack for knowing what Israel's enemies were going to do before they themselves did also put a target on his back—and that of anyone close to him. His servant Gehazi, for instance. Collateral damage.

A bounty had been placed on Elisha's head. Vultures circled. That morning Gehazi opened the door and saw that they were surrounded. Soldiers fanned out around them as far as the eye could see. The BC equivalent of red laser sight beams appeared on his chest from every direction. This was it.

“Master!” he managed through clenched teeth, without moving an inch.

Elisha made his way to the doorway, casually glancing at the leering mob that had amassed and was slowly approaching from all four directions. Clearly unfazed, he asked Gehazi what was the matter.

Oh no, Gehazi thought. He’s finally lost it! What does he mean, “What’s the matter?” Does he think they’re here to sell us Girl Scout cookies?

Gehazi gasped and then whispered, “These soldiers! What are we going to do?”

“Don’t worry about it,” Elisha said.

This was almost more than Gehazi could handle. Mind you, he had seen some things in his time as Elisha’s assistant. But this was going to the next level. His master clearly was delusional. They had maybe five minutes before the soldiers reached them, and perhaps an additional two where they could hold them off if they wedged furniture behind the door—and that was the best-case scenario. Yet here was Elisha, practically singing the lyrics to “It’s a Small World” and pretending everything was going to be all right. Things were most definitely not going to be all right.

Elisha continued: “There are more on our side than on the enemies’.”

Gehazi processed this and did some quick counting. Looking at the soldiers, he estimated that there were five or six thousand. Then he looked at himself and Elisha, and the counting was much easier: one, two.

Good thing Elisha got into the ministry, because math is clearly not his strong suit, Gehazi thought, genuinely feeling sorry for the bald, weathered man who was obviously nuts.

Elisha smiled, and with a twinkle in his eye he prayed, “Lord, open his eyes so he can see.”

Gehazi looked outside once more. He still saw the soldiers with their armor and their weapons, but now that wasn’t *all* he saw. On the hills above those soldiers, he could now see another army—a bigger, far more powerful army. There were glorious, glowing warriors riding chariots that shimmered like fire, spilling up the canyon into the sky. Bright like the dawn and as powerful as a thunderous waterfall, each of them wielded a terrible bow with an arrow at the ready. There must have been a hundred thousand of them.

The sight made Gehazi’s fingertips tingle and his heart flutter. He felt giddy like a child and wanted to laugh and run. Safe—above all else, he felt safe. And he was.

What is so important about this Bible story (2 Kings 6:15–17) is that the angels didn’t show up when Gehazi’s eyes were opened. They were there when he couldn’t see them. Present but invisible. Gehazi was staring at them every time he looked outside; he just didn’t know it. When God opened Gehazi’s eyes to see the unseen, he still saw the enemy soldiers. They didn’t go away. Why was he no longer afraid of them? He now understood that the thing that had him surrounded was itself surrounded by God.

So it always is.

HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT

The best stargazing conditions are outside of town. On a cloudless, dark night, when you are far away from civilization, it is possible to see as many as five thousand stars. A place like Montana, for

example—that’s where I live, by the way—is a sweet place to stargaze. My wife, daughters, and I love to lie out on the driveway on clear summer nights and look up at the sky, especially when there are shooting stars to watch. A couple of summers ago, during the annual Perseid meteor shower, there were one hundred shooting stars per hour streaking across the sky, more than one a minute. Lenya and Alivia (my then four- and six-year-olds) and I snuggled up on a blanket on the lawn, oohing and aahing at the show.

In the city, all the light pollution keeps the visible number of stars down to only a couple hundred, even on the clearest of nights. Abraham wouldn’t have needed too much faith to believe God’s promises if he had been in New York City instead of Ur of the Chaldees when God called him, if you know what I mean. But what is important to remember is that even when you can’t see the stars, they are still there.

Keep your place here in the book, and go look up at the sky. Go on. Do it. Don’t just keep reading. I mean it. If you are outside, it’s easy—just look up. If you are indoors, go to a window, or better yet, open a door.

What did you see? Any stars out there? It’s daytime, you say? Ah. Sorry about that. But that works just as well, because you know that you were still looking at stars, right? No matter what time of day or night it is, there are always stars in the sky. Just because you can’t see them doesn’t mean they aren’t there.

No matter whether you are in Manhattan looking at hundreds of stars, or in Montana seeing thousands, there are always more. Millions and millions and millions more. The human eye sees more than you realize—much more than you can actually process. For instance, when you look up at the stars, you are technically looking at all of them; you just can’t perceive all you are

seeing. I can prove it to you. A telescope or other lens just magnifies and brings into focus what you are already looking at, what is there all along. Even in the daytime, the stars are right in front of you, hidden in plain sight. The reason you can't make out what you are seeing is because of distance and interference.

So it is spiritually. You must not rely on the naked eye. What you think you see is not all that is there. There are unseen things. Spiritual things. Eternal things. You must learn to see life *through the eyes of a Lion*. Doing so is to utilize the telescope of faith, which will not only allow you to perceive the invisible—it will give you the strength to do the impossible.

DESTINED FOR IMPACT

A man named Daryl walked into a pawnshop in Los Angeles with a guitar. He popped the case and asked the clerk what he could get for it. When the inevitable haggling was over, he emerged with a fistful of cash. Two hundred fifty dollars, to be exact. Not exactly a jackpot. If the guitar had been a junker left over from lessons he had been forced to take as a child, that could even be considered decent money. But this was not some old beater, and \$250 was nowhere close to decent money. This guitar belonged to Tom Petty and was worth eighty times what Daryl sold it for. He had been ripped off more than he could possibly imagine.

In addition to not being all that bright, Daryl was a thief. He worked as a security guard at a California soundstage, where Tom Petty and his world-famous Heartbreakers were rehearsing in preparation for a tour. One day the group discovered that five electric guitars were missing. Daryl was being paid to protect the gear in the facility, but it turned out the gear needed protection from

him. The five guitars he stole were worth more than \$100,000 combined.¹

Perhaps Daryl was desperate for money, and so no price was too low. Or maybe he had no idea what the instrument was actually worth. That would be hard to believe, considering whom he stole it from. A quick Google search could have filled him in. But what I couldn't stop thinking about when I read the news story was this: when you don't recognize the value of what you have in your hands, you will always get from it far less than it is worth.

We're not talking about guitars anymore, are we? you might be thinking. No, we're talking about something much bigger: you. More specifically, the potential you carry deep down inside.

YOU ARE THE ONE, NEO

There is a calling on your life. A great, big, God-sized calling. God has plans for you and has been dreaming about them since before you were even born. You are destined for impact. My heart is racing just thinking about it! I wish I could jump out of this book, look you in the eyes, and tell you to your face so that you could see that I mean it. And then if you still didn't get it, I would shake your shoulders and say it louder. I pray that, by the time you reach the end of the book, God will have poured Red Bull into your veins and your heart will be pumping like a racehorse, because you'll be so eager to see your destiny fulfilled.

If you are reading these words, you have been given a unique, powerful, custom-built platform. A voice. As long as there is breath in your lungs, you have a microphone in your hands. There are things God intends for you to accomplish that no one else has

been chosen for. Words he wants you to speak. Actions that speak louder than words. And through it all, he wants you to leave a mark, to put a dent in the universe.

But if you don't understand that calling, you will undervalue it. Just as a pawnshop employee seems to be doing you a favor by taking some "old piece of junk"—that is actually priceless—off your hands, a failure to understand how powerful and extraordinary God's plans for you are will lead to you being taken advantage of by the enemy and failing to live up to your potential.

I don't know what you see when you look in the mirror. If you are like me, there is a long list of things you wish you could change. The bags under my eyes say that I don't get enough sleep. My nose is crooked, as it has been since middle school, when I broke it jumping on a friend's trampoline. I'd like to think it gives me character in an Owen Wilson kind of way, but most of the time I just see that it's not straight. Though I am only thirty-two, I already see little lines forming near the corners of my eyes that speak of the aging process that has already begun. When I first wake up most mornings, I splash water on my face, look at myself, and think, *Dude, you look like you got hit by a truck*. But lately there have been a lot of times when I have seen a sadness in my face that hasn't always been there.

Regardless of what you see looking back at you while you brush your teeth, I can tell you with zero hesitation that to God there is nothing ordinary about you. You spit your toothpaste out just like everybody else, but the truth is, you are complex, special, and one of a kind. I realize I'm getting all Barney the Purple Dinosaur on you, but I'm dead serious. There is nothing even remotely close to normal about you.

The trouble with this sort of talk is that callings are invisible.

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You can't see destiny. It's not readily apparent when you look at it with the naked eye. If you take a selfie, you won't see the version of yourself you are meant to become, no matter what filter you use.

YOU MATTER MORE THAN YOU KNOW

To make things worse, just about every part of our lives makes us feel as though we are just another number, just another person. A cog in the machinery of the universe. A little lemming.

There is perhaps no experience in life that makes you feel less special than being at the division of motor vehicles, trying to obtain or renew your driver's license. Take a number, sit down, and lose a little bit of your soul. We will call you sometime this decade. Maybe.

Even the sign at McDonald's makes you feel insignificant: You are just one out of a gazillion people who have eaten a Big Mac. Give us your money. We can't even get fat without being made to feel like a tiny statistic.

Recently I bumped my head and cut my scalp just to the right of my part. The laceration was about an inch and a half long. I had been leaning over below an open window, and when I stood up the corner tore into my head. The people I was with took one look at me and said, "You need to go to the ER."

The place was packed. People everywhere. You'd think a bleeding head wound would get me to the front of the queue. No such luck. The receptionist told me it would be an hour and

a half. Four and a half hours later, a frazzled nurse finally called me back.

“Levy Loose Co,” she said, completely butchering my name as countless people have over the years. (For the record, my first name is pronounced Levi, just like the jeans, and *Lusko* is pronounced Ləskō, and yes, I did have to use Google to figure out that an upside-down *e* is how you make the *uh* sound.) Completely out of dignity, I didn’t even bother to correct her. I walked in her direction, holding gauze to my head, and said, “I’m Levy Loose Co. Please fix my head.” Half a bottle of superglue later, I was on my way. (You read that right. They actually glued my head shut.)

So much of our lives feels pretty unimportant, composed of activity that is seemingly insignificant. Folding clothes, writing papers, paying bills, watching *Seinfeld* reruns, eating dinner. Repeat. But don’t let the simplicity of life fool you. You are so close to the details that it can be difficult to get perspective, but you are a part of a much larger story. You matter more than you know.

You might feel pretty ordinary or average. Perhaps you even have the Cs on your report card to prove it. If you were a late bloomer like me, middle school was brutal for you. Have you been picked on or squashed down by people? That gets old pretty quickly and eventually can cause you to believe what is being said about you. Even worse, maybe you have been flat-out told you are worthless. You feel tempted to accept that you are doomed to alcoholism, like your father before you, or divorce, like just about everyone you know. Hear me loud and clear: these are all lies!

You were made in the image of God. That’s right, made. You are not smart mud or a monkey wearing pants. God *made* you. Fearfully, wonderfully, he knit you together inside your mother. You’re no accident. Out of all creation, God made humans, male

and female, to be like him. And as his image-bearer, you possess a gift no animal was given—self-awareness. You have free will. You are not a robot or a puppet.

Like God, you have a personality. A sense of humor. You can laugh and sing, make love and create, dream and destroy. You have feelings and can be hurt. When things don't go our way, we get sad and can be grieved, just like God. This might surprise you, but God doesn't always get what he wants, and neither do we. Jesus knocks at the doors of our hearts, and we have to invite him inside in order to be saved. He is a gentleman, so he knocks. He won't go all SEAL Team Six and kick the door down. He gives us the dignity and responsibility of making our own decisions.

You are also immortal. The question is not whether you will live forever, but where. Four hundred years from now, and four thousand years after that, you will still exist—you will still be alive, and you will still be you.

Then there is the matter of what God was willing to spend to redeem you and give you hope, when sin and death had their suffocating stranglehold on your life. The value of something comes from what someone is willing to pay to have it. And boy, were you expensive. The Bible says that while we were dead in our sins, God demonstrated his love for us by sending his Son to die for us (Romans 5:8). You weren't purchased with any common currency, like gold or silver, but with the precious blood of Jesus. His veins were opened, and then, hanging on two pieces of wood on top of a hill shaped like a skull, the Son of God died to pay the price for every wrong thing you have done. Sin is a capital crime, so he died to set you free.

There is no higher price that has ever been paid for anything in history. No Rolex, luxury yacht, penthouse apartment,

work of art, or private island can come close to being as outrageously expensive as the price Jesus paid to secure your release from captivity. When he was faced with the thought of you being separated from him and the plans he has for your life, he gladly strapped himself into your electric chair and died in your place so you could go free. You are valuable—not just by birth, but because blood was spilled so you could be born again.

That's not all. As a child of God you have been entrusted with the Holy Spirit. The same Holy Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead now lives in your heart and is ready and waiting to be activated. Greater energy courses through you than can be measured with horsepower. As often as you ask, the Spirit is prepared to surge afresh into your soul, like the power coming from Iron Man's glowing chest piece, turbocharging your efforts as you rise up to do all God wants you to do.

Then there are the gifts and unique privileges you have been given. There are spiritual capabilities and also skills, talents, and abilities. He has made you passionate about certain things. You have specific connections and opportunities that I haven't been given. There are people you get to talk to every day whom it would take a miracle for a preacher to get in front of. But for you it's as effortless as sitting in second period or clocking in for an afternoon shift at your job. Lucky!

Oh, and you have also been tasked with the greatest mission that has ever been undertaken in the history of the world—the Great Commission, a mission to go fishing. The orders from your commanding officer are pretty clear: go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. People who believe will be saved, but if they do not, they are not. You're pretty much like Frodo, except instead of a ring that has to get to the volcano, you

have a message that is the only hope of saving mankind from sin and death.

ROYAL REPRESENTATIVES AND SPIRITUAL SUPERHEROES

So let's recap: The God who created the universe made you and trusted you with his image. The most important person ever to live was willing to die to save you. You are tapped into a power source greater than the electricity generated at Niagara Falls added to the mushroom cloud of Hiroshima, plus you have spiritual super-powers. If I were tweeting about you, I would hashtag it this way: #NoBigDeal #ReallyBigDeal #TheFirstHashtagWasSarcastic.

I hope you are starting to get a sense of how incredibly, wildly unordinary you are. You, my friend, were put on this earth to make waves, disrupt the status quo, and kick over some stinking applecarts. The apostle Peter said that you are “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation,” God’s “own special people” that he brought “out of darkness into His marvelous light” so you might proclaim his praises (1 Peter 2:9). *Hello?! Look at those adjectives! I mean, I could go off on the nouns, but even just glancing at the descriptive words should give you a sense of how God sees you: chosen, holy, special, marvelous, and royal.*

I have been in the presence of royalty only once. I was about ten feet from Prince William, Prince Harry, and Kate Middleton, the duchess of Cambridge, at a bike race I attended in England. I rode to the race on my bicycle, traveling about seventy-five kilometers from York, where I was staying. They flew in their royal helicopter to see it. I had to fight through the crowds of

200,000-plus people to get to a friend of mine, who had gotten up at the crack of dawn to save us a spot by the winner's podium. They were escorted through us common people to their private box to see the racers go by, arriving just moments before the action started, while the rest of us stood for hours, packed in like sardines. They were given the royal treatment. Why? Because they are royalty. A day is coming when one of those two brothers will sit as king on the throne of England.

That's earthly royalty. You are a part of the royal line of heaven—kings and priests to our God. Citizens of a coming kingdom that can't be shaken. No, you don't have a tiara or a crown yet, but you are a son or daughter of the King who's higher than all other kings! There is no game when it comes to his throne. He shall reign forever and us with him. To use an epic line from the movie *The Avengers*, "You are burdened with glorious purpose."²

Knowing what I know about you, I am humbled by the chance to write something you would read. Far better than cutting in line or owning a ceremonial sword (though let's be honest: that would be pretty sweet), the privilege attached to our status as Christ followers is that we get to represent God. That's what it means to be an ambassador. You are a royal representative of the crown. And we are deputized, on behalf of the King, to offer pardons and full-fledged citizenship to any and all who will receive it. That's heavy stuff!

Your potential is unlimited. God's desire is to do through your life "exceedingly abundantly above" what you could ask for or even think of (Ephesians 3:20). Whether you are sixteen or sixty, no matter where you have been or what you have seen, you haven't even scratched the surface of all that God intends for you. There is music inside you waiting to burst out, poems you're meant to

write, horses you're meant to ride, people you're meant to touch, companies waiting to be launched, things you're supposed to invent, clothing lines you'll design—all to the glory of God.

“But what about the laundry? The bills? The fact that I still need to go to the DMV and I literally ate a Big Mac for lunch today?” you ask.

I have told you that you are a spiritual superhero, a part of the royal family that will reign through all eternity. But day to day your life is made up of seconds and minutes that often don't

HOW DO YOU
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feel all that special. How do you live out an extraordinary calling while doing ordinary things and living in a world that is all screwed up?

That is not only the million-dollar question; it is why we desperately need to have our eyes opened up. Living out the calling on your life isn't necessarily going to mean doing entirely new things, but doing things in an entirely new way. You have to see your life through the eyes of a Lion.

I had my pupils dilated the last time I was in for an eye exam. I protested and complained and begged the doctor not to do it. He insisted and promised me I would get a sucker if I would behave. When your pupils are dilated, it makes you extremely farsighted. It's an unsettling procedure that allows extra light to come into your eyes so that you can see things far away in great detail, but things close up are blurry and out of focus. I can't stand that feeling and couldn't wait for my pupils to shrink back to normal so that I could get on with my life.

I kept getting so frustrated while I waited for the dilation to

wear off, because I was unable to make out anything on my phone. It was all blurry. I finally figured out that if I held my phone at arm's length, I was able to read it. You should have seen my wife laughing at me holding my phone several feet away from my face. But I didn't care. I was back in the game.

My aim is for God to use this book to dilate the eyes of your soul so that you will see things as laser sharp that are yet far off, and so that all the things that seem so real, but are not going to last, would lose their crispness. I want to show you that God doesn't expect you to be happy about what has been torn from your hands—whether it's a marriage, your health, a job, or someone you love—but if you are willing to trust him, he can turn trash into triumph.