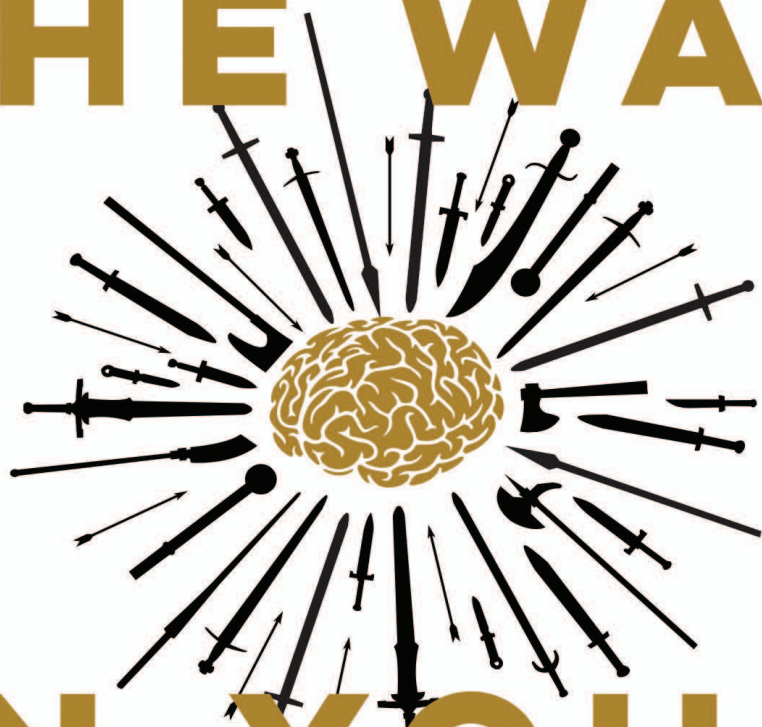


**CRAIG GROESCHEL**

*NEW YORK TIMES* BESTSELLING AUTHOR

# WINNING THE WAR

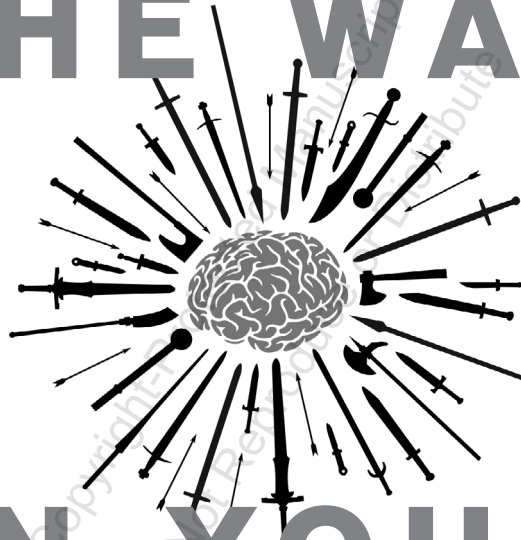


# IN YOUR MIND

**CHANGE YOUR THINKING,  
CHANGE YOUR LIFE**

CRAIG GROESCHEL

# WINNING THE WAR



# IN YOUR MIND

CHANGE YOUR THINKING,  
CHANGE YOUR LIFE

 ZONDERVAN  
BOOKS

## ZONDERVAN BOOKS

*Winning the War in Your Mind*

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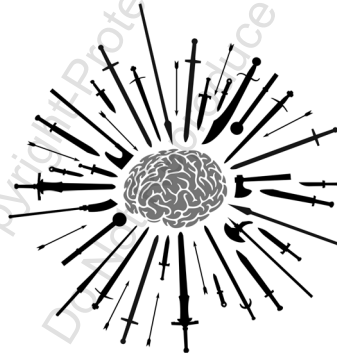
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## PART 1

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# THE REPLACEMENT PRINCIPLE



## Remove the Lies, Replace with Truth

*God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of  
power and of love and of a sound mind.*

—2 TIMOTHY 1:7 NKJV



## CHAPTER 1

---

# PERCEPTION IS REALITY

### **MY FRIEND KEVIN SERVED ON OUR CHURCH STAFF AS ONE**

of our pastors for close to twenty years before retiring. Way back in the early days, our staff used to play a game called capture the flag in our storefront church offices. We occasionally got violent as players tried to seize the flag. But because we were ministers, it was of course holy violence. Eventually, however, two people ended up getting injured, so we had to establish some guidelines.

One of those rules was no attacks before 8:00 a.m. I tend to get to work early, and one day as I showed up around 7:00 and began walking to my office, my Spidey sense went off. Something wasn't right. Suspecting a threat, I threw open a closet door to find Pastor Kevin hiding. I don't know if he had spent the entire night in there, but his plan was to wait patiently for a surprise attack at go time.

But thanks to my superhero ability to detect danger, I thwarted his plan. I was so excited that I slammed the door shut, wedged

## PART 1: THE REPLACEMENT PRINCIPLE

my foot against the bottom, and yelled triumphantly, “You’re going to spend the day in that closet, Kevin!”

I grabbed a chair to secure my prisoner. Chuckling maniacally, I said, “I’m putting a chair under the doorknob!” But no matter how hard I tried, I couldn’t get a chair to fit. And because I couldn’t move my foot from the door, there was nothing I could do to lock Kevin in the closet. Fortunately for me, I realized he didn’t know that. He believed me. So with all the fake confidence I could muster, I sold it. “There’s now a chair under the doorknob, Kevin. You can’t get out!” Yes, I lied, but I’m a pastor, so it was holy lying.

Well, what did Kevin do? More like what did he *not* do. He never tried to open the door! He just believed my lie.

Kevin started shouting, “Lemme out! Lemme out! Please, lemme out! I don’t want to spend the day in here. Lemme out!”

I couldn’t stop laughing. Because the door was unlocked. All he had to do was turn the handle and push, and he would be free. But he just stayed in the closet.

I had a premarital counseling appointment at 8:00, so I went to my office to meet with the soon-to-be-married couple. At about 8:20, I heard something in the ceiling above me. Then I heard the noise again. It was Kevin. He had scaled the shelves in the closet and gotten up into the ceiling tiles, trying to find a way out.

When a ceiling tile suddenly poked out, I saw Kevin’s eyes glaring down at me. I asked the couple to forgive the intrusion, then looked up and jokingly said, “If you wait until I’m finished with this meeting, I’ll call the fire department and see if they can get you down. If not, you’re spending the rest of your life in that



ceiling!” The couple I was counseling faced a dilemma: should they laugh or pray for the guy stuck above us?

Out of respect for them, Kevin waited. The whole time, the closet door was unlocked.

I wonder if you feel locked up or taken captive. If so, have you considered that you might be trapped in a self-made prison? You may feel held back from living the life you want to live, not experiencing the relationship you want with God, with little to no hope for the future, but are you? If you think you're trapped, if you believe there's a lock on the door, you've bought into a lie. And it is the lie, nothing else, that is holding you back. Yet if you identify that lie, then you can remove it. You can replace it with the truth and be free. Your liberation is a simple two-step process:

- Remove the lie.
- Replace it with truth.

But the struggle in this process is very real and very hard, and it can feel like a war is being fought in your life. Because that's exactly what is happening.

## **THE BATTLE FOR YOUR MIND**

In the eighties, we were taught that love is a battlefield. Thank you, Pat Benatar! If you're a bit younger, you learned the same lesson from Jordin Sparks. If you are even younger, you know Battlefield as a series of video games.

## PART 1: THE REPLACEMENT PRINCIPLE

But no, your *mind* is a battlefield, and the battle for your life is always won or lost in your mind.

Picture a battle with two opposing sides. Now imagine that the people on one side don't realize they're involved in a battle. The enemy is attacking and taking them out, picking them off one by one, but they are oblivious.

Hard to imagine because it's just too absurd? I agree. But every day, you are engaged in a battle; are you aware of it? You may not recognize the battle you're in while it's wreaking havoc in your life. Ever wonder why you can't shake a habit? Why you feel like you can't connect with God? Why you lose your temper so easily? Why you too often make bad decisions? Why you and your spouse fight so much? Why you're consumed with worry, fear, and negativity?

There is a reason why. Your mind is a war zone, and you are under attack. It's critical that you become aware of the fight. You cannot change what you do not confront. If you ignore the

**“YOU CANNOT CHANGE  
WHAT YOU DO NOT  
CONFRONT.”**



battle, you lose the battle. The apostle Paul made this truth clear: “We are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:12 NLT).

Your adversary is not your boss, spouse, child, ex, or neighbor with the demonic dog that is always barking. You may not realize it, but the one you are fighting against is your spiritual enemy, the devil. Sound too extreme? That's exactly what your enemy wants.

There is an old saying that goes, “The greatest trick the devil ever pulled was convincing the world he doesn’t exist.” Satan doesn’t want you to believe in him, so he works subtly. He knows that if you ignore him, he can invade your mind with impunity. He can plant seeds of doubt, confusion, worry, depression, and anxiety that will continue to grow.

Satan is your unseen enemy whose mission is to “steal and kill and destroy” (John 10:10), stop you (1 Thess. 2:18), and devour you (1 Peter 5:8). Satan despises you with more hatred than you can imagine. He wants to keep you from God and from the life God has for you. He wants to keep you from intimate relationships with those you love most. He wants to rob you of inner joy and abiding peace. He wants to strip you of the fulfillment you could have in knowing you are making a difference with your life.

So how does he do this?

Simple. He lies. Just like I lied to Kevin about the locked door. Satan is a deceiver, and his strategy to defeat you is to persuade you to believe his lies. Jesus warned us, “There is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44). I think it’s interesting that the only time Satan is called a creator, a father, is here in connection to lies.

Understand this: Satan is your enemy, and every day he is prowling around (1 Peter 5:8), watching you, looking for a place where you might believe a lie.

If you succeed at something, maybe he can convince you that you don’t need God. If you fail, he’ll try to brainwash you into thinking you’ll always be a failure.

## **PART 1: THE REPLACEMENT PRINCIPLE**

You have a great first date? He'll suggest romance is the only thing that will make you happy. First date was a disaster? He'll whisper that you'll never have anyone love you for who you are.

If you do a nice thing for a difficult person, he'll murmur that you're a pretty great person yourself and really don't need God's grace. If instead you speak harshly to someone, he'll whisper that you're an awful, hateful person whom God could never love.

If you're trying to stay away from porn, he will tell you everyone else is doing it. If you give in to porn, he'll make you feel like you're the only person sick enough to do such a disgusting thing.

Satan is conniving and trying to lock you in a prison of lies.

But you are not his prisoner of war, unless you choose to be. Those days can be over. That's your call.

### **AS IF A LIE WERE TRUE**

For centuries people believed the world was flat. (Some still do. Don't believe me? Google it. You'll find there are "Flat Earthers" today.) Because they believed the wrong idea, it impacted their lives as if it were true. People would not venture too far out in the ocean for fear they might sail off the edge. Why? Once again, a lie believed as truth will affect your life as if it were true.

Growing up, a lot of us were told that going swimming right after eating wasn't safe. Our parents made us wait thirty minutes after a meal to get in the pool. The only problem is that it's not dangerous to swim after eating. That was and is a lie. Right now

you may be thinking, *No, I'm pretty sure that's true*. But it isn't! Yet we believed it, so the lie affected our lives as if it were true.

Missing some swimming time isn't a big deal, but what if you believe significant lies that have serious implications? What if you buy into the lie that you'll never be good enough? Or that you made too many mistakes? Or that God doesn't really care about you? Or that you'll never be able to stop doing what you don't want to do?

One more time, because this point is crucial: a lie believed as truth will affect your life as if it were true.

There is a specific lie I have believed as long as I can remember. Living as if that were true has been one of the biggest limiting forces in my life. For years my strongest thoughts have always been about my shortcomings. I have always felt inadequate. No matter what anyone else said, my inner voice always screamed, *No matter how hard you try, you'll never measure up*.

Why did I feel that way? Frankly, I'm not sure; I have never not felt that way. It seems self-doubt comes naturally to me, but at the same time I could give you a resume proving why I should feel that way.

Essentially, I was living a faithless life.

As I type these words about how we can control our thought life, my mind is racing. As the psalmist often wrote (Ps. 42:5, for example), I am wrestling with my thoughts. I am battling feelings of overwhelming anxiety because I have said yes to too many things and overcommitted myself again.

Yes, my mind is out of control. I wish I could tell you I'm full

## PART 1: THE REPLACEMENT PRINCIPLE

of faith as I write this first chapter of the book, but my thoughts are full of fear.

But then I come back to what I know is true. And what is true is the point of this book.

I swat at the swarm of thoughts flitting around my head and remember that I am not a victim of my own mind. I have power over my thoughts. I am not captive to them. With God's help, I can make them captive to me.

While I know those truths, at the same time the reality is that I am a struggling thought warrior who has battled insecurity, negativity, fear, and anxiety most of my life.

Midway through college, something dramatic happened to me. Jesus changed my life. By God's grace, he found me and saved me.

Soon I was being so transformed by my relationship with Christ that, while still very new in my faith, I sensed God calling me to be a pastor. (Way before pastors could wear cool shoes and have more Instagram followers than church members.)

As God was building my faith, I felt him telling me I could make a difference in the world through his church. All my childhood insecurities and teenage self-doubts were being eclipsed by glimpses of hope. What do I mean? Well, here's a little backstory for context:

When I was growing up, my family couldn't afford name-brand clothes, so my mother bought used Izod socks at garage sales, cut the alligators out, and sewed them on my generic shirts.

I felt fake.

In second grade I discovered I was color-blind. Not only could

I not match my fake Izod shirts to my no-name pants, but I would never see the beauty of this world as others could.

I felt defective.

In a spelling bee with my classmates, I misspelled Mississippi. We had learned a song teaching us how to spell the word. And every time an *i* appears, there's only one of them and two of everything else. How could I possibly misspell Mississippi?

I felt stupid.

In fifth grade a girl named Tiffany dumped me for a guy named Brian. Her reason? Brian had a motorcycle. I only had a moped. (Yes, twelve-year-olds in my small town drove motorcycles and mopeds.) Tiffany said I was Richie Cunningham and she wanted the Fonz. (If you're too young to remember *Happy Days*, then think of it like she said I was Screech and she wanted Zack Morris.)

I felt lame.

My father played minor league baseball. He was a professional athlete, and I wasn't sure if I could even play in college.

I felt inadequate.

These isolated events, along with many others, formed my perception of myself into the reality I would carry into my newfound faith as a young adult.

I felt I wasn't good enough.

So I learned to play it safe and avoid risks at all costs. I felt that, given any opportunity, I would fail. I quietly came to define success as just not failing.

Chances are good you have your own set of lies holding you back. The lies nearly derailed my call to ministry.

## PART 1: THE REPLACEMENT PRINCIPLE

### FOR NOW, IT'S A NO

Only weeks after putting my faith in Jesus, I tried to teach my first Bible study to a group of young guys in a little church in Ada, Oklahoma. Afterward the leader of the youth group said, “Well, I guess teaching the Bible is not your gift, is it?”

Three years later I finally got up the nerve to try teaching the Bible again, after being asked to preach my first sermon. After the service, as I stood at the door saying goodbye to church members, an older gentleman looked at me with a raised brow and remarked, “Nice try.” Nice try?!

The next lady in line asked if I had any other skills besides being a preacher and then made a weak attempt to encourage me to keep my options open. Seriously, that really happened. I had to fight off the temptation to run and hide in the church baptistry. And yes, full immersion!

Despite yet another setback, still believing God’s call, I continued my journey toward full-time vocational ministry by going to seminary following college and marriage. About halfway through seminary, the day finally came when I stood before a group of spiritual leaders as a candidate for ordination in our denominational church. With the entire committee looking on, the spokesperson explained to me, “We’ve chosen not to ordain you. You don’t have the gift-mix we see in most pastors. In fact, we are not sure you are called to be a pastor. But feel free to try again next year. But for now, it’s a no.”

Immediately all those childhood memories met up with my



teenage memories. They all joined forces with the rejections from the church, forming an avalanche of negative thoughts that crashed over me, engulfing me. The voices roared loudly, *You aren't enough! You will never be enough! You will never measure up!*

And then the final verdict was delivered: *You . . . don't . . . have . . . what it takes!*

Driving home in my red Geo Prizm, I felt dejected, embarrassed, confused, and angry. Devastated. *How can I explain to my wife that I didn't make the cut? How can I face my pastor? My friends? My classmates? The church where I serve?* The tears flowed as every possible negative thought played on repeat.

But then a strange thing happened.

Suddenly a different voice interrupted the others. God spoke. He spoke to *me*. While not audible, the words somehow seemed louder than any physical voice I had ever heard.

In that moment, my heavenly Father said, "You are not who others say you are. You are who *I* say you are. And I say you are called to ministry."

While that was of course one of the most powerful moments of my life and a massive turning point, I wasn't suddenly healed of my negative think-

ing or delivered from believing every lie I'd told myself while growing up. The patterns were still there. The consequences were still ingrained. But I began to realize God had a very different way for me to think and a much healthier way for me to think of

**“ YOU ARE NOT WHO OTHERS SAY YOU ARE. YOU ARE WHO I SAY YOU ARE. ”**



## **PART 1: THE REPLACEMENT PRINCIPLE**

myself. I realized he was offering me a choice of whether to continue to believe my lies or accept his truth about me.

That's the beauty of allowing God to master our minds: he gives us a new path, a new way to think, but we have to get on board, agree, and cooperate with him.

### **LIE DETECTION**

How about you? What negative messages did you take away from your childhood?

What unhealthy and destructive conclusions have you come to believe about yourself and your place in the world?

Satan's strategy to win the battle for your mind is getting you to believe lies. If you believe a lie, it will hold you back from doing what God's calling you to do.

The lie will keep you living in shame from the past, when God wants to set you free for a better future.

The lie will keep you from living with joy and freedom and confine you to a less-than existence.

When legendary magician Harry Houdini came into a town to do his show, he often went to the local jail, gathering a crowd of people along the way. To get buzz going about his upcoming performance, he asked the jailer to lock him in a cell. Time after time, jail after jail, town after town, Houdini escaped within minutes.

But one jailer had heard that Houdini was coming, and the jailer was ready. When Houdini closed the cell door, the jailer put the key in the lock and secretly turned it in the wrong direction. He

then removed the key, and everyone watched as Houdini struggled to escape—by unknowingly locking himself in repeatedly. Finally, in frustration, Houdini admitted he could not escape. The jailer then revealed his deception. Houdini had believed a lie, and the lie had held him captive.

Living your life by a lie is a lot like believing the door is locked when it isn't. On the other side is freedom. But you first have to commit to some personal lie detection to experience the abundant life Jesus came and died to give you. That leads us to our first exercise.

— EXERCISE 1 —

## YOUR THOUGHT AUDIT



**DO YOU EVER FIND YOURSELF THINKING THINGS LIKE:**

- I just can't change. Even if I try, I'll always be stuck.
- I can never get out of debt. No matter what I do, I'll always struggle financially.
- No one really loves me. And if they knew the real me, they'd definitely not want to be in my life.
- I'm not good at relationships. When we start to grow closer, I always do something to mess things up.
- People in my family struggle with their weight. I'll never like my body.
- I can't get close to God. I'm sure it's my fault. There must be something about me that keeps me from experiencing God like others do.
- When I look at what others post on social media, I feel like my life sucks.

If you think you can't do something, you probably won't. If, on the other hand, you think you can, odds are you will. The

same is true with your problems. If you dwell on them, they will overwhelm you. But if you look for solutions, you will find some.

If you feel like a victim, you'll think like a victim, and the direction of your life could be one of misery. But if you believe that by the power of Christ you can overcome, then with his help you can. Consider this:

- Who you are today is a result of your thoughts in the past.
- Who you become in the future will reflect what you think about today.

Whether it's self-doubts or worrying or responding poorly to a bad day or a tough season in life, we all wrestle with negative thoughts that try to hijack our emotions and decisions.

The goal of this exercise is to give you the opportunity to think about what you think about.

Let's conduct a thought audit. Hit pause for a moment and prepare your mind. Focus on your honest answers. This could begin the process of you changing your mind. There are two parts to this exercise.

---

## **PART 1: INVENTORY**

---

As you go through a normal day, take stock of your thoughts. Write them down, type them into the notes on your phone, or record them in your voice memo app to transcribe later. Trust me, if you really want to change, you need to invest the time to figure out

## PART 1: THE REPLACEMENT PRINCIPLE

what you are regularly thinking. Be honest. Don't lie to yourself about the lies you tell yourself.

Evaluate the factors consistent in your day. Are you more negative in the morning but usually level out by the end of your workday? Or the opposite? Do you tend to bring negative thinking home with you? Or do you manage to leave it at work? Consider all the dynamics and patterns of your day. Pray and ask God to reveal anything he wants you to see and understand in how you think.

Once you see your thoughts in black and white, you can begin to work on your thought life. Jesus said the truth sets us free, but first we must reveal the truth.

---

## PART 2: AUDIT

---

Here are twenty questions to help you analyze what you regularly think. I've broken down the questions into two categories: defense (protection from the Enemy) and offense (growth toward God). Write down your honest answers. When you're done, compare your defense and offense. This evaluation will help you see your thoughts and work on real change.

### On a typical day:

#### DEFENSE:

- Are my thoughts tearing me down?

- **Do I think worried thoughts?**
  
- **Does my self-talk cause me to shrink back in fear?**
  
- **Do my thoughts cause me to keep people at a distance?**
  
- **Are my unhealthy thoughts keeping me from the life I want?**
  
- **Are my unhealthy thoughts keeping me from the life God wants for me?**
  
- **Are my thoughts negative, toxic, or self-deprecating?**

## PART 1: THE REPLACEMENT PRINCIPLE

- Does my inner voice tell me I'm helpless or that life is hopeless?
- Do I find myself skeptical of others?
- Do I lean toward imagining worst-case scenarios?

### OFFENSE:

- Are my thoughts building me up?
- Do I think peaceful thoughts?
- Does my self-talk inspire me to take faith risks?



- **Do my thoughts help me get closer to others?**
  
  
  
  
- **Do my thoughts reflect my faith?**
  
  
  
  
- **Are my thoughts God-honoring?**
  
  
  
  
- **Do my thoughts reflect my hope in Christ?**
  
  
  
  
- **Do they inspire me to believe I can make a difference in the world?**
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- **Do they equip me to become more like Jesus?**

## **PART 1: THE REPLACEMENT PRINCIPLE**

- **Do my thoughts connect to the vision God has for my life?**

Remember, the goal is to think about what you think about. You can use this information as we move forward, to help you take practical steps in winning the battle in your mind. As we continue, we will get to some answers that deal with the truth you have revealed in this exercise. Be encouraged. You are one step closer to changing your thinking and believing what God says about you.