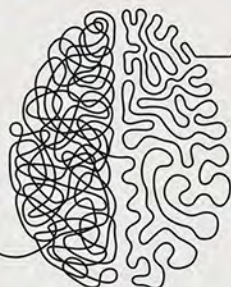


BRAIN WASHED

**Overcome Toxic Thoughts
and Take Back Control
of Your Mind**



MANNY ARANGO



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This book recounts events in the life of Emmanuel Arango according to the author's recollection and from the author's perspective. While all the stories are true, some dialogue and identifying details have been changed to protect the privacy of the people involved.

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To my wife, Tia

The journey required of us to become parents, forced us to practice the principles found in this book. Each year we waited to become parents I witnessed your adopting the Mind of Christ. Thank you for being mentally strong and choosing faith.

To my son, Theophilus

I wrote every chapter of this book knowing you'd read them one day. Even when doctors told us conceiving was impossible, I still wrote.

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Introduction

THE FINGER OF GOD

For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools.

Romans 1:21–22

I WAS IN A TRANCE as I stared at the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. Countless photographs of Michelangelo's famous fresco *Creation of Adam* exist, yet as I stood under the majestic work of art, I realized I had never truly seen the mural before that moment. No photograph can fully capture Michelangelo's three-dimensional effects. The images pop and pulsate with character, and the longer I stared, the more it felt as though Adam and God were moving closer and closer toward the crowd gathered beneath them.

It took my breath away.

Our tour guide startled me, and I immediately regretted that after standing in line for hours in peak-summer heat to enter the

Vatican City State, I had bolted off on my own, face like flint, leaving my group behind. But now that he'd found me, the guide pointed out that the shape of the swooping scarlet robe behind God forms an outline of the human brain and a green portion of fabric outlines the shape of the brain stem. He also drew my attention to how Adam's expression, depicted prior to his receiving God's touch, doesn't simply lack life but intelligence as well.

I was in awe of Michelangelo's ability to convey a rich theological message through art. When God created humanity, He endowed it with His divine image by granting us the gift of rational thought, intellectual creativity, and consciousness. To Michelangelo, then, it seems the divine spark that separated humans from other creatures in the garden of Eden was the power of their minds. God desires relationship and intimacy with humanity, and therefore He created Adam as a rational and intelligent being, one who could receive and reciprocate love and understanding.

The brilliance of Adam's mind is immediately on display as he goes to work studying God's creation within the opening chapters of Genesis. The Bible tells us that Adam is given the task of naming and categorizing all the species of animal life found in the garden of Eden. Earth is colonized and ruled by heaven through the image-bearing brilliance of Adam.

Did you know everyone's brains are washed—either by the Serpent or by God, our Father and King? But whereas the Serpent wants to destroy us with his brain washing, God wants to wash our brains with His truth. And we allow Him to do that by abandoning the Mind of Adam and adopting the Mind of Christ.

In the same way a criminal is incentivized to kidnap the son or daughter of wealthy parents, the Serpent's assault on Adam and Eve was a direct attack against God Himself. He kidnapped and hijacked Adam and Eve's minds in order to throw the entire colony of Earth into rebellion, and we are all part of that war. The Serpent's goal is to destroy God's kingdom, so he continues

his assault on God's throne by releasing a virus into the Mind of Adam.

This book is a field guide to help you win the battle taking place in the trenches of your mind, to regain control over rogue thoughts, so the kingdom of heaven can be firmly established on Earth. The dominion you experience over your mind directly correlates to the dominion heaven has on this planet. Your thought life will either be host to the terrorist cells of the Serpent or claimed as an instrument of righteousness that God can mobilize for His purposes. You will either be brain washed by the Serpent's secular agenda or brain washed in the blood of the Lamb. There is no neutral territory.

You may currently view your mind as your private property. You may believe that the thoughts you entertain have no effect on others. You may have picked up this book for self-help or self-improvement. But the truth of the matter is that our minds are valuable real estate, and the King is constantly giving us opportunities to surrender them to Him so they can be available for His use. The Serpent, though, desperately wants to privatize your mind, and the over-individualization of our culture is part of his scheme to push our species toward independence, insecurity, and isolation. That's why we must unconditionally surrender our minds to God instead of using them to oppose His rule.

The Never-Ending Fall

The realness of Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam* matches the painful images of the fall of Adam and Eve. Adam and his bride were deceived by the Serpent and ate from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. The Bible describes what follows as the fall of humankind.

Canyons were hollowed out as these first people fell to the ground. The flat earth beneath them cracked as the weight of glory crashed and crumbled. God's mirrored image imploded and shattered within them like a thousand glass windows on the surface

of a skyscraper. The sound of Adam's knee hitting the garden floor echoed throughout creation like thunder. Their physical fall, however, was only a reflection of their mental collapse.

Their brilliance was darkened.

Their intelligence was muted.

Their understanding faded.

Their genius disintegrated.

The apostle Paul taught the Roman church that when humanity refuses to acknowledge God as the Creator and King, our thinking is directly affected by that choice. Like a lamp that isn't connected to a source of electricity, our minds are dark without the light of God. The same pattern we find with Adam and Eve is clearly at work with all people. Paul wrote, "Although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools" (Romans 1:21-22). In a quest to gain worldly understanding, these humans ended up destroying the very minds they sought to enhance.

Unfortunately, many of us have embarked on this same journey of self-improvement. Many of us are also still operating with the fallen and debased Mind of Adam. Every mental stronghold you may have experienced in your lifetime is the result of Adam and Eve's fall from glory. We can live in the caverns and dark caves carved out by their fall, or we can ascend the mountain of the Lord to adopt His thoughts and His mind.

This book is for all the hitchhikers trying to leave the deserted minds of Adam and Eve behind.

iOS—The Mind of Christ

Years ago, I visited an Apple Store because my laptop was running really slow. Some friends had told me about a new operating system, and I asked the "Apple Genius" if he could upgrade my software. He

checked out my computer and then broke the unfortunate news that the upgraded software wasn't compatible with my older laptop. To get a new operating system, I would have to part ways with my old laptop and get a new one. In other words, new software required new hardware.

I'm afraid a lot of Christian teaching surrounding the life of the mind encourages people to upgrade their software while still using Adam's hardware. But the Mind of Christ is the new model, and God's operating system is compatible only with a complete change of hardware.

Jesus echoed this idea when He said, "Neither do people pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst; the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved" (Matthew 9:17). I have often made the mistake of trying to put God's thoughts into the Mind of Adam, and although there is an improvement, it's only temporary. Jesus doesn't simply want to give us new thoughts; He secured and promises us a new mind. Through the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives, Jesus can always deliver new thoughts to our human minds. His thoughts, however, are most compatible with His mind—the Mind of Christ.

Might I add that I took my Apple product to an Apple Store because the manufacturer was authorized, equipped, and the most knowledgeable concerning the product. As I looked up at the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, I was reminded of a simple truth—God is the manufacturer of the human mind and consciousness, yet humanity isn't always convinced that He's the best equipped or the most knowledgeable source for how to heal the mind.

In this book we will hold open the Bible as an instruction manual for the human mind and learn what this ancient God has to say about our current dilemmas. God's Word, and in particular the New Testament, isn't provided merely as an attempt to improve your mind but rather as an invitation for you to adopt the Mind of

Christ. The old hardware has reached its limit for upgrades. The old wineskins have been stretched to capacity. We've tried to make our own minds stronger, but honestly, we were all born with the Mind of Adam, our fallen forefather. We didn't do anything wrong; we made no mistakes. We were simply born into the lineage of Adam and inherited a flawed mind because of his decision to accept the Serpent's thought.

That's not where the story ends, though. The good news is that there's a bridge between the Mind of Adam, which we are all born into, and the Mind of Christ, which we all have access to. The Bible outlines a road map across that bridge, moving from that old mind to the new. From that fallen mind to the exalted one. From that natural mind to the supernatural.

Worth It but Not Easy

It's not easy leaving the familiarity of Adam's mind where we are all well-learned scholars and experts. Nor is navigating the Mind of Christ easy, because it is indeed foreign terrain. But I believe we can get there—especially if we journey together.

Nor is the renewal of our minds instant or quick but rather a life-long process. Moving from the depraved Mind of Adam to adopting the glorious and brain washed Mind of Christ is, as I've also indicated, a journey. But again, the good news is that Scripture lays out a road map for us to follow, which means we can track our progress along the way.

I desperately wish I could provide a shortcut to help us all arrive at the Mind of Christ quickly. But what I can do is offer a process and a companion along the narrow path to the Mind of Christ.

I also wish we could immediately skip ahead to the sections of this journey that are more practical. But to unravel the complex cords of consciousness that have led us to our current mindsets, we must retrace the steps of our fallen foreparents. The opening

chapters of Genesis outline the tragic fall of Adam and Eve, but in their fall, they left behind bread crumbs that will help us restore our minds to their original factory settings. The Gospels also outline this pattern since Christ is indeed a second Adam, sent to live out the course of the first Adam's life as an archetype for the rest of humanity. On this journey, we will backtrack in order to retrace the fallen steps of Adam, and then we'll move forward to follow the steps of Jesus.

The fall of Adam and Eve was layered, thus the foundation for the Mind of Christ is layered. Adam and Eve sustained three layers of destruction, and we'll have to construct three layers of foundation in order to recover all that was lost.

The first layer to sustain significant damage was their concept of God. Second, the Serpent destroyed their understanding of self. Last, their ability to relate to each other was marked with distrust, doubt, and dysfunction. And as we retrace the fall of humanity, we'll see these three distinct thought patterns. The Serpent's deception begins with a toxic thought about God. The fruit immediately shatters their understanding of self. And last, the Serpent positions humans against one another.

All toxic thoughts can be organized into those three categories:

1. Thoughts about God
2. Thoughts about self
3. Thoughts about others

The first stops along the journey may not seem as immediately helpful as the latter stops, but as your tour guide, I promise that the foundation we establish in the following chapters will support the weight of everything we endeavor to build. When we stand inside a home or building, we rarely compliment the owners or architects on how impressive we find the foundation. The foundation is

of utmost importance but goes unnoticed, taken for granted, and unpraised.

If we are to stand on the balcony of a renewed mind, hang expensive curtains from the windows of changed perspective, or enjoy the peaceful gardens of healed memories, then we must first pour the concrete for a stable and permanent foundation. We may never compliment builders on how perfectly level we find their foundations, but we sure would notice and complain if the foundations were faulty. For all you *Fixer Upper* fans, TV's Chip Gaines must do some structural demolition before Joanna Gaines can order furniture and fill the home with aesthetics and decor.

A Mind Map

I have carefully mapped out our journey from the Mind of Adam to the Mind of Christ.

Independence → Intimacy

Insecurity → Identity

Isolation → Interdependence

Independence from God → Intimacy with God

Insecurity within self → Identity within self

Isolation from others → Interdependence with others

The Mind of Adam is marked by independence, insecurity, and isolation, and so chapters 1, 2, 3, and 4 explain those mental frameworks. In order to build upward, we must first secure some bulldozers and dig down into the fallen Mind of Adam.

The Mind of Christ moves us from independence to intimacy, from insecurity to identity, and from isolation to interdependence. Chapters 5 and 6, then, outline the Mind of Christ—the human

archetype for intimacy, identity, and interdependence. This is where we'll construct the pillars, beams, walls, HVAC, and plumbing of our structure.

The last part of this book—chapters 7, 8, and 9—explores more practical thought patterns, like memories, regret, and anxiety. This final section is where we will furnish our home and install a security system for lasting protection.

Let's begin.



PART ONE

Understanding the Mind of Adam



Doubt Takes the Lead

What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.¹

A.W. Tozer

When [Satan] undertook to draw Eve away from God, he did not hit her with a stick, but with an idea.²

Dallas Willard

I FELT LIKE A COMPLETE FAILURE as one of my students stood suffering from a crippling panic attack in the lobby of our church minutes before the worship service was to begin. A massive boa constrictor of anxiety had coiled itself around her, and prayer seemed useless as I watched her struggle to breathe. She was bent over, trapped under the pressure, and I felt powerless to protect her from this generational Goliath.

Over the previous decade, as hundreds and thousands of young people poured into our church, we quickly learned that many of them were terrorized by mental health challenges and plagued with

destructive thought patterns. Statistically, we who lead and minister to these young people are doing so to the most medicated generation in the history of America.

I've prayed with teenagers who were drowning in depression.

I've talked with suicidal middle schoolers.

I've counseled young adults who constantly compared themselves to others.

I've sat with entire families trapped in a maze of toxic thoughts.

And I've stood in the lobby as a student got hit with a panic attack. (After a couple of minutes, my wife, who suffered from anxiety attacks for years, came to the rescue and helped restore this young girl's peace of mind.)

There's tension between the real and raw experiences I've had with people and the Bible I'm typically holding in my hand during those experiences. God's Word is clear regarding the realm of the mind and the power of our thoughts. The entire canon of Scripture is filled with promises and lessons on mental freedom, clarity, and peace.

Second Timothy 1:7 declares, "God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a *sound mind*" (emphasis mine, NKJV).

Second Corinthians 10:5 teaches, "We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and *we take captive every thought* to make it obedient to Christ" (emphasis mine).

Philippians 4:6 says, "Do not be *anxious* about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God" (emphasis mine).

In just these three short verses, the Bible teaches us that God has given us the power of sound thinking, the ability to take every thought captive, and dominion over anxiety and anxious thoughts. The gospel of Jesus Christ includes the cleansing of our minds, the renewal of our thoughts, and the power to operate the complex machinery of our minds with expertise and care. When we accept Christ as our Lord and Savior, He washes our minds in His blood and gives us a new mind.

In other words, He brain washes us.

The prophet Isaiah assures us that Jesus was “pierced for our transgressions,” “crushed for our iniquities,” and that “by his wounds we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5). We have access to the healing grace of God because Jesus was wounded in our place. This verse is the epitome of good news, but the good news gets even better when we examine the wounds of Christ and the corresponding areas of healing where we can exercise faith.

By His wounds, we are healed.

- Jesus was circumcised so we could be healed of private pain.
- Jesus’s sweat turned to blood to heal the human will.
- Jesus was whipped across His back so our past can be healed.
- Jesus was pierced in His side so our relationships can be healed.
- Jesus’s feet were wounded to restore the authority that was Adam’s.
- Jesus’s hands were nailed so our hands may receive our inheritance.
- Lastly, Jesus wore a crown of thorns so our minds may be healed.

The first bread crumb our foreparents left for our journey was their unfortunate conversation with the Serpent, so let’s start there.

Hit with an Idea

Genesis 3:1–5 says,

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’” The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God

did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’” “You will not certainly die,” the serpent said to the woman. “For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

The late Dallas Willard, who had a brilliant theological mind, offered eye-opening commentary on how the Serpent was able to seduce Eve. In his classic book *Renovation of the Heart*, he wrote,

Ideas and images are, accordingly, the primary focus of Satan’s efforts to defeat God’s purposes with and for humankind. When we are subject to his chosen ideas and images, he can take a nap or a holiday. Thus, when he undertook to draw Eve away from God, he did not hit her with a stick but with an idea. It was with the idea that God could not be trusted and that she must act on her own to secure her own well-being.³

The Serpent understood that ideas and thoughts were weapons that could be used for the destruction of God’s kingdom and creation. The first thought he held out for Adam and Eve as bait was doubt. He knew if they doubted the character of God, they would be compelled to become self-sufficient beings, so he convinced them that their King was a dictator, making the fight for independence inevitable. He knew if those first humans chose independence, God would not allow them to secede from the union without a war. (The Serpent also knew peace wouldn’t be available for my anxious teenager in the lobby of our church because of the war-torn creation.) The first domino fell as Eve reached out her hand, and the human race is still tripping over and being crushed under the dominoes as they continue to fall.

The Serpent didn’t destroy Adam and Eve with fruit; their undoing was a rather cruel and simple thought. And until we address that thought, our minds will be filled with countless other toxic thoughts. The first foundational stone of the Mind of Adam is doubt, specifically

doubt in the character of God. The Mind of Adam does not trust God; it's at war with Him. And unfortunately, although countless numbers of people today eagerly desire the peace of God, their minds are at war with God too. That makes it impossible for them to *have* the peace of God because they must first *be* at peace with God.

The root of anxiety is deeply spiritual. My student in the lobby, hyperventilating and filled with angst, represents the fallout of our war with God, and until there's unconditional surrender, there will be a continual onslaught of anxiety in our broken world.

Unconditional surrender, however, is possible only when we trust in the character and goodness of our Creator and King. The Serpent works tirelessly to continue casting the shadow of doubt and distrust on humanity's perception of God, and as we walk in the footsteps of our fallen foreparents, our minds are filled with more and more doubt.

Conversely, the first foundational stone of the Mind of Christ is faith, belief, and trust. As we determine to make our first move from the Mind of Adam to the Mind of Christ, we must move from doubt and independence to trust and surrender.

Doubting God's True Character Is Heretical

The Serpent stands before Eve and poses a question designed to produce doubt and mistrust: "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'" (Genesis 3:1).

The cunning and crafty Serpent knows that only one tree is off-limits. But he has an agenda, an angle, a thought he desperately needs Eve to adopt. He suggests that what God has prohibited drastically outnumbers what He has permitted for their pleasure and provision. His agenda is to cast even the faintest shadow of doubt in the human psyche toward the Creator and King.

The Serpent referencing "any tree" may seem like a minor detail. Yet if he can convince Adam and Eve that God prohibits more than

He provides, isn't He stingy, unfair, and can't be trusted? If this is a God who won't allow His creation to enjoy fruit from *any* of the trees, isn't His entire character called into question?

The Serpent's goal is for them to entertain doubt-filled thoughts about God:

This is a God who withholds blessing.

This is a God who hides things.

This God doesn't care about us.

This God has secrets.

This is a God of rules.

This God can't provide for our needs.

We can't trust this God; we can trust only ourselves.

Eve responds to the Serpent by declaring that they aren't allowed to even touch the Tree of Knowledge in the middle of the garden. But when did God prohibit *touching* the tree? He didn't. The Mind of Adam will constantly exaggerate God's good rules until they seem illogical and unrealistic.

Adam and Eve begin to wonder about God's character, and the Serpent is still casting doubt on the character and motives of God today. His tricks have never been updated.

What thoughts have you entertained about God? What is your idea of God? What version of God do you believe in?

- Is your version of God holding out on you?
- Is your version of God angry?
- Is your version of God someone you need to fear?
- Is your version of God stingy?
- Is your version of God a dictator?
- Is your version of God the image of your earthly parents?
- Is your version of God making you anxious?

You may have entertained erroneous—heretical—ideas about God, but our first step in redeeming those thoughts is a healthy confrontation of wrong ideas about Him. So let's set a few of them straight.

- God invented sex, so it was His idea.
- God laughs, so He likes fun.
- God made colors and gave us eyes, so He wants us to enjoy them.
- God created taste buds and showed up at weddings with wine.

Any Being who invents sex, laughs, creates colors and taste buds, and provides wine at a wedding seems like a marvelous Being to me. Unfortunately, the Serpent was able to spin a web of deception that caused Adam and Eve to believe that this jovial, loving, and kind God was prohibiting them from enjoying the trees of the garden.

What trees has the Serpent asked you about? What trees do you think God is prohibiting you from enjoying?

- Does your version of God want you poor?
- Does your version of God want you eternally single and celibate?
- Does your version of God want you to be barren?
- Does your version of God want you to be bored?
- Does your version of God want you anxious?

What version of God do you believe in, and which trees is He prohibiting you from enjoying? The God of the Bible provided countless trees for His children, but He protected them from the one tree He knew was dangerous by saying no. God said yes countless other times. Every loving parent says no when their children are in danger. Good parents don't prohibit sticking items into electrical

sockets or running into the street as an expression of hate but rather as an expression of love.

Please allow me to reassure you that . . .

- God is good.
- God is for you, not against you.
- God only wants to protect you.
- God loves you unconditionally.
- God is flawless in His character.
- God is unwavering in His love.
- God is perfect in His judgment.

And because of all these things, you can trust Him.

In his book *The Knowledge of the Holy*, A.W. Tozer writes these three sets of wise words:

The most portentous fact about any man is not what he at a given time may say or do, but what he in his deep heart conceives God to be like. We tend by a secret law of the soul to move toward our mental image of God.

What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.

Were we able to extract from any man a complete answer to the question, “What comes into your mind when you think about God?” we might predict with certainty the spiritual future of that man.⁴

Tozer communicates all this with a sniper’s accuracy, because everything can be traced to our ideas about God. Our ideas about Him will be either poisonous or nutritious to our minds, and an accurate concept of God is the ultimate brain food. Jesus stands at

the Tree of Life offering the fruit of orthodox theology. The Serpent still stands at the Tree of Knowledge, offering slanderous half-truths and heresies concerning God.

You can medicate yourself for the rest of your life and still continue to deal with the symptoms of your toxic thoughts, or you can change your mental diet and heal yourself from the inside out. Adam and Eve chose to binge on a diet of doubt and moral independence from the Tree of Knowledge, and until we consume healthy ideas concerning the character of God, we will need to mask our mental pain with various forms of self-medication.

The cross is the Tree of Life, and the cross of Christ is the demonstration of perfect theology. Everything we need to know about God can be clearly seen as Jesus hangs on a tree for the redemption of humanity.

Independence? Or God-Given Ignorance?

When I moved to England years ago, I had an adapter that allowed me to plug my electric shaver into a British outlet. But I hadn't accounted for something. My American shaver vibrated uncontrollably and died because it wasn't built to handle the increased measures of voltage. Similarly, our minds aren't equipped for the knowledge Adam and Eve let leak into the human consciousness, and the Enemy knew this.

The Serpent's sneaky sales pitch to the innocent couple culminated with this statement: "God knows that when you eat from [the tree] your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:5). He knew this statement was full of half-truths, hiding dire consequences for both them and for us.

Humans weren't built to handle the knowledge that is destroying us today. We're overinformed. We have access to a level of knowledge that kills—especially now that we're constantly connected to every world crisis through twenty-four-hour news. And though the Serpent told Eve that she and Adam could be like God, we're not gods, and

our human frailty is on display, crippling our teenagers with anxiety as the voltage of information tasers them into paralysis.

Adam and Eve's eyes were opened. Because the Serpent introduced distrust for the One who was their moral compass, they chose to be morally independent beings, becoming their own gods. Once there was doubt within the hearts of humans, they dethroned God as the moral lawgiver and bit into the fruit that would make them independent of His moral standard and objectivity.

As long as they trusted and obeyed God by avoiding the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, they were safe as morally dependent beings. Eating from the forbidden tree was the only way to obtain the knowledge of good versus evil. The original design of humanity doesn't include an ability to judge for ourselves what is good and what is evil. Neither has there been an update from the manufacturer. Adam and Eve were sold a lemon. They traded abundant life and unlimited provision for moral independence, because they doubted God's character and motives. And God's crown of moral independence crushed their heads.

The salesman with snakeskin boots, a forked tongue, and greasy slicked-back hair still stands in front of the Tree of Knowledge, offering sons and daughters of Adam and Eve the opportunity to exchange abundant life for moral independence. As we try to escape from God's moral judgment, we run full steam ahead into the pit of confusion, despair, depression, and anxiety. The fruit we stole from the tree of forbidden knowledge is indeed poison.

Anxiety—as well as gender confusion, depression, and every other form of mental unrest—is simply the side effect of wearing God's crown of moral independence. The human soul was designed for moral ignorance, not moral independence.

Maybe it's time to stop eating the forbidden fruit and return to God's throne with His stolen crown, once again becoming loyal, morally dependent beings so we can have true peace of mind. In order for our loving Creator to brain wash our broken minds with

the blood of the Lamb, we have to dethrone the false gods of our own opinions and return to dependency on Him alone.

We must accept His verdict regarding what is good.

We must accept His verdict regarding what is evil.

To be dependent on His mind and thoughts alone is to be brain washed. But like our fallen predecessors, we choose to be independent rather than brain washed by a Creator who loves us and knows what's best for us.

We fight it.

We resist it.

We want our opinions.

We want to give the final verdict.

We want the freedom to choose.

We want to choose our gender.

We want to choose our spouse.

We want to define marriage.

We want to be gods.

As long as we enthrone our own opinions, we'll be anxious, depressed, and medicated, and we'll experience mental unrest.

The prophet Isaiah declared that Jesus would be called "Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6). As thousands of people flood into our churches every Sunday, I'm keenly aware that they're looking to Jesus to be their Prince of Peace because they've suffered under the influence of anxiety for so long. Yet it becomes more and more clear that not everyone is willing to make Jesus their Prince. But only when we've made Him the Prince of our lives can He bring us His peace.

So many of us, though—refusing to make Him the Prince of our lives—still ask Jesus for peace that surpasses understanding. Sadly, we're our own "princes." We're filled with anxiety regarding areas of our lives we refuse to place under the lordship of Jesus. We've replaced God's throne with our opinions and feelings, and anxiety proves the experiment has failed. But peace is the exclusive right of those who are actively making Jesus their Prince.

When Jesus is the Prince over our finances, we have financial peace.

When Jesus is the Prince over our marriage, we have marital peace.

When Jesus is the Prince over our career, we have vocational peace.

When Jesus is the Prince over our ministries, we have spiritual peace.

Many of us today are also our own “lords.” When my wife and I leased an apartment, we called the landlord whenever something broke or didn’t work properly. If the dishwasher malfunctioned or the air conditioning wasn’t to our liking, we called the landlord, because the responsibility rests with the owner. But then when we became homeowners, a convenient number to call for help with household maintenance was no longer available. Assuming the role of landlord inevitably came with the responsibility of consistently being the lord of our own land.

When we’re the lords of our finances, our marriages, and all our moral decisions, we’re inevitably in over our heads. If we want to be our own lords, then we must provide peace, joy, purpose, fulfillment, and mental clarity for ourselves. But the reality is that none of us can do that. We’ve overplayed our hand.

We aren’t good princes; we’re inadequate lords. And we aren’t competent at playing God’s role.

The crown of moral independence has caused a cosmic headache as it rests on the head of humanity, and the sight of our teenagers bent over with anxiety should be a wake-up call for an unconditional surrender.

Based on the name of the forbidden tree, it’s clear that God understood how easily thoughts could be weaponized. He allows humanity access to the Tree of Life, and presumptive reasoning would assume that the opposite tree would simply be called the Tree of Death, since eating from it brings death. But God forbids Adam and

Eve to eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil because He understands that knowledge isn't always beneficial, and in many cases it kills. The Serpent baits Adam and Eve with a thought, and then they partake of the poisonous fruit of knowledge.

The descendants of Adam and Eve are still dealing with the venomous effects of both.

Anxiety and Grace

Like many people, I've had the awkward privilege of borrowing money from close friends and family members, and nothing has the power to fill the human heart with stress and anxiety like bumping into someone you've borrowed money from before you've had the chance to pay them back. The best-case scenario involves your spotting the person you owe before they spot you, allowing you to control the situation. And yes, by *controlling the situation*, I do mean avoiding that person altogether.

The worst-case scenario is when the cousin-turned-debt-collector startles you in a store's checkout line while you're spending money on something stupid. My hood upbringing may leak through the pages here, but I have seen my fair share of confrontations where the lender demands that items get returned to the shelves. Maybe I'm the only person who's ever heard someone say, "If you got money for Target, you got money to pay me back," but you can put that moment down as one of the top ten embarrassing moments of life.

Regardless of the circumstances, debt brings paranoia. The more debt you have, the more stress and anxiety you feel. At one point, I owed thousands of dollars for parking violations in the state of Massachusetts, and I was paranoid to park because I knew I was at risk of getting a bright-yellow boot placed on the wheel of my car. My friends and I would be downtown, and while they experienced a carefree evening, I'd have this underlying knot of worry playing as background music, coloring my experience.

Inevitably, I was caught. One day I walked out of a shopping center to find my car had been towed to the city impound. But after I paid my debt, I could once again enjoy a stress-free parking experience.

You may not be able to easily draw a straight line between God's grace and your anxiety, but they are directly linked. When you walk through life with this underlying guilt that you're indebted to God, it will inevitably lead to anxiety in your soul. There is no greater peace than knowing that you and God are at peace. Peace with Him creates peace in every other aspect of life. Grace is the understanding that Jesus has paid the debt humanity incurred by eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.

If you believe you owe God,
if you believe He's angry with you,
and if you believe you're in debt to Him,
then you'll avoid Him,
and you'll have this unexplainable anxiety,
and every bad thing that happens you'll consider karma.

But if you know you are debt free,
if you believe God smiles on you,
and if you know there's peace between you and Him,
then your entire life will be filled with peace,
and paranoia and fear will lose their grip on your mind,
and peace with God will produce the peace of God.

This is what I wish I'd said to that anxiety-ridden student in the church lobby.