2X AMAZON BESTSELLING AUTHOR

JESUS WAS A BADASS



AND YOU CAN BE TOO

ERIC ALEXANDER CRAWFORD

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→ *And You Can Be Too*

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A Note on the Title

◆

JESUS WASN'T BAD. And Jesus certainly wasn't an ass. But put those two words together and you get a very different meaning — Badass (n.): a person of formidable strength or skill; one who is tough, courageous, impressive and committed.

CHAPTER ONE:
The Toughest Man Who Ever Lived

◆

PICTURE THE TOUGHEST person you can think of. Maybe it's a soldier, a fighter, or an athlete. Or maybe it's the guy at the end of the bar that nobody wants to look at the wrong way. Maybe it's your own parent or grandparent. Or maybe you think it's you? Whoever you pictured, I'd bet money on one thing: you probably didn't picture Jesus.

But that's actually ironic if you think about it, since Jesus took on four of the most powerful adversaries that have ever existed, all at the same time, and never once backed down. Why don't we hear more about that version of Jesus? Why is Jesus so often seen as the boring goodie-two-shoes as some like to describe?

You see, Jesus gives us a whole different version and level of toughness. Here's what I mean. Jesus took on Rome. Not a metaphor for Rome, not a watered-down idea of Rome, but the actual Roman Empire. It was the

most efficient war machine the ancient world had ever produced, and maybe ever since.

Jesus also took on the religious establishment. This wasn't the church as we know it today. These were men who held the power of life and death, who could drag you out and stone you simply on an accusation, who controlled the entire religious and social world. He called them out to their faces, in public, in their own house for being hypocrites. He also stood firm against Herod, the paranoid king who would have people killed on nothing but a whim, as Herod did by quite literally putting John the Baptist's head on a platter.

And then of course, Jesus took on evil itself. He went toe to toe with temptation and darkness in the desert, with no food or shelter for forty days, but refused to break. He walked knowingly toward that evil and all the greatest temptations and called them out. Not fighting them with a sword, but with scripture. Why did Jesus take all this risk, and sign up for all this struggle?

It was for love. Jesus stopped at nothing to ensure the message of God's Kingdom would be shared. That is what truly made Jesus the toughest person to ever live. It wasn't just what Jesus did. But very much why it was done, and especially how. And that's the part I want to focus on. In particular, how you can learn and apply those virtues to your own life, to be the most empowered version of yourself that you were born to be.

* * *

Now, I should tell you where I'm coming from personally, because I didn't arrive at this idea from a comfortable pew. My grandfather was a Marine and a champion boxer. He was a hard man in the way that the greatest generation of hard men were hard. Built out of hard work, discipline, and struggle, and the absolute refusal to back down from anybody. My great-grandfather was a detective in New York City, so that toughness goes without saying.

And my father grew up underneath both those men, and he carried that toughness too. He taught me how to defend myself before I was old enough to really understand what that was even for. His advice, when I was a boy, was simple: if anybody messes with you at school, punch them in the nose.

And he meant it. And I saw him back it up. I watched my own father take on a belligerent man in a bar fight with my own eyes, and then carry that drunk troublemaker out of the bar by the scruff of his neck like a lion carries its cub, and throw him into the gutter. My dad was a good man, but not one to mess with. So trust me, I'm no stranger to toughness in the traditional sense.

Early in my life I thought toughness was about dominance. Or the willingness to strike before being struck. I saw toughness as being the hardest man in the room. And I was well on my way down that road, although as a skinny teenager I didn't exactly look the part. But I was tough as nails on the inside, at least I thought I was.

Now I’m not against defending yourself or the people you love. But the thing I was chasing wasn’t really about protection. It was about being feared, and if I’m being honest, about being scared. Being tough was about demanding respect, acceptance, and validation. It was about winning, because the alternative was, well, the alternative. I had a very monochromatic view of winning and losing, not yet fully understanding how a loss, or even something that looked like a loss, could serve to build greater strength, and sometimes far greater outcomes.

Then in college I found myself unhappy, unfulfilled, and lost. It was exhausting trying to stack up, fit in, and get the constant validation and respect I needed. And that’s when I found a treasure that changed my life. Or maybe better said, that treasure found me. It was Jesus, and I was utterly and powerfully transformed.

It changed the picture I’d built in my own mind of toughness, coolness, and independence. I became a very different man. Jesus had more raw grit and willpower than anyone I’d ever heard of. He was a man who stared down empires and demons and death. But never once used that strength for its own sake. Jesus used it to heal. To protect the weak. To tell the truth, even when the truth came at a cost. To forgive people who absolutely did not deserve it by the world’s standards. Jesus had every ounce of the toughness that my father and those before him prized. But also something I’d never seen anyone in history display the way Jesus did. I didn’t have a word for it at the time. It was all that toughness, pointed squarely at love, healing, and redemption. All I

knew is that's what I wanted to model my life after. I knew it would always be imperfect, but I felt more than anything it was to be the north star of my life.

It changed everything for me. And because of it, so much in my life changed. I started to see that I'd had so many things backwards my whole life. I thought a badass was just a man who could win the most fights, or score the most touchdowns on the football field. But my new expanded view of a badass was the man or woman who also chose to make lasting change, to be disciplined, to fight the battles that matter most, and to do it in a way that always sought to build people up and inspire positive transformation. The real badass, I realized, had all that power, but also knew how to unleash it for good.

* * *

Now, nobody — and I mean nobody — has ever taken on as much opposition as Jesus and stood firm. Not Caesar. Not Alexander the Great. Not any general or champion or king you could name. Sure, they picked fights they thought they could win, or that were thrust upon them. But Jesus picked the fight everyone said was unwinnable. And Jesus won it, in the most unexpected way imaginable.

So why do so many people picture Jesus as soft? As frail? Easy to take for granted or ignore. As some passive figure in a stained-glass window who wouldn't say boo to a goose? Somewhere along the line, we let "good" get confused with "dull" or uninteresting. We let "kind" get confused with "cowardly" or "passive". We let

“integrity” get confused with “boring.” And we let love get confused with weakness.

And we ended up with a Jesus who is easy to compartmentalize, because nothing about that version of Jesus seems to demand anything from us, or inspire anything in us. This book is here to remind you who Jesus really was, and who you can be when you lean into it. It’s not toxic masculinity or bro-theology, it’s a journey for everyone, men and women alike, that just might blow your mind and empower you toward greatness in ways you may not have expected.

And you likely know exactly why this matters, because you’ve got hopes, dreams, and fights of your own. Maybe it’s something that’s been wearing you down for years, an issue that you’ve never quite overcome. Or somebody’s betrayal is still whispering to you at night, making you feel unloved or alone. Maybe you’re running on empty, or doing things to escape the weight of it all, numbing in ways you know aren’t really good for you. Or maybe everything looks fine on the outside, but you know deep down you were made for more. Whatever it is for you, this book is not a museum tour of somebody else’s strength, even if that “someone” is Jesus. It’s a map and a mirror. Every chapter ahead is aimed at something you’re facing or aspiring to right now. And how, with the power and example of Jesus, you can overcome, level up, and experience transformation.

I want to really dig into the kind of toughness Jesus possessed, and let it permeate you, let it take you to the next level, so you can leverage that same empowerment too for a better life, with increased success and

fruitfulness. Even if you are already familiar with Jesus, you may be surprised just how deep the story goes when we look at it in this light, and what an impact spending this kind of time with Jesus can have.

* * *

So here's what we'll do. This book comes in two halves. First, I'll remind you why Jesus really is the toughest man who ever lived — the life, and four epic showdowns. You'll see how Jesus took on Rome, the religious establishment, a paranoid king, and the devil. Partly to prove just how tough Jesus was, but mostly to show you how you can do it too.

Then we'll turn the corner. We'll dive into what Jesus taught about the kind of man or woman who can have that kind of impact, and how almost every quality the world calls weak can actually be raw strength in disguise. You've heard these words your whole life. Blessed are the meek. Blessed are the merciful. Blessed are the peacemakers.

You may have heard them read in church on Sunday mornings, maybe even by a kind older lady in a sweet voice, and somehow they may have made Jesus sound a little passive, a little soft. I'm going to show you there's a much deeper context. Put those same words next to a man who stared down Rome and didn't blink, and they stop sounding like a recipe for getting walked on. They start sounding like what they actually are: strength. And a leader you can truly follow and call your Lord. It's

strength in service of love. And that's the whole second half of this book.

Because Jesus didn't come to just be admired. Jesus told us to build our lives on a foundation of rock instead of sand. So I'm going to hand you the blueprint: the building blocks I've studied for over twenty years about how Jesus actually lived, and that same toughness laid out so you can stack it into your own life, block by block, through the power of the Spirit.

The point was never admiration from a safe distance, or only one day a week. The point is to walk the road every day and get your feet dirty, fully surrendered to Jesus.

If you're a tough man or woman, or you want to be one, take this journey with me. I'm not going to try to tell you how to live, or preach to you. I'm going to share what Jesus did and said, and let that permeate your heart, mind, and soul. I want to show you how that carpenter from a backwater town, who changed the entire world without ever lifting a fist, can truly be your guide, your general, your best friend, your teacher, and your king. Because here's the truth about whatever you're inspired to do. Reaching your highest potential is not badass-optional.

Let's get to work.

CHAPTER TWO:
Jesus vs. Rome

◆

SAY "ROME," TWO thousand years ago, and you're saying power. Massive power. Not theoretical power. Boots-on-the-ground, taxes-from-your-pocket, beating-you-for-looking-at-them-wrong power. Rome didn't merely win wars. Rome dominated. The Pax Romana — "Roman peace" — was stability enforced at the point of a spear. And the crosses were the billboards. "Try rebellion," they warned, "and see where you hang."

We use the word "empire" so casually now that it's lost its teeth. But Rome was not a far away city. Rome was the soldiers stationed in your town, the roads built for legions to march on. Crucifixion wasn't hidden away. It was done out in the open, beside the busy roads, on purpose, so that every traveler and farmer and child would see exactly what happened to people who pushed back. It was terror as public policy.

Into that world stepped a carpenter-turned-preacher announcing, "The kingdom of God is at hand." Now,

that’s not a private devotional slogan you cross-stitch onto a pillow. That’s public language. A kingdom inside a kingdom, under an empire that executed people for so much as whispering about insurrection. If you misunderstood it, it could sound like Jesus was planting a flag in the middle of a military base and declaring that another country exists here now. You could be killed for far less. People were.

Rome had every visible advantage. Legions moved like one body. Supply chains fed cities. Governors could summon soldiers with the flick of a ring. Everywhere you looked: the eagle, the laurel, the triumphal arch. And the punishments: scourging, imprisonment, and the cross. All designed to break not just bodies but also the spirit of entire populations.

And what did Jesus show up with? Twelve apostles, most of whom couldn’t spell “military strategy” if you spotted them the first ten letters. Fishermen. A tax collector. A few hotheads. The battle plan? Love your enemies. Tell the truth. Carry other people’s burdens. On paper, it’s the most lopsided matchup in history.

But notice how Jesus did it. There was no army, though the reasons to raise one were everywhere. The people in the crowd were desperate for a warrior-messiah, a man on a horse who would drive the Romans into the sea. The crowds would have followed Jesus into battle. The role of revolutionary general was right there for the taking. And Jesus refused it, not out of fear of Rome, but out of hunger for something far bigger than Rome.

* * *

Here's the plot twist. Jesus opposed Rome without becoming Rome — or even directly opposing Rome. There was no mirroring of the empire's contempt. Jesus healed a Roman centurion's servant, honoring a man in uniform while refusing to worship the uniform. And when they tried to trap Jesus with a no-win question about paying taxes, Jesus held up the coin, looked at Caesar's face stamped on the metal, and said, "Give Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and God what belongs to God." That's divine-speak for: Caesar is not God. That's courage with a side of wit.

And at the very end, face to face with Roman power in the person of Pilate, watch what happens. Pilate, the governor, the man who literally held the authority to execute, tries to intimidate the prisoner. "Don't you know I have the power to free you or to crucify you?" And Jesus — beaten, exhausted, abandoned — answers plainly: you would have no power at all unless it had been given to you from above. Think about that. The prisoner is calmer than the governor. The condemned man is steadier than the judge. Pilate is rattled. Jesus is not.

Rome's intimidation playbook was simple: humiliate the rebels publicly, and the people will learn to keep their heads down and their mouths shut. Jesus' playbook was the opposite: live so truthfully, and care for people so stubbornly, that not even humiliation can shut it down. Rome wielded the sword of iron. Jesus carried the

sword of love. And in the end, love proved infinitely more powerful.

* * *

Here's the thing that should stop you cold. The Roman Empire is gone. The empire that ordered the crucifixion is dust and museum exhibits. And two thousand years later, more than two billion people follow the man it nailed to a cross. Jesus outlasted the most powerful empire on earth without ever drawing a blade. Tell me that isn't badass.

And there's a lesson in it for you, right where you live. Real toughness isn't always about hitting back. Sometimes the toughest thing you can do is refuse to play a rigged game, but instead to stand in your truth in front of the people who can hurt you. Because here's the secret Rome never figured out: every tool the empire had, from fear to force to the threat of death, depended on you being willing to live in fear more than you wanted anything else.

Jesus had quietly removed that lever. A man who has made peace with what would eventually happen is a man no empire on earth can truly control. They could kill the body but they could not kill the outcome. So when you face the powers in your own life, the friends who can turn on you, the crowd that can mock you, the system that can crush you, remember that the deepest strength isn't out-muscling them. It's being anchored to Someone they can't reach. Rome could touch everything about Jesus except the one thing that mattered, because that

part belonged to the Father. Get yourself anchored there, and you become a different kind of unmovable.

* * *

And here's the proof that it worked, the most staggering part of the whole story, the part that should make the hair on your arms stand up. Rome did its absolute worst to the followers of Jesus for almost three hundred years. Fed them to lions. Burned them as torches at garden parties. Crucified them sideways and upside down for sport. And the church kept growing. Why? Because you cannot as easily intimidate people who have already made their peace with God. Rome had built its entire empire on one lever — the fear of death — and these people had pulled that lever clean out of the wall.

But notice how they fought, because it is the most Jesus thing imaginable. Not with swords. With casseroles. With open homes. When a plague swept through and the healthy fled the cities, Christians stayed and nursed the dying. Strangers, pagans, the very neighbors who had turned them in.

When Rome left unwanted babies out on the hillsides to die of exposure, the followers of Jesus went and picked them up and raised them as their own. They forgave the crowds that screamed for their blood. They shared everything and feared nothing. To a watching empire built on power and contempt, it was utterly baffling, yet incredibly magnetic. People looked at these

strange, fearless, absurdly kind people and wanted whatever they had.

So let me ask you a question. When was the last time you forgave someone, not only because it was the right thing to do, but because it was the thing that finally set you free? Because that's the secret hiding in this story. Forgiveness wasn't just mercy toward Rome. It was the weapon Rome had no answer for, and the medicine that kept three hundred years of persecuted people from being poisoned by their persecutors. And that freedom, multiplied across centuries of ordinary people, is what finally finished the fight.

Because that led to the day that proves the whole point of this chapter. The hardest power on earth, the throne of Caesar itself, bent the knee. The emperor Constantine, by some accounts softened over the years by the quiet faith of the women closest to him, his own mother chief among them, finally yielded to a spiritual experience that turned the most powerful man in the world toward Jesus.

And the empire that had spent centuries trying to stamp out the church was, in the end, conquered by it. Sit with the size of that. Rome was never defeated by an army. Rome was defeated by a casserole carried to a sick stranger, by a baby pulled off a hillside, by a mother praying for the men lighting the fire, by three hundred years of unnamed, unseen, unkillable love, all inspired by Jesus.

The sword of iron lost to the sword of love — exactly, precisely, as Jesus said it would. That is the most badass military upset in human history, and most of the greatest

warriors in that early movement will never be remembered by history.

YOUR MOVE

What's Your Rome?

Name the Rome in your life right now. What's a thing that instigates fear or keeps you from being your truest self? Now ask yourself one honest question: what exactly is stopping you? Pull that lever out into the light, look at it, and decide what you'd be willing to lose rather than betray what you know is the right thing for you. The day you stop settling is the day its grip is lost on you, and you take your life to the next level!

Every chapter in this book has its own set of discussion questions in the back, for going deeper on your own or with a group.

CHAPTER THREE:
Jesus vs. the Religious Institution

◆

At least Jesus had the full support of the religious institution, right? Well, not really. Actually, not at all.

If Rome was the iron glove, the religious institution of Jesus' day was the velvet glove — with brass knuckles underneath it. Now, institutions are supposed to guide people and guard justice. But institutions with a lot of power sometimes have a habit of drifting if they're not managed well. Sometimes, they start protecting their own reputation, and their own revenue streams, and the power of their leaders above all else. In the process they may bulldoze the very people they were built to shepherd. In many ways, the institution of that day was doing exactly that.

But Jesus walked into that political maze and refused to play the game everyone else was playing. Again, with wit.

Picture the scene. Priests, scribes, councils, and committees. Rules that in an ideal situation would be

there to guide people in a good direction, but when corrupted became suffocating. And Jesus named it, with surgical precision: “Woe to you, hypocrites. You bury people under burdens you won’t lift a pinky finger to help carry. You love the best seats at the dinner parties and step right over broken people on your way to the podium.”

That’s not trendy snark. That’s fierce compassion wrapped in uncomfortable truth. Because when leaders perform instead of serve, people they are leading tend to get hurt. Jesus said the best leader is the best servant, which the leaders of the day took as a slap in the face. An act of pure insolence.

And if the directness of that language surprises you — there’s plenty more where that came from. Jesus chose some of the strongest language for those who were supposed to be representing God, but instead were empowering only themselves. Read the Gospels honestly and you’ll find a man who chose words like a craftsman chooses tools, and some of those words were meant to shake people awake.

He called some of the religious leaders a brood of vipers. He also called them whitewashed tombs, beautiful on the outside and full of dead bones within. Now, these weren’t slips of the tongue or losses of temper. They were precise, deliberate, and aimed — the sharp words used for those who professed to be working in the name of good but instead doing the opposite. He used these sharpest words on purpose, to cut through their pride and wake people who had gone numb.

The sacred has always had room for a bit of holy provocation, as long as it is aimed at the right target. So when you see Jesus reach for a cutting word, don't flinch as though something has gone wrong. Something has gone right. Sometimes, love is refusing to stay quiet.

And make no mistake, just as there is today, there was real danger in that back then too. It was the backdrop in the temple courts on the day Jesus started flipping tables like a holy tornado to clear out the financial corruption.

Coins scattered. Doves flapped frantically. Money changers scrambled. That is not the action of a timid man, that is love aimed at injustice. But here's the part that tells you exactly what kind of man this was. In that same space, the space Jesus had just cleared of religious racketeering, the blind and the lame came forward to be healed. Judgment for the exploiters. Mercy for the wounded. Right on top of each other. That's the classic Jesus move, and it tells you everything about where the anger was aimed.

Because notice what that anger was for, and what it was never for. The tables went over because the powerless were being fleeced. Never once did Jesus raise that voice to crush a sinner who came broken and honest. The toughness ran toward the powerful who abused their position. The tenderness ran toward the weak who knew they needed help.

That kind of discernment is rare, as you probably know. Plenty of people are angry. But they're often angry at the wrong things, or in the wrong way. They're often angry at something that offended them, or because their own pride was challenged. The anger in Jesus was

almost never about self. A personal insult was usually met with silence. But exploit the vulnerable and twist God's name to do it, and the storm rolled in. That's the discipline of a truly tough person: not the absence of anger, but a righteous anger, under command, spent only on what's worth spending it on.

So let me ask you a question. When was the last time your anger was aimed at the right target? Not the driver who cut you off, or the waiter who got the order wrong, but something that was actually hurting someone who couldn't defend themselves. Or maybe something deeper, inside you, that's been quietly doing the hurting to yourself for years, and you're finally ready to be mad enough to break its hold on you. Aimed anger, at the right things, can be rare. And it looks a lot like love.

And it cost Jesus dearly. Jesus could have softened the message, made peace with the powerful, and lived a long quiet life. Instead, Jesus chose, again and again, to keep telling the truth to the very people who could, and would, kill for it. That's not recklessness. That's a man who decided some things are worth more than acceptance.

* * *

And here's why this one should hit close to home. It's relatively easy to be brave against an obvious villain everybody already hates. The foreign occupier, the cartoon bad guy, stand up to him and you get applause. But standing up to the ones your neighbors may admire for their positions or titles, or for what they can get from

being in their good graces — the ones holding the moral high ground in everyone's eyes, kissing up to all the right people and keeping everyone fooled? That's a lonelier, bolder kind of courage. You often don't get applause for it. You may have to lose some things. You might even lose friends. If you've ever had to call out something rotten inside your own circle of friends, your own company, your own team, your own family, your own church, then you've tasted a sip of it. Jesus drank that whole cup, every single day, and never flinched.

YOUR MOVE

What's Keeping You Quiet?

Think of one place where you've stayed quiet about something wrong inside your own camp. Maybe in something around you, or in the world, or maybe, with yourself — because speaking up or changing some things could cost you. If something came to mind, just name it honestly to yourself. Then when you're ready, take one true step toward the light instead of the status quo.

CHAPTER FOUR:
Jesus vs. Herod

◆

In his fortress, Herod sits on his throne. A servant approaches, trembling with urgent news: “Foreign visitors have arrived asking about a newborn king.” A king?!? Herod’s blood runs cold. For Herod was no mere king. He ruled with an iron fist. He’d built some of the greatest structures in all of ancient Jerusalem, architectural wonders that made people’s jaws drop. And he governed through a paranoia that made people disappear. Rivals vanished. Sometimes even his own family members. So when word reached him that visitors were asking about a child — a newborn king — something snapped in Herod’s mind. He felt the earthquake in his own throne room.

Because power hates surprises. And it hates challengers even more. Especially the baby-shaped kind. So the orders went out. Execute every boy two and under, in Bethlehem and the villages around it! There could be no risk of a rival king rising to power. Soldiers

marched. Mothers wept. And Joseph grabbed Mary and the child, and fled onto the road in the dead of night, running for Egypt under cover of darkness. That's how the earthly story of Jesus began. A hunted baby with a bounty, forcing Mary and Joseph with their newborn into the wilds of the cold, dark desert to save their son. Which, by the way, tells you Mary and Joseph were pretty badass too!

Years later, another Herod — Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great — ruled the region where Jesus was running the preaching and healing circuit. And this Herod had already executed John the Baptist. John's crime? Telling uncomfortable truths about the king's marriage. So the climate was crystal clear: speak truth to power around here and you might find yourself having a very bad day, the kind that ends with your head on a platter.

He kept speaking anyway.

Jesus healed in public. Taught out in the open. And when some well-meaning people came with a warning that Herod wanted Jesus shut down, watch the response. That steel-wrapped-in-wisdom calm: "Go tell that fox I'm driving out demons and healing people." And yes — that's the real language, not a paraphrase. Translation: threats noted, mission unchanged, go tell your boss he doesn't set my schedule.

Think about that for a second, because it's easy to skim past. A regional king, a man with soldiers and dungeons and a documented willingness to behead his critics, sends word that he's coming for you. Most people would go quiet. Most people would leave town. Jesus

sent a message back calling him a fox; a small, sly, scavenging animal, and announced that the work would continue exactly as planned. That's not bravado. Bravado is loud because it's scared. This was calm because it was settled.

* * *

But here's where it gets even more powerful. Years later, near the very end, Jesus finally stood before Herod face to face. And Jesus said nothing, complete silence… While Herod pressed and questioned and demanded answers, Jesus remained unmoved, unshaken, refusing to perform or mount any defense at all. That silence spoke louder than any words could have. It was the confidence of a man with a settled identity, and a settled mission, not needing to prove it to anyone externally.

That refusal to bend, that composure in the face of a man with absolute power over life and death, also fulfilled an ancient prophecy about one who would stay silent before the accusers. Some tie that prophecy to this moment before Herod, others to what was still to come, and perhaps it pointed to both.

Because later we'll see another time Jesus stood silent before accusers, a silence that may have shaken the world even more. Both moments point to the same thing. That standard Jesus set, refusing to feel the need to respond to every accuser, defend every criticism, or perform on demand, was one of the greatest displays of power the world has ever seen.

It became fuel for the movement that would rise after Jesus' death, proof to followers that everything happening was part of something far bigger than Rome, far bigger than Herod.

So let me ask you a question. When was the last time you stayed silent in front of your accusers? Your mockers, your doubters, your haters. Maybe in person, maybe on social media? Not silent because you were being nice, or weak. Silent because you understood that answering the more petty person would only pull you down into their game, and they had no intention of changing anyway. Sometimes silence isn't surrender. Sometimes it's the loudest possible way of showing that someone no longer has power over you.

And here's the thing Herod Antipas never understood. All his scheming, all his power plays, all his puppeteering to Rome didn't get him very far. A few years later, Rome exiled him to an early death. While Jesus, the man Herod tried to silence, launched a movement that would outlast empires.

There's a lesson buried in the Herod showdowns, both of them, and it's worth pulling out into the light. Power is often most dangerous when it's most afraid. Herod the Great wasn't secure. He was so terrified of a rumor that he sent soldiers after children. Herod Antipas wasn't strong. He killed John because the truth made him squirm at his own party. That's the tell of the cheap kind of power: it lashes out because it's threatened. The real kind of strength, the kind Jesus carried, doesn't need to lash out at all, because it isn't threatened in the first place. When you are anchored to something bigger

than your own survival, the foxes of this world lose their teeth.

* * *

So if there’s a Herod in your life — a person with power over you who uses fear to keep you small, a boss, a bully, a system, a voice in your own head — take a page from this. You don’t have to match their volume. You don’t have to grovel either. And you certainly don’t have to give in. You just do the good work you were put here to do, steadily, and let them find out that you’re not the one who scares or quits easy.

YOUR MOVE

Who's Your Fox?

Who's the fox in your life, the one whose judgment, disapproval, or intimidation makes you shrink? Picture them. Then picture being or doing the next good thing you were going to do anyway, steadily, without asking their blessing, or matching their tactics. That composure and self-assurance is the goal. Practice it, in one small way anytime you can, and notice how little power the fox actually has when you don't hand it to them. And likewise, how much power you do have.

CHAPTER FIVE:
Jesus vs. the Devil

◆

Now we come to the last of Jesus' big showdowns before we turn the corner to the next part of this book. If you're not deep in the Bible, or if talk of evil, temptation, or spiritual darkness feels unfamiliar to you, I encourage you to stick with me. Because what you'll find in this chapter might actually equip you in one of the most powerful ways, no matter what your spiritual views may be.

There's something here worth understanding wherever you land on the theological spectrum, and it's about the deepest kind of battle every human faces.

* * *

So, let's get back into the life of Jesus. If kings and councils and empires weren't enough, there was a darker showdown happening, especially the day Jesus stood face to face with temptation itself. Power. Riches. Glory. The kind of deal that could have made Jesus

untouchable. The kind of offer every one of us would struggle to resist. But Jesus didn't flinch in the wilderness.

Here's what makes this one different from all the others. It may have been the hardest fight of all.

Before the public ministry even began, Jesus went out into the wilderness and fasted for forty days. Forty days. By the end of it, Jesus was at the absolute limit of human endurance. Starving, exhausted, and physically wrecked. And that is precisely the moment the enemy chose to strike. That's often how it works. Temptation doesn't usually win when you're rested and surrounded by friends. It tends to come when you're alone, depleted, and weak.

And what the devil offered wasn't obviously evil. That's the genius of it. He didn't say, "Come do something monstrous." Instead, he offered shortcuts, and artificial glory. Turn these stones to bread and you can eat. You're starving, why suffer? Throw yourself down and let the angels catch you. Prove to me who you are. Make a spectacle, win the crowd the easy way. Bow to me, just once, and I'll hand you all the kingdoms of the world. Why do it the hard way, the way that will end you on a cross?

Every temptation was the same trick: get the comfortable destination by the wrong road. Power without sacrifice. Glory without the life. The crown without the suffering. And the thing is, we all face those same general questions in our own lives. This story of temptation is universal, and Jesus shows us precisely how to beat it.

Jesus said no to that evil. Three times. Starving and alone, Jesus turned down bread, spectacle, and the whole world handed over in a perfectly wrapped package. Could you have done that? Forty days in, with nothing in your stomach and the world on a silver platter? Few could, if any.

And look at how Jesus fought, because this is a part you can really use. There was no lightning bolt, no display of raw power. It was all available, and it was all refused. The weapon was truth. Every single time, the answer was scripture: it is written, it is written, it is written. The most powerful being in the universe in human form, and the chosen weapon against the enemy of all mankind was the Word of God, spoken steadily by a starving man who would not be moved.

There's a lesson buried in that desert for every one of us. Your hardest battles — the ones that really decide who you are — usually happen where no one can see. Not on a stage. Not in front of a crowd that'll applaud you for doing the right thing, or the wrong thing. They often happen alone, at your weakest or most susceptible, when the easy way out is right there and nobody would ever know if you took it.

The business trip, spring break, the bottle, the browser, the little lie that would make the next hour easier. No crowd, no witnesses, no immediate impact — just you and the temptation. That's where character is actually forged: in the private fight, the unwitnessed no, the shortcut refused in the dark.

By the time Rome, and Herod, and the religious leaders would argue for the execution, the biggest war

was already over. It was won alone, in a desert, with the truth as the only weapon.

* * *

And here's one of the most practical things in this whole book. When the enemy came, there was no improvising. There was no last-second attempt to out-argue the tempter with clever words. Jesus reached for something prepared for, studied, and stored up long before the crisis ever came. The truth was already known, already practiced, already built in. The battle in the wilderness wasn't won in the wilderness. It was won in the quiet times beforehand, when the soul got filled with what was true. So when the test finally came, the truth was already there, the plan was in place, loaded and ready.

That's how it works for you too. You rarely rise to the level of your best intentions in a crisis. You achieve the level of what you've actually built into yourself beforehand. The person who hasn't decided who he or she is before the temptation shows up will often decide wrong when it's standing in front of them, offering exactly what he or she is hungry for with a bow on it.

But what's inside that package will usually hurt once it's fully revealed, like one of those exploding gifts in the cartoons of the '80s. The strength to say no in the dark isn't generated on the spot. It's drawn from a well that was dug long before the thirst ever came.

So let me ask you a question. When was the last time you answered a temptation out loud, with scripture? Not

a vague good intention or excuse. Actual words, spoken into the air, the way Jesus did it in the desert. It might feel strange the first time. But there’s something about hearing truth in your own voice, and professing it, that has power and changes the fight.

YOUR MOVE

What's Your Temptation?

Your hardest battles often happen where no one's watching. So be honest about your wilderness. What's the shortcut or desire that tempts you when you're tired, stressed, fearful, or alone? Name it. Then decide what truth you'll stand on when it comes. And put that truth somewhere you'll see it and know it before the test arrives, not during it. Dig the well before you're thirsty.

CHAPTER SIX:
Blessed Are the Badass

◆

IMAGINE A RECRUITER for the toughest warrior unit on earth steps up to a microphone to read out the qualities they're looking for. The room is full of fighters, leaning forward, ready to hear about grip strength and pain tolerance and the will to dominate. And the recruiter clears his throat. "In this squadron, we're looking for the gentle," he says. "The merciful. The peacemakers. The ones who get insulted and don't insult back. The ones who are persecuted because they hunger and thirst for righteousness." Some in the room would walk out laughing.

Now, there's nothing wrong with being physically tough and gritty, and being able to protect people around you, and take care of business on the job. But what this recruiter said is almost word for word the speech Jesus gave during the Sermon on the Mount. We call it the Beatitudes, and it's the opening of the most famous public speech in history.

And here's the thing that people sometimes misunderstand. This isn't a list of weaknesses for doormat types of people. Read it right, and it's a recruiting poster for the strongest people who have ever lived. You know the type. The man or woman who could clearly handle themselves, maybe even level the room, but who stays the calmest one in it. Insult them and they don't take the bait. Not because they can't answer it, but because they don't need to prove it, least of all to the person daring them to.

Everything we've watched in the chapters leading up to this was Jesus showing you what toughness of spirit can look like in action. This chapter is different. This is Jesus telling you, in plain words, what kind of person to become to do things like that. And this is where I have to put the whole thesis of this book on the table.

The goal is not to prove to anyone we're a badass. The goal is to grow, and serve, and have impact like Jesus. Do that, and the badass shows up automatically. It's the way muscle shows up on the person who actually does the work instead of just flexing in the mirror. You don't chase the strength. You chase the process. The strength comes free.

* * *

So let's read the recruiting poster the way it was meant to be read.

First, "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth." The world hears "meek" and pictures a pushover. But meek doesn't mean weak. It means power under

control. The old word was used for a war-horse that had surrendered to its master. All that muscle and fire, fully trained, responding to the lightest touch of the rein. A wild horse is useless. But a war-horse under command can win a battle. That's meekness. Strength that answers to something higher than its own impulses. And notice who inherits the earth in the end. Not the loud. Not the bullies. Not the ones grabbing for it. The ones who had the strength to hold their power in check.

Next, "Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy." Mercy looks soft until you realize what it actually is. It's the power to make someone pay, but deliberately laid down. You can't show mercy from a position of weakness. A weak man or woman who lets an offense go isn't merciful. He or she is just incapable of doing anything about it. Mercy is for people who could crush you and choose not to. That's the whole definition of the badass we started with. The merciful person is the one with the power and none of the need to prove it.

Then comes, "Blessed are the peacemakers." Not just the peace-keepers. The peace-makers. Anybody can avoid a fight. It takes nothing to keep your head down. But walking into the middle of a conflict and forging peace where there was none? That's the hardest, most dangerous work there is. Peacemakers get shot at from both sides. It takes far more spine to reconcile two enemies than to pick one and swing.

And lastly, Jesus said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, and blessed are those persecuted because of it." Here's the unlock. Jesus says the people who care about what's right, so much that

they'll take a beating for it and keep going, are the blessed ones. That's not a personality type. That's a fighter's heart pointed at the right target. The same hunger that makes a person dangerous in a bad situation, makes them unstoppable in a good one.

Can you see the pattern? So many qualities the world reads as weakness, Jesus reveals as strength under control. Strength aimed at love instead of ego. The Beatitudes aren't Jesus lowering the bar. They're Jesus raising it past where most tough guys can even reach.

And then, Jesus finished the sermon the same way as always. He told stories. Because the best teachers don't lecture you into changing. They slip a story past your defenses and let it go off quietly in your chest. So let me hand you one. A portrait of a Jesus kind of man or woman.

Let's look at the most famous story Jesus ever told, the Good Samaritan. In it, a man gets jumped on a lonely road, beaten, robbed, left bleeding in the ditch. And two religious VIPs see him and cross to the other side. The respected, important, churchgoing men. Too busy. Too clean. Too important to get involved. Then the one nobody expected, a despised outsider, stops. Gets his hands dirty. Pays out of his own pocket.

Jesus told that story to answer the question "who is my neighbor" after Jesus had just said one of the most important commandments was to love your neighbor as yourself. But underneath it is a harder question. When you see someone bleeding in the ditch, are you the important or distracted person who just walks past, or

the one with the spine to stop? Real strength isn't in the title or the resume. It's in who stops.

And I can tell you from experience, stopping is harder than it sounds. I was driving one day and saw an older couple broken down in the middle of the road. They were standing in the lane in front of their car, and people were just whipping around them. Every part of me wanted to keep driving like everyone else.

I was busy. I had somewhere to be — just as everyone else who passed them probably did. But this story of Jesus popped into my mind. I honestly didn't want to do it. But I popped a U-turn and pulled up behind them, got out, helped them stop traffic, and pushed their car a few hundred yards down the road to a Tire Kingdom. I was so exhausted I thought I was going to have a heart attack.

When I walked inside, my plan was to quietly pay their bill, because I could tell from the car, and from their faces, that money was tight. When I explained that to the man behind the counter, he said, "Well, you're a true Good Samaritan!" I wasn't going for that. I didn't even want to be there. I was just being obedient to the calling I felt. Then the man surprised me: "You don't owe us anything. We'll get their car fixed and get them out of here. It's on us." I almost cried.

To see the teachings of Jesus play out like that, kindness triggering more kindness, was powerful. Or I could say, obedience triggering more obedience. And I don't tell you this story for a pat on the back. I tell you because doing the right thing sometimes doesn't even feel good. It can feel hard and inconvenient. And maybe that's exactly what Jesus was getting at. Because

oftentimes, the biggest payoffs come just on the other side of disciplined growth.

YOUR MOVE

Where Will You Grow?

Think back to the recruiting speech at the beginning of this chapter. Meek, merciful, peacemaker, hungry for what's right, persecuted, and pick the one that feels most like a place you can grow right now. That's your growth edge. Not just the things you're already good at, but also the things that require you to make a conscious choice of obedience today. This week, look out for one concrete moment to practice the harder ones on this list, and watch whether it feels like weakness, or whether, maybe even for the first time, it feels like strength.

CHAPTER SEVEN:
Build on the Rock

◆

A FEW YEARS ago, I was living in Asheville, North Carolina, a consummate mountain town. While searching for a house, we looked at existing homes, as well as buying land and building from scratch. And that's when I got an education I never expected. In foundations.

House after house, and piece after piece of land, the story was the same. Before anyone would talk kitchens or square footage, they talked about what was under the ground. On many of those lots, we were told the foundation would need "engineering." Which meant for some of the existing homes, we would need to do some fixes to the foundation, and for the new-builds, it couldn't just sit on the surface layer of the lot, even when the surface looked pretty solid. In many cases, the foundation had to be anchored down into the underlying bedrock.

And here's the thing I remember most. The surface layer often looked fine. I could stand on it and build on it, and on a sunny day nobody could tell the difference. The difference only shows up later — when the rains come, when the ground shifts, when everything sitting on the surface starts to slide. We saw it so many times in homes that were even just a few years old.

That was a reminder that the most important part of the house is the part nobody will ever see. And interestingly, Jesus, a trained carpenter, seemed to know that better than anyone. Jesus said the wise man builds his house on rock, and the fool builds his on sand.

From the curb, on a clear day, the two houses look identical. But the storms always come. And when they do, the house on weak ground cracks, or slides into the ditch. But the house on rock doesn't move. Same house. Same storm. Different foundation. That's the whole ballgame.

* * *

The chapters ahead are not a list of rules on how to act. So if that's what you're bracing for, you can relax. Everything Jesus went through, and everything Jesus taught about strength in the service of love, was never meant to just sit there and impress you. Or worse, to confuse you. Or feel like tedious obedience. Jesus wasn't saying: hey, look what I can do! Or you better be good, or you'll be in big trouble.

Jesus wanted to empower you. He wanted to stabilize your life, so you could reach your greatest and highest

potential. He wanted you to be anchored down to bedrock, so the storms couldn't easily take you down, so you could express your personal gifts and talents.

Jesus didn't come to collect fans. The call was to make followers. "Truly I tell you," Jesus said, "you will do greater works than these." Greater. Yes. That's not a typo. That's an invitation with your name on it.

So that's what we're building now. The foundation. The building blocks of how Jesus actually lived. It's the same toughness we just watched in action, broken down into pieces, like bricks, that you can pick up and stack into your own life, starting today. And here's the part I never want you to forget.

You don't lay these bricks only in your own strength. That was always the old, exhausting way. Grit your teeth, try harder, white-knuckle your way to being a better person, and collapse a month later. This is different. Every block gets laid with the help of the Spirit, not only by your own willpower. You bring the willingness. God brings the strength. That's the only way any of this actually holds.

But here's the thing. Jesus didn't hand you a blueprint just so you could admire it. He handed it to you so you would build. And that requires a choice. A real one. Because you've been given something — a life, gifts, potential. And it's never too early or too late to firm up that foundation for great results. The question is what you do with it.

Jesus told a story about exactly this. A master gives three servants money to manage while he's away. Two of them take the risk, put it to work, and grow it. The third

one is scared. Scared of losing it, scared of his master. So he digs a hole and buries it to keep it safe. And when the master comes back, the two who risked get the same words every one of us is dying to hear: “Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into your master’s joy.”

But the one who buried his out of fear? The master calls him wicked and lazy and takes it all away. So, who or what is your master? The sin in that story wasn’t losing the money. The sin was being too afraid to risk using the talents for a return. Playing it safe, hiding your gift in the ground, calling cowardice caution. Jesus has no patience for it. Faith takes the shovel and builds with it. Fear uses the shovel to bury it.

So roll up your sleeves, and let’s build.

YOUR MOVE

Rock or Sand?

Answer this honestly: is your life right now being built on rock or on sand? And are you burying your talents out of fear of whatever or whoever your master is, or are you fully and authentically letting your light shine for good? Just name your foundation as it actually is today, because everything ahead is about building a better, stronger, more enduring one. And, about putting your talents to work for good.

CHAPTER EIGHT:
Fuel Yourself First

◆

WE JUST SPENT the last chapter talking about building. Taking action. Putting your gifts to work, taking the risk, doing the hard thing. So what I'm about to say next might confuse you. Because the very first block in this section of seven foundational building blocks, isn't an action at all. It's somewhat the opposite. It's learning to stop, to make space. To be refueled, connected, and empowered.

Before teaching the crowds, Jesus often withdrew to pray. Before facing the cross, Jesus spent hours alone in a garden called Gethsemane. Before launching the entire public ministry, Jesus spent time in the wilderness. You see the pattern? The most impactful life in human history was built on a habit of caring for the spirit first, and most of us treat that as optional.

* * *

Now, if you hear “spiritual care,” you might picture scented candles and crystals and flute music. And while there’s nothing wrong with those things, there is so much more to spiritual connectedness than that. It doesn’t have to be considered soft. So stay with me, because spiritual self-care is the maintenance that the most impactful man who ever lived refused to skip. And I’m suggesting you don’t skip it either.

Think about it. No fighter walks into the ring on an empty stomach and no sleep. That’s not toughness. That’s a death wish. They’d probably get folded in the first round. And yet that’s exactly how most of us charge into the biggest challenges of our lives, spiritually speaking. We may so often wake up already behind, already drained, already reacting. And then we wonder why we lose rounds we should have won. We take a thousand actions, but because we never stopped long enough to get clear, half of them are the wrong ones, with our mind too scattered, or our soul too haggard to see things clearly. Jesus never made that mistake. He fueled up first.

And it wasn’t just an emergency response to burnout. It was proactive. Luke tells us Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed. Not sometimes. Often. It was woven right into the fabric of the routine. When the crowds pressed in screaming for more, more healing, more teaching, more miracles, Jesus didn’t cave, and Jesus didn’t feel one ounce of guilt about stepping away. That takes real backbone, by the way. To disappoint people who want a piece of you and you want to give it to them, but you understand that sustainable impact

requires sustainable strength. You can't pour from an empty cup. And it's hard to lead anybody else when you're depleted yourself.

My favorite example is the time the crowd decided they wanted to make Jesus king by force. The opportunity, the popularity, the momentum, the chance to fast-track the whole mission. It was all right there, handed over on a platter. Awfully tempting. But instead of just saying yes and going with it, Jesus slipped away to a mountain, alone, to pray instead. And, if you know the story, you'll know that Jesus declined their offer and instead took a much more strategic route. That's not weakness. That's a man who knew the best decisions come from a connected soul, not a pressured mind.

Now, your ability to stay connected to your soul runs a lot like your phone battery. It drains all day from use, and it needs regular charging to work at full strength. But unlike your phone, when your connection runs down, everything goes with it. Your decisions, your patience, your relationships, your energy. Ignore it long enough and you'll find yourself running on fumes, snapping at people you love and making choices you might be cleaning up for a long time.

* * *

So how do you charge yourself up? Jesus' toolkit was simple. It included the following five-part routine: First, solitude. Real time alone with God, not only a brief five minutes here or there, but also a genuine block to actually relax, recharge, and hear the stirrings of your

soul. Second, scripture. Truth saturated into your mind ahead of time, so it's already loaded when the noise hits, exactly like Jesus in the wilderness.

Third, prayer. Not just rattling off requests, but listening, surrendering, talking life over with your Heavenly Father. Fourth, nature. Mountains, gardens, lakeshores. Jesus was forever stepping out of human-made spaces into God-made environments to get clearheaded. And fifth, uplifting community. A few good friends like Peter, James, John, Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. The kind who helped Jesus fill the tank instead of only draining it.

If you want to start laying this block of fueling yourself first, here's the rule that matters most. Over the long term, consistency beats intensity. Fifteen honest minutes most days will do more for you than a heroic two-hour session you manage twice a year and then quit. Jesus' strength came from regular connection, not only good intentions.

So protect a little time in the morning before the phone hijacks your brain. Debrief with God at night. Literally ask yourself, what went well today, where did you struggle, what do you need for tomorrow? Then take some time to let the clarity come. That way the stress doesn't pile up like unpaid debt day after day. But instead, clarity and solutions are what compound. And when a big decision is coming, always do what Jesus did and take it to prayer before you take it anywhere else.

Let me give you a real-world example from our modern day, as I will in each of these seven foundational blocks. Look at one of the toughest, coolest competitors

on the national stage over the past few years. In the 2025-26 season, a kid named Fernando Mendoza led Indiana to a perfect, undefeated football season and the national championship, after winning the Heisman as the best player in all of college football.

He started his college career as a two-star recruit nobody wanted, turned down even for a walk-on spot by his hometown team. Here's how this tough, successful, and incredibly well-grounded guy prepared for the biggest games of his life. He didn't blast hype music to get his blood up, not that there's anything wrong with that. He said, "I honestly don't listen to hype songs, because I have to stay calm, cool, and collected. I actually meditate and pray before the game." Prayer was his pregame ritual. Stillness was his weapon.

He said his faith was maybe the sole reason he got to where he did, and that the only perfect example he believes in is Jesus, and for sure that's who he thanked first after so many games. The best quarterback in the country fueled himself first, in the quiet, on his knees in prayer and contemplation. And then went out and dismantled everyone like a boss.

So fuel yourself first. Not only on hype, not on willpower, but in the well that never runs dry. Everything else you're trying to build will sit on top of it.

YOUR MOVE

What's Fueling You?

Let me ask you a question. An honest one, and I don't mean it in a judgmental way at all. How many minutes yesterday did you spend genuinely fueling your spirit — not scrolling, not numbing, not hyping, but solitude, prayer, scripture, real connection? Write the number down and don't judge it. Then pick one fixed time tomorrow — fifteen honest minutes, before the phone, or the event, or whenever — and guard it like it matters. Because it does. Everything else is sitting on top of it.

CHAPTER NINE:
Step Boldly in Faith

◆

AFTER A LONG day of teaching, Jesus withdrew to pray. He sent the disciples across the lake with a plan to meet up with them there later. But a storm had other ideas.

Now, some people will take this next story as literal and some will take it as a figurative parable. Either way, the point lands hard. Here's what happened.

It was night. Wind was whipping like a freight train. Waves were hammering the wooden hull of the boat. Grown men who knew the sea were acting like children who didn't, because raw terror can do that to a person. Then someone points and the impossible has a shape. A man, walking on the water. Not surfing it. Walking on it. The storm hasn't let up, the spray is stinging their eyes, and yet there's Jesus, steady where nothing else is steady.

"Lord, if it's you," Peter shouts, "tell me to come to you on the water." Notice what Peter doesn't ask for. He doesn't ask for a lecture on faith, a map around the

storm, or a guarantee that everything will be okay. He asks for a word. And Jesus gives him exactly one. “Come.” That’s it. Permission granted, direction clear.

* * *

Because here’s the second block of our foundation: Step boldly in faith. Because faith is not mental gymnastics. Faith is motion. It’s the first foot out of the boat when the boat feels like the only rational thing in the world to hold onto. We’ve all been trained to wait for certainty before we move. Jesus trains us to walk on command.

And watch Peter, because his story is the whole lesson in miniature. He doesn’t float. He doesn’t fly. He does the most ordinary thing imaginable in the most extraordinary place. He walks. Step, by step, by step, right up until he looks away at a coming wave. And that detail matters more than anything. Faith didn’t fail Peter because the waves got bigger. The waves were always big. Faith faltered the moment his focus shifted. The moment the storm became the thing he was staring at and Jesus became the background. Write this on your hand. When fear occupies your attention, it will occupy your outcomes.

Maybe your storm is a diagnosis. A bank account heading the wrong direction. A relationship knotted up so tight you can’t see how it ever gets right. And maybe your boat, the safe thing you’re white-knuckling, is your reputation, your comfort, your need to stay in control. And maybe, underneath all the noise, you can already

hear the same single syllable Peter heard. Not "understand." Not "feel ready." Just, Come. Your next breakthrough might be one act of obedience away.

* * *

So picture the one step you could actually take. Not the tenth step. The first. Make the call. Send the email. Apologize. Apply. Ask. Admit. Start. Faith doesn't require theatrics. It requires a next move.

But here's the tension. When you finally step, the storm doesn't politely stop. Sometimes it gets louder. The critics stir. The bills don't blink. Your anxiety offers a running commentary. That's exactly why faith has to be relational, not transactional. You're not walking toward an idea. You're walking toward Jesus. So keep praying while you walk. "Lord, I feel the wind. Help." That prayer isn't failure. That's focus.

And don't miss the mercy at the end. Peter sinks, and is still within arm's reach. Jesus doesn't deliver a lecture while Peter's gulping water. Jesus grabs him. Because faith isn't a performance God grades. It's a relationship God sustains. So if you've already taken a step and then panicked halfway across, hear me. You are not disqualified. You are still going.

Remember the servant who buried his talent in the ground? His whole crime was being too scared to risk it. He called it caution. The master called it wickedness. That's the warning hanging over the man or woman who stays in the boat. Fear that never steps out doesn't keep

you safe. It just renders you on the sidelines when you're not in the game.

* * *

Here's one man who stepped out of the boat from a business sense. You probably never heard of him. His name was R.G. LeTourneau, and he was a self-taught mechanic. After a business failure and a deep surrender of his life to God, he decided he'd run his whole company as a kind of partnership with the Almighty. "God runs my business," he'd tell every reporter who asked, with a grin.

And then he went and earned nearly three hundred patents. He invented the machines that became the modern bulldozer, built the equipment that raised the Hoover Dam, and supplied well over half of all the earthmoving gear the Allies used to win World War II. A welder from nowhere moved literal mountains.

But here's the part that drops jaws. As the money poured in, LeTourneau flipped the tithe on its head. He didn't give ten percent and keep ninety. He kept ten and gave ninety percent away. He funded missions and a university that still trains engineers today. That is what it looks like to step out of the boat with your whole life.

Bottom line. The safest place is wherever Jesus says, "Come."

YOUR MOVE

What's Your Boat?

What's the boat you're white-knuckling — the safe thing you're holding onto so you never have to step out in faith? And what's the one syllable you already hear underneath the noise on that issue? Forget the tenth step. Name the first one — pray over it. Make the call. Send the email. Step up to the starting block. Consider taking that step as soon as you know it's the one beckoning you. Faith moves first and proof comes second.

CHAPTER TEN:
Conquer Your Giants

◆

Twelve years. That's how long one woman had been bleeding. Twelve years of a condition that wouldn't stop, that drained her body and emptied her bank account and slowly cut her off from everyone she loved. In her world, the bleeding made her unclean, which meant untouchable. No hugs. No hand on the shoulder. Twelve years without the simple human comfort of being held. She had spent every coin she had on doctors, and the scripture puts it bluntly. She had suffered a great deal, spent everything she had, and only gotten worse.

That is a giant. Not the kind with a sword and a helmet, but the kind most of us actually face. The problem that doesn't kill you in one dramatic blow but wears you down a little more every day, until you can barely remember who you were before it. The chronic illness. The addiction you've relapsed on for a decade. The debt that never shrinks. The shame you've carried so long it feels like part of you. The thing you've thrown

money and effort and prayer at, and it's only gotten worse.

This is the third block. Conquer your giants. This woman who suffered from a bleeding condition is the masterclass, because she shows you exactly how it's done, especially when you're at the end of your rope about it.

Here's what she did. She heard Jesus was passing through, buried in a crushing crowd of people all pressing in. And she made a decision that took every ounce of strength she had left. She thought, if I can just touch the edge of that cloak, I will be healed. That's it. No grand speech. No demand that Jesus stop and notice her. Just a desperate, stubborn faith that getting to Jesus, even barely to the hem of the robe, was worth everything it would cost her to push through that crowd.

And think about what it cost her. She was unclean. By the rules of her day, she wasn't even supposed to be in that crowd, brushing against people, reaching for a rabbi. Every step was a risk of being exposed, shamed, dragged out. She pushed through anyway. She got low, fought through a wall of bodies, and stretched out her hand. And the moment her fingers found the edge of the cloak, twelve years of bleeding stopped.

Now watch what Jesus did. He stopped. In the middle of the crowd, with people pressing on every side. He stopped and asked, "Who touched me?" The disciples thought it was a strange question. Everyone was touching Jesus. But Jesus knew the difference between a crowd that swarms in a frenzy, and someone who desperately needs healing. He wasn't going to let her

slip away healed but unseen. He turned, and found her, and called her something nobody had called her in twelve lonely years. “Daughter.” “Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace.”

He didn’t just fix her body. He gave her back her name, her dignity, her place. The giant didn’t just fall. The person it had been crushing got lifted all the way back up.

* * *

So here’s the giant math, and it’s different from what the world teaches. The world says you beat your giant by becoming bigger than it. Hit the gym, grit your teeth, white-knuckle it into submission. But this woman had no bigness left. She’d spent it all. She didn’t conquer her giant by being stronger than it. She conquered it by getting herself to Jesus. That’s the whole secret. You don’t have to be big enough to beat your giant. You have to be desperate enough to get to Jesus, even if all you can do is reach out in desperation.

And I’ll tell you a personal story about this that hits close to home for me. When I was in college, I felt a lot like that woman. I was only twenty-one, but I had chronic back pain, a rash on my arm that wouldn’t go away, and I felt absolutely lost and powerless. I was bombing my classes, sinking in debt, and coming off a string of failed relationships.

It was around that time that someone pointed me to a pastor who gave a daily radio sermon. And after some time, I listened to it. Then I listened more. And then, I

called on Jesus. I asked for forgiveness, and I asked to be born again, the way Jesus said, born of the Spirit. I prayed and asked emphatically. Save me. Revive my life. Give me hope. Give me vision.

And I promise you, everything changed. It was nothing short of miraculous. To keep this moving I'll save the details for another day, but I'll tell you this, the back pain that no doctor could cure and the X-rays said would be permanent, the rash on my arm that was also apparently incurable, the negative compulsions, and the lack of vision for my life. It all went away.

I then gave the church the only twenty dollars I had that following Sunday, and I told God, "I'm ready to do it your way." And the rest was history. So understand, I'm not sharing these stories just to fill a book. They are real. And although to this day I find them somewhat vulnerable to share, and even embarrassing because I had to reach rock bottom to find my way, I feel a responsibility so others who reach out to Jesus might find the same gift as I did.

Your giant doesn't become smaller because you finally feel strong enough to take it on. It looks smaller in relation to the power of Jesus and the Spirit's empowerment within you. Standing at the bottom of it, staring up, of course it looks impossible, and you can't possibly see a way. But the question was never whether you're bigger than your giant. You're probably not. The question is whether you'll push past the shame, the pride, the exhaustion, and the voice that says don't bother, and get that plug into the power socket.

* * *

So let's get practical, because giants don't fall to good intentions. First, name your real giants. Be honest about the thing that's been bleeding you dry, mentally, physically, or both. Maybe it's something you've been too ashamed to say out loud. You can't reach for healing from a thing you won't name, especially when God sees it all anyway. Second, push through the proverbial crowd. There will always be a hundred reasons to stay where you are. Too far gone, too embarrassed, tried it before, what will people think, exhausted, overwhelmed, and done with believing it can change. The bleeding woman felt every one of those, and she reached anyway.

Third, reach for Jesus specifically, not just a technique or a self-help plan. She wasn't healed by trying harder. Nor was I when I was in my greatest need. She was healed by contact with Jesus, just as I was.

And fourth, let yourself be called daughter, or son. Don't just grab the healing and run back into the shadows. Let Jesus give you your dignity back, too. Accept God as your heavenly parent. That's the part of the miracle most people leave on the table.

If you think this kind of reach-through-the-impossible faith is just an old story, there have been so many others with the same story, some who went on to incredible feats. Consider how Harriet Tubman escaped slavery. Immense power and courage. But then, and this is the important part, instead of staying safe, she went back with her newfound freedom and empowerment to help others.

She walked right back into slave territory roughly a dozen times to lead others out too, with a bounty on her head and almost nothing in her hands but faith. She did it the same way the woman in the crowd did. She didn't measure the giant against her own strength. She got herself to God. "I always told God," she said, "I'm going to hold steady to you, and you've got to see me through." When people marveled at her courage, she waved it off. "It wasn't me. It was the Lord."

YOUR MOVE

What's Your Giant?

Name the giant that's been quietly bleeding you dry, the one you've maybe never said out loud, or the one you've resigned yourself that may never change. Now be honest about what's really been keeping you from reaching for help. Shame? Exhaustion? The voice that says it's too late? This week, do the one thing that counts as pushing through the crowd to touch the hem of Jesus' robe. Confess it. Ask Jesus into your heart if you haven't already. Open the Bible, and the budget, and the schedule, and the friends list, and pray over all of it. Surrender it to Jesus and prepare to be empowered for great things. You don't have to be strong enough to beat whatever it is. You just have to step out, walk. And reach with faith.

CHAPTER ELEVEN:
Take Authority Over Chaos

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A WOMAN WAS thrown down in the dirt in the middle of the temple court. The morning crowd was everywhere. Teachers, merchants, families, all headed here or there, now stopping and turning to stare. Dragged out of the worst moment of her life and dumped in the dust like evidence. Caught in adultery, they said. And the law, they said, was clear. Stone her.

It was a setup, of course. Not really about her at all. The religious leaders had been hunting for a way to trap Jesus, and they thought they'd finally found it. If Jesus said let her go, then that was soft on the law. If the answer was to stone her, then Jesus would have been just another hard man with a rock. And Rome didn't allow them to carry out executions anyway. So then Jesus would also be directly advocating for the breaking of Roman law. So, they had Jesus boxed in. Or so they thought.

Now watch what Jesus does. Because this is the fourth block, a master class in taking authority over chaos. And Jesus does the opposite of what you might expect.

He doesn't match their energy. He doesn't shout them down or escalate. When the noise is at its peak and they're demanding an answer, Jesus bends down quietly and starts writing in the dirt. To this day, nobody knows exactly what was written. The Bible doesn't say. But the effect remains unmistakable. The loudest voice in the place suddenly belongs to the one who isn't raising it at all. Everything slows down and comes to a hush. The frenzy has to wait on Jesus. He's taken control of the moment without adding a single decibel, because real authority doesn't have to be loud.

Then Jesus stands and says one sentence. "Let any one of you who is without sin throw the first stone." And then Jesus kneels back down and keeps writing, like the outcome was obvious.

Notice how perfect that is. He doesn't argue the law. He doesn't deny what she did. He doesn't say booyah and drop the mic. He just hands the chaos back to every single person holding a rock and makes it personal. He turns the mob from a faceless mass back into individuals, each one suddenly alone with his own conscience. The thing a mob can't survive is a moment of honest self-reflection, because the mob only has power as long as nobody in it stops to look in the mirror. Jesus held up the mirror.

And the scripture says they left, one at a time, starting with the oldest. That detail is almost funny. The

older ones, the ones with the longest list of their own failures, knew first that they had no business throwing anything. One by one the stones hit the ground. The frenzy didn't get defeated in a battle. It just dissolved, until the temple court was pin-drop quiet, and the only two people left were the woman, and Jesus.

Notice Jesus doesn't pretend she did nothing wrong. He doesn't excuse it. He refuses to let the mob, or her own worst moment, have the final word over her life. He clears the chaos, invites her to get up, and then hands her back a better future.

* * *

And here's what this means for you, because we all live surrounded by chaos, even if nobody's holding actual stones. The pile-on online. The room where everyone's worked up and reason has left the building. The family argument spiraling out of control. The drama that sweeps a workplace or locker room. The mob mentality that wants you to grab a rock and join in. Chaos is loud, and it is contagious, and it desperately wants you to react at its level.

And the lesson from Jesus is that you don't take authority over chaos by getting louder than it. You take authority by refusing to be ruled by it. There is staggering power in the man or woman who simply will not be swept up, who stays anchored when everyone else is losing their heads, who can kneel down in the dust and change the entire temperature of a situation.

So let’s get practical about how we do it in our own lives. First, do the earlier foundational steps ahead of time so you are prepared and aligned when chaos hits. Second, when chaos does hit, and it will, slow down on purpose. The mob or situation wants speed, but speed kills reflection and composure. Take the breath. Refuse to be rushed into the reaction everyone’s expecting. Third, don’t match the energy, shift it. You cannot out-fight a storm, but you can be the calm that breaks its spell. And fourth, make it personal again. Chaos runs on people forgetting themselves. Knowing who you are and what you have trained for is key.

Now, chaos doesn’t always look like a mob. It can come in many forms that test your readiness and resolve. I’ll tell you about a day this got personal for me, ten thousand feet in the air. I’d flown out of Tampa International Airport hundreds of times, so many times that the takeoff was baked into my mind and body. Every turn, every bump, every little shudder on the climb.

I knew the whole rodeo by heart. And on this particular day, a few minutes off the runway, my senses lit up. Something felt different. Not different enough to scare anyone yet. But I noticed, and I could see a few other frequent-flyer types quietly looking around as well. Then it got worse. The plane would rise, then fall. Rise, then fall. And then came that “bing.”

You know the one. The little chime that dings right before an announcement. I’ll be honest with you. In that half second, I didn’t know if we were about to hear that we were going down. I knew an announcement coming on that early in the liftoff, mixed with the erratic flight

pattern, couldn't be good. But it wasn't that dramatic, thank God. The captain came on and said we'd lost an engine on liftoff and were going to turn around and go back to the airport for an emergency landing.

But my first instinct, before a single conscious thought? Prayer. Funny how that works. They say there are very few atheists in foxholes, and I can tell you there probably aren't many on failing airplanes either. And then something settled over me that I can only describe as an incredible calm. The women seated on both sides of me seemed very nervous, they were visibly frightened, and they kept glancing at me like I might have inside information.

I could tell my calm was reassuring to them, and I made sure to just keep doing what I was doing prior, as if nothing had even happened. So I gave them what calm I had. After a little while, we made it back to the ground in one piece. Everyone clapped. And there were many sighs of relief.

But I've never forgotten that moment, where I got to see what I was made of, and make a choice of how to handle the chaos. And I remember wondering what it must be like for the one person on that plane who doesn't just get to sit there and pray. The one whose job is to actually take that faith into action, lock in, and fly the plane back to safety.

Captain Tammie Jo Shults could tell you. In April of 2018, twenty minutes after takeoff, an engine exploded on Southwest Flight 1380 at thirty-two thousand feet. Shrapnel tore into the plane, a window blew out, taking someone's life, the cabin lost pressure, and the aircraft

dropped more than twenty thousand feet in about six minutes while passengers screamed into oxygen masks. Chaos doesn't get much more acute than that. Shults was one of the Navy's first female fighter pilots, and also a Sunday school teacher, who had spent that morning at the gate talking through the Biblical Psalms with her crew.

Listen to the recording of her radio calls and you'll hear something almost eerie. Her voice never changes. "It's not on fire, but part of it is missing," she tells the tower. She flew the crippled jet on one engine and landed it in Philadelphia, and the other 148 people on board went home to their families. Passengers called it nerves of steel. Her crew called it something else, the peace God had given them all before they ever knew they'd need it.

She didn't out-shout the storm. She was anchored to something more stable, that the storm couldn't touch.

The question for you is, when the chaos hits in your life, in whatever form it may take, what will your training lead you to do? That is authority over chaos. And with the Spirit working within you, it is on your side.

YOUR MOVE

What's Your Chaos?

Think of any chaos you tend to get swept into. The argument, the group pile-on, the drama that spreads through the office or team. Next time you feel it pulling, do the one thing the mob can't survive. Lock in. Don't grab the stone to throw at someone, and don't freak out. Take a breath, get quiet, and refuse to be ruled by the noise, by being anchored to Jesus. And if you're in the dirt or a falling plane right now, with everything feeling like it's against you, hear the only voice that matters, saying "get up." That's your invitation. To get up, and take authority over your chaos, knowing Jesus has your back, no matter how it turns out.

CHAPTER TWELVE:
Rise Above Betrayal

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NOTHING CUTS LIKE the blade held by someone inside your own circle. And we've all likely experienced that at least once in our lives, if not more. You can armor yourself against enemies. That's what's expected from enemies, after all. But friends? The people who know your passwords, who've shared your dreams, who've laughed with you until your sides hurt? If someone like that turns, it hurts. That sets up the fifth block in the foundation of a badass, and it's the one almost no one knows quite what to do with. Rise above betrayal.

Judas walked with Jesus for three years, watched the miracles up close every single day, managed the ministry's money, and preached in Jesus' name with real power. If you'd polled the disciples on who was least likely to sell out, Judas might have won in a landslide. Betrayal almost never announces itself with ominous music. It usually sits right across the table from you, breaking bread.

Which is exactly where it happened with Judas. Judas sat at the Last Supper, sharing the bread and the cup, with the plan already in motion. Thirty pieces of silver, the going price of a slave, apparently seemed like fair payment for handing over his most trusted friend. And here's what separates Jesus from every other leader in history. He saw it coming and chose love anyway. At that table, with the betrayer right there, Jesus looked across at him and said quietly, "What you're going to do, do it quickly." No public shaming. No security escort dragging him out. Just a quiet acknowledgment of the choice being made. No plan to get back at him.

And later that night in the garden, when Judas led the torch-bearing mob through the olive trees and stepped forward to plant the betrayer's kiss, Jesus called him friend. Even then, even in the exact moment betrayal was wearing the mask of affection, the calm never cracked. And when Peter drew a sword to fight off the mob, Jesus told him to put it away because violence was precisely what everyone expected, and the aim was something far more powerful than a brawl in the dark. Jesus would convert it into redemption. So while the others played checkers, Jesus played chess.

Maybe your Judas was a schoolmate, or teammate, or maybe they wore a business suit and shook your hand on a deal they never meant to honor. Maybe they wore a wedding ring and promised "till death do you part" before choosing someone else. Maybe they had a job title, or position of trusted authority that demanded your trust while they quietly hurt you. The signature is always the same. That sickening moment you realize someone

was playing by a different set of rules the whole time, that while you were building a relationship, they were unjust, cheating, jealous, or competing.

* * *

Being betrayed is especially rough, but rising above it with grace doesn't make you weak. It makes you dangerous to the whole cycle of hurt that keeps the world spinning in circles. Resisting the urge to let betrayal knock you down for life, or incite retribution, not only saves you from the cycle of more pain, it releases the knife from continuing to twist at every thought of it.

Now. There's another kind of betrayal too. And this kind can be the most hurtful type of them all. It's when we betray ourselves. Sometimes we do a thing that knowingly hurts us, mentally, physically, or spiritually. Sometimes we abandon our integrity, or our mission, for some cheap and temporary thrill. Sometimes we make a pact with ourselves, or even God, and then fail to follow through. Certainly you can relate in at least some small way to this. Sometimes we don't need to only forgive someone else. Sometimes we need to forgive ourselves. And to accept God's forgiveness and grace, with repentance.

Take musician Johnny Cash as an example. The Man in Black was no plaster saint. He'll be the first one to tell you that. He betrayed himself for years with addiction, nearly burned his whole life to the ground, fell and got up and fell again. But he never stopped coming home.

And sometimes when we acknowledge our own faults, it can be easier to forgive the faults in others. In fact, in the Lord's Prayer, Jesus said "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." Johnny Cash heard this clearly, and out of his own scars came one of the most quietly badass ministries in entertainment history.

Cash went into prisons, Folsom, San Quentin, to play for the men everybody else had written off, because he saw himself in their eyes and he believed they could be redeemed too. That wasn't a publicity stunt. That was a man living out a direct teaching from Jesus. Cash visited the prisoner. He brought hope to the hopeless side of town, just like the song says. His faith, his son said, was the only reason he didn't die a dozen times over. Near the end, asked if he ever had lapses in his faith, the scarred, redeemed old outlaw answered without missing a beat.

"I have an unshakable faith." That's the whole thing. Not a man who never fell. A man who never stopped getting up.

* * *

So when betrayal hits you, or you hit yourself with it, you've really only got two roads. You can sink, or you can rise above it and prioritize redemption. Sinking feels great for about a minute. The self pity, the public exposure of someone who crossed you, hurting your own self further to prove a point, or trying to drown out the pain in harmful ways that may only feel good for a

moment. But ultimately, those things only sink you further. Rising above doesn't mean becoming a doormat or pretending something painful isn't there. It means refusing to let a bad situation decide what kind of person you become. It means choosing to get better instead of bitter.

Practically, that looks like a few honest steps. Feel the full weight of it first. Don't rush to some fake, premature forgiveness. Even Jesus grieved. It's okay to grieve what you actually lost. The key is to be sure to reject the lies that betrayal tends to whisper to you: "Everyone will hurt you." "You can't trust anybody." Or maybe, "You brought this on yourself."

Choose better, not bitter. And watch the thing that was meant to destroy you become the very thing that brings hope and redemption to yourself and others.

YOUR MOVE

Who's Your Judas?

Is the weight of someone's betrayal holding you down? Or maybe is it your own? If so, don't rush to judgment. Decide, can I set this down, or better yet, hand it to Jesus, for my own healing and move forward? That will set you free, and help you prepare for the next time something like this may happen, and it will powerfully strengthen your foundation. Because handling betrayal like Jesus, that's true strength.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN:
Forge Strength from Struggle

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Here's the part of the story Jesus could have avoided entirely. A little groveling, maybe just sloughing it all off as a misunderstanding. A quiet exit out the back door with a commitment to stay out of the public eye, and the whole problem goes away. Jesus knew exactly what was coming, and had every chance to sidestep it, but walked forward anyway. And that might be the most badass thing possible. Continuing forward with the mission you know is right, even when escape or avoidance is sitting right there and awfully tempting.

This is the sixth block, and one of the most transformational in the book, and it is also one of the hardest to lift.

I'll spare the graphic details, but the cross was engineered to be the cruelest death Rome could invent. Jesus didn't want it, but accepted it. Because God's will was never to suffer for its own sake. It was that humanity

be shown the way, and this was the only way that story was ever going to end, for Jesus and for us.

But of all the pain that was to come, the hardest part may have been the abandonment. In those hardest hours, the closest friends were gone. One even denied knowing Jesus, three times. The crowd jeered like it was entertainment. And the very people Jesus came to rescue were the ones screaming for blood.

You may know some version of that valley in your own life. If you've ever tried to do something extraordinary or outside the norm, you surely do. Doing the right thing and standing alone because of it. Giving your best to people who end up turning on you. Hurting while the room mocks you. Jesus knew that valley personally, all the way to the bottom.

So why did Jesus go through with it? It was love for us, and the knowledge that this was the very thing that would carry the message and the salvation thousands of years into the future. Jesus knew the result of what had to be done in service of others, and no amount of pain or loneliness was going to stop the mission.

I'll tell you, I've tasted a very small version of that valley myself. After discovering Jesus in college, I suddenly found myself feeling very alone. Nearly everyone I knew had little to no interest in what I'd just been through, or my new lease on life. And although I respected that, it was very hard to adjust to.

It was like winning the lottery and wanting to tell everyone about it, but finding out nobody cared. Or worse, they treated you weirdly for it. So I became isolated. But at the same time, something else was

happening. So many of my previous trials were turning into testimonies. I was being healed, inside and out.

I saw everything brighter and clearer. My past struggles were being transformed from spiritual messes into spiritual muscles. And the least likely people, sometimes near strangers, started confiding in me. It was as if for every nine people who ran away, one came closer, thirsting for the water I had found. My greatest strength was being fueled by my greatest struggles.

I could suddenly see something in people I was never able to see before. I saw their need. I was hit with a sense of empathy and compassion I had never experienced, and for the first time I cared more about giving than getting. My definition of a badass had been flipped on its head. Now I saw Jesus as the ultimate badass, and myself as the apprentice. Like Daniel-san sitting at Mr. Miyagi's feet. I was forged in the fire, not to be infallible, but to be obedient and compassionate. Not only toward others, but also toward myself. It was imperfect, but it was there.

* * *

And here's how this might apply in your life. The question was never whether you'll face struggle. You will. The only question is what you'll do with it when it lands. Will you let it block you, will you abandon your convictions before the result, or will you forge it into something?

And forging is the right word, because that's how strength is actually made. You don't get a stronger blade

by keeping the steel comfortable. You get it through fire and hammer. So when the struggle comes, you don't have to spiritualize it away with a tidy cliché, because remember, Jesus wept and groaned too. Pour the real thing out to God, the confusion and the anger and the disappointment. Then start allowing the fire to teach you, even if the only lesson is to lean not only on your own understanding. Knowing the clarity or any benefit usually comes later, on God's timeline and not yours.

I recall hearing a story once, and was struck at what a great example of this it was. In 2003, a thirteen-year-old surfer named Bethany Hamilton was floating on her board off Kauai on a calm morning, when a fourteen-foot tiger shark took off her left arm. She lost over half her blood and barely survived. Now, a fair question, and it's okay to ask it. Where was God in that part? Why didn't God just stop the shark attack from happening? Well, the truth is, we don't know.

But we can ask Bethany what her answer to that question is, because she's spent her whole life answering it. She said somehow, she felt God's peace keeping her calm in the water while it was happening. Then, she was back on a surfboard a month after the attack. Within two years she was a national champion, and then a professional surfer, competing against the best in the world with one arm, and no excuses or pity. "I don't need easy," she famously said. "I just need possible."

And here's the part that really answers the question. Bethany has said she wouldn't change what happened to her, because losing her arm gave her a way to reach far

more people in the surfing community and beyond than she ever could have with two arms. God didn't spare her the shark. God forged strength and hope through it, and a girl who could have been just a story of a tragedy became one of the most unmistakable walking testimonies on earth.

So in life, the fire is real. We don't know why it's necessary, and we often wish it wasn't, but there's no use sticking our heads in the sand about it. True badass leaders find ways to turn that pain into purpose, and strife into strength.

YOUR MOVE

What's Your Fire?

Name the fire you might be in right now, or one whose scars you still carry. Be honest about the pain, no tidy positivity needed. Then ask the forging question: what is this teaching me, or what has it taught me, that comfort never could? Then ask, how can this make me a better person to have a more positive impact on others? Or, how has this helped me focus more on my relationship with God? Those are the questions so many of the most impactful humans to ever live have found a way to answer, and answer well.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN:
Stand Unshakeable

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PICTURE THE SCENE. Midnight proceedings that felt so urgent to the people that they broke their own laws to make it happen. They gathered witnesses whose stories changed faster than today's campaign promises. A high priest tearing his clothes like a courtroom actor auditioning for the lead. They'd written the verdict before they ever heard the evidence. They were just filling in the paperwork. False charges delivered with Oscar-worthy performances. Purchased testimony that fell apart under the lightest scrutiny. Spineless leaders who knew the truth and lacked the backbone to defend it. And a mob that turned justice into a popularity contest.

This is the last block. Let's look at how Jesus stood. Here's a man who could dismantle an accuser's argument in a single sentence and leave a whole crowd stunned. And at the trial, Jesus mostly stayed quiet. Not out of weakness or lack of defense, but because Jesus

was wise. Sometimes answering a lie just feeds the fire and gives it oxygen. Sometimes letting your character do the talking is more powerful than any speech. When Pilate pressed, “Don’t you hear how many accusations they’re making?” Jesus said nothing. Because when you truly know who you are, you don’t need to prove it to people who have already decided to misunderstand you. The silence wasn’t surrender. It was strategy.

Then Pilate did the most human thing in the whole account. He declared Jesus innocent out loud, but to satisfy the mob, he okayed the execution anyway. But with one condition. He insisted, to the dismay of the religious crowd, that the sign above Jesus on the cross say “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.” That’s politics in a nutshell. Truth sacrificed on the altar of self-preservation. And still Jesus did not break.

The soldiers mocked Jesus. The crowd screamed for death. Jesus carried the instrument of execution through the streets while people cheered the destruction like spectators at a game. And from the cross came the words that detonate every revenge fantasy ever conceived. “Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they’re doing.”

That’s not weakness. That’s spiritual martial arts. So much so, that shortly after Jesus said that, one of the other prisoners being crucified declared Jesus as innocent, from the very next cross. Evil expects escalation. It’s built to feed on the cycle of hurt creating more hurt, and fear creating more fear. And Jesus ended the cycle right there with a forgiveness so total it left the enemies nowhere to go but grace.

* * *

Now, here's what that means for you, because you will most certainly face your own unfair and unjust situations. Jesus never promised you'd avoid injustice. He promised you wouldn't face it alone. Sometimes the right move is to fight back, legally and ethically of course, speaking truth to the powerful and standing up for what's right.

And sometimes the deck is genuinely stacked, the game is genuinely rigged, and your best and strongest move is to hold your dignity and trust a higher court than the one in front of you. Because here's the revolutionary part. Sometimes enduring injustice with your dignity intact exposes the corruption more powerfully than any protest or lawsuit ever could. It shows the watching world there's a better way to be human, even when humanity is failing right in front of you.

Sometimes the rigged room isn't a physical room at all. Sometimes it's the judge inside your own head. Anxiety can be an aggressive and unjust prosecutor in there, reading verdicts that were written before any evidence came in. You'll fail. They'll leave. What if it goes wrong? It's all about to fall apart. And here's the thing almost nobody tells you about anxiety. Anxiety is not just the absence of faith. Anxiety is faith running in reverse. Believing, completely and vividly, in an outcome you can't see yet.

The bad one. Anxious people may be some of the most faithful people alive. They just have that powerful faith aimed at the wrong future. Anxiety is a void. It's a space

that faith was designed to fill, and when it sits empty, dread is happy to move in and take over the lease.

Even Jesus experienced it. The night before the trial, in the garden of Gethsemane, with the cross just hours away, Jesus said, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow, to the point of death.” Then Jesus fell face down on the ground and prayed the most honest prayer ever recorded. “Father, if it is possible, take this cup from me.” No performance. No pretending to be fine. Just a man under a weight so crushing that the sweat fell as drops of blood.

And then came the turn that changed everything. He said, “Not my will, but yours be done.” Jesus didn’t stuff the anxiety down or fake the peace. He poured out every ounce of it, honestly, and then handed the outcome to the Father, and walked out of that garden anchored, straight into the rigged room, unshakeable.

The apostle Paul, the most effective disciple of Jesus to ever live, writing from inside a prison cell of all places, handed us the same play in plain words. Be anxious for nothing, he said, but pray about everything, with thanksgiving. And the peace of God, that passes all understanding, will be yours.

And then, he said, focus your thoughts on whatever is true and noble, whatever is right and pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, whatever is excellent and worthy of praise. In other words, take the reins of faith and aim it back at Godly things. That’s not a coping trick. That’s the natural, God-designed cure for the anxiety that holds you back from your full potential. Fill that void

with faith to be unshakeable, and the prosecutor runs out of material.

That's what it means to stand unshakeable. Not to feel nothing. Not to win every round. But to be so anchored to who God is, and to who you are because of that anchor, that no anxiety or rigged room can move the part of you that matters most. Remember the war-horse from the start of all this. All that fire and muscle, holding steady under command while the battle rages. That's standing silent in front of Pilate, with a higher purpose in mind.

Standing unshakeable in who you are, and refusing to win the way everyone says you have to. Now, let me give you one last current example in this final block of our foundation. Tony Dungy coached in the toughest and most violent league in American sports, football. Where the stereotype of a winning coach is a red-faced man, screaming until the veins pop in his neck and spit flies from his jaws. Dungy refused to be that man. And it's worth pointing out that showing some passion is not the issue in focus here, neither is righteous anger, or holding one to account. The point here is the why Dungy chose to lead how he did.

He didn't curse. He rarely raised his voice. He led with a calm so steady some people called it eerie. Some called it weak. And the so-called experts said it would never work. That you can't win in the NFL being that calm, that quiet, that controlled. But Dungy won a Super Bowl doing it exactly his way. A feat less than ten percent of coaches ever experience.

He said, “People look at me and see a calm, cool guy on the sidelines, and I want them to know that my Christian faith affects my coaching and everything I do.” Dungy had the guts to do it differently, to redefine what a winning leader can look like, and dared to be different for a purpose. Then he went out and backed it up, winning at the highest level there is. That is this book. Choosing your message. Being a living example in everyday life, which is the main cross most of us are called to bear. Real strength doesn’t have to look like the cheap kind to beat it.

Bottom line. You can’t always control the room. But you can control who you are when you stand in it. Passion and fire are fine. Losing yourself to it is not.

And with that, the seventh and last block is laid. Look at what you’re standing on now. You’ll more consistently fuel yourself first, step boldly in faith, conquer your giants, take authority over chaos, rise above betrayal, forge strength from struggle, and stand unshakeable. That’s the foundation of a badass. Not built on sand. Built on the rock. All held in line by the cornerstone, by which the entire foundation is leveled and set.

YOUR MOVE

What's Your Rigged Room?

Decide now, before you walk back into the arena. Who do you want to be, and what kind of person are you going to be?

CHAPTER FIFTEEN:
He Still Is

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The title of this book is Jesus Was a Badass. And I actually struggled with that name from the second I conceived it many years ago.

Now you might think that the word badass is the part I struggled with. But it wasn't. Well, maybe a little. Language is something I've had to be very mindful of over the years. Because since I worked with youth and was active in ministry, I had made the conscious decision to keep a guard on my language. Growing up with a family full of construction workers and police officers, my language was quite salty for many years, as you might imagine.

So cleaning that up was a decision I made in service of the work I knew I had to do. Even saying the word badass in a casual conversation would be a stretch for me. But I went with it for this book because no other single English word seemed to nail it quite as cleanly. Well, if "cleanly" could be a word to describe it.

And truthfully, many times while reading the gospels, or in church looking up at the cross, I would just think, what a badass. I lacked any other word for what I was thinking in many of those moments. So that word wasn't the main part I struggled with. The word I struggled with more was the word "was."

That one small word changes everything. It's past tense. As if we were only talking about a hero from a long time ago, someone who only lived and died and left a legacy behind. If that's how you look at it, I respect that. But in my opinion, the story isn't over.

That's the part that breaks the word "was" in the title. Because the man who took on Rome, who dismantled the corrupt establishment, who stared down a powerful king, who beat the devil in the desert, all in the service of love, is still alive for anyone who calls, and through the people who follow.

Death is supposed to be the one fight nobody wins. It's the undefeated champion of all human history. The force that eventually takes everyone. The eventuality that outlasts every empire. The strongest men and women who ever lived all lost to it in the end. My grandfather. Every general and king and champion you could name. All of them in the ground. Death is the wall every story finally runs into.

But death wasn't the end for Jesus. And the good news of that is, anyone who calls, who surrenders, who decides to follow, they get to live with Jesus now and for eternity too, and experience that spiritual power and strength right this very moment. Not only in some distant afterlife. Also in your ordinary Tuesday, hanging

out with friends at school, walking into a business meeting, making dinner for the kids, driving down the road, stepping onto the field, helping someone in need. That's the whole point. You don't bury your talents in the ground. You invest them into something that actually matters, the way Jesus did, the way followers have been doing ever since.

In some of the chapters of this book, I gave a modern example to help make it more relatable. And in this final chapter, I want to allow that modern example to be you. It doesn't have to be a big splash, although it could be. It could simply be one of the millions in the cloud of witnesses who are following the way Jesus did it, having a meaningful impact, being a badass in your own life. For your own good and those around you, you can be the victorious hero of your own story and your own circle. That's what this book was written for. Yes, Jesus was a badass, not only in guts and determination to take on the forces of harm in the world, but also in how it was done with love, with compassion, with patience and perseverance and temperance, and humility.

* * *

So everything I've written in this book in the past tense, I have to say again in the present. The defiance of blind conformity didn't end. Jesus defies it now through you. The protecting of the weak and the broken didn't end. Jesus protects them now through you. The truth that ends every argument didn't fall silent. Jesus speaks

it now through you. The love for the people around you didn't end. Jesus loves them now through you.

And in a way, that changes what these building blocks really are. They're not a self-improvement checklist you grind through on your own willpower. They're the way you walk with the spirit to be the hands, feet, eyes, ears, and mouth of Jesus. Not simply trying harder, but by staying close to the empowerment and inspiration of God through Jesus.

* * *

Now here's the part I saved for the end, because it's the part that matters most for you. When you imagine living all this out, it's tempting to picture something dramatic. A stage. A spotlight. A story someone writes down for the ages. But the truth is, most of the badass faith in the history of the world has no name attached to it. It never made a newspaper or a highlight reel.

It's the mom who prayed through the night and got up and went to work anyway. It's the man who stayed clean one more ordinary day because his kids were depending on him. It's the person who forgave the unforgivable in private and told no one. It's the quiet act of kindness with nobody around to clap, or capture it on social media.

There is a great cloud of witnesses stretching back through history, and most of them you will never hear about. They didn't storm a Colosseum or win a title or lead a movement. They just loved, and served, and refused to quit, in a thousand small unseen moments

that never trended anywhere. And God, with a very different scorecard than the one we're used to on ESPN, counts every single one of them a hero.

So don't miss what that means for you. You don't have to be famous to be a badass. It's not about follower count, donation size, or being recognized at the local convenience store. You may become well known for something positive you do. And you may do something extraordinary. And if so, great. But for many, it will be the small, simple, private things. And that's great too.

Sometimes it's giving millions to charity instead of buying a yacht. Other times it's commitment nobody sees. Either way, love, and kindness, and perseverance poured out day in and day out. That is real strength. That is the toughness of Jesus, lived out in a human life. And it counts for everything.

And remember the subtitle of this book. "And You Can Be Too." You can take the baton, and run with it. Start tomorrow morning, in the quiet, before the noise. Take the step you've been circling. Love and care for the people in front of you, and around you, and for yourself too, like it's your mission, like it's why you're here on this earth, because it is. Thank you for taking this journey with me. I pray that Jesus empowers, uplifts, and sustains you, for the growth of your soul and the good of the world. Go. And be a badass.

A Quick Favor

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If this book strengthened you, please consider leaving a rating on Amazon or wherever it was purchased. It tells the algorithm to show the book to more people who may need it.

And I’d love to put the next tool in your hands. Leave a rating, then visit PowerPrecepts.com for a free gift: 20 Principles and Promises of Jesus to empower and uplift your life.

Thank you!

About the Author

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Eric is a multiple Amazon bestselling author and a former Microsoft leader. He holds a Master of Theology degree and has spent over 25 years studying the traits and teachings of Jesus.

Eric writes and speaks at the intersection of business and theology, always pursuing the same answer to what actually empowers and transforms a person, a business, and a brand for greater fulfillment, impact, and success.

Learn more about Eric and his work at EricCrawford.com.

For Reflection and Discussion

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Whether you're going through this book alone, with a friend, or with a group, these questions are where you can dive deeper into what each chapter is really asking of you. You're invited to be honest, and to let the words and example of Jesus empower you for the better. And if you're in a group, go easy on each other. Help one another grow. The realest answers usually cost something to say out loud, and a trusted space is where that work gets to happen.

Chapter One — The Toughest Man Who Ever Lived

1. When you pictured the toughest person you could think of, who came to mind, and what does it tell you that Jesus probably didn’t? And, if Jesus did, why?

2. Where did your definition of toughness come from? Who taught you what it meant to be tough? How has your definition changed through this book?

3. Where in your life do you have power or talents you could aim at love this week?

NOTES

Chapter Two — Jesus vs. Rome

1. What is the Rome in your life right now, the power or fear that keeps your head down and your mouth shut?
2. Rome's only real lever was fear of losing something. What would you have to make peace with for that lever to stop working on you?
3. Rome wasn't defeated by an army. It fell to casseroles, open homes, and three hundred years of unnamed love. What small act of kindness could you carry, maybe even into hostile territory, this week?

NOTES

Chapter Three — Jesus vs. the Religious Institution

1. Why is it sometimes so much harder to confront what’s wrong inside your own camp than to stand up to an obvious outside enemy? Where have you seen that in your own life?

2. Where have you stayed silent to keep the peace? What was that silence protecting?

3. The anger of Jesus was never about personal insult, only about defending the things of God and protecting the vulnerable from being exploited. What does your anger usually defend, justice, ego, or sometimes both?

NOTES

Chapter Four — Jesus vs. Herod

1. Who is the fox in your life, the one whose potential punishment can make you shrink back? Is it maybe not even a person, but a group or a concept?

2. Power is most dangerous when it’s most afraid. Herod proved it twice. Where have you watched fear make someone lash out, and has it ever been you? What has it taught you?

3. Threats noted, mission unchanged. What good work could you keep doing steadily this week, without fearing judgment, or matching the haters’ volume, or feeling the need to ask for social permission?

NOTES

Chapter Five — Jesus vs. the Devil

1. What's your wilderness, the shortcut or weakness that may show up when you're tired, alone, and nobody would ever know?
2. The battle in the wilderness was won years before it happened, in the quiet seasons of filling the well. What truth are you storing up now, before you're thirsty?
3. Most of us are strong when people are watching. Jesus was strongest when nobody was. Where could your private fight catch up to your public one?

NOTES

Chapter Six — Blessed Are the Badass

1. Which Beatitude sounded the least like strength to you before this chapter? Meek? Merciful? Peacemaker? Do any of those sound different now?

2. The thesis of this whole book: chase Jesus and the strength and wisdom come free. Where have you been chasing the strength or respect directly, and what might change if you chased the things of Jesus more directly instead?

3. Consider the Samaritan who stopped for the man in the ditch, and the father who ran to the son who wrecked him. Which one would feel harder for you to live out, and why?

NOTES

Chapter Seven — Build on the Rock

1. From the curb, the house on rock and the house on sand look identical. What did your last storm reveal about your foundation?

2. The servant who buried the talent called it caution. The master called it fear. Where in your life might you be burying your talents?

3. Rock takes longer to build on than sand. Where are you tempted to take the fast, surface-level route right now, and what would anchoring to bedrock look like instead?

NOTES

Chapter Eight — Fuel Yourself First

1. When did you last run on empty, and who may have paid the price for it besides you?
2. Solitude, scripture, prayer, nature, real friends. Which part of Jesus' toolkit is most missing from your week, and what's crowding it out? Could any of them be worked back into your life, a little at a time?
3. Consistency beats intensity. What fifteen honest minutes could you guard tomorrow morning or during the day, before the noise drowns out your whole day?

NOTES

Chapter Nine — Step Boldly in Faith

1. What’s the boat you’re white-knuckling right now, the safe thing you hold onto so you never have to step out in faith?

2. Peter sank, and was still within arm’s reach. How does your next step change if you believe faith is a relationship God sustains, and that you’re never out of reach of help?

3. Forget the tenth step of faith you may eventually have to take. What’s the first one, the call, the email, the apology, the start you can take right now? And will you take it?

NOTES

Chapter Ten — Conquer Your Giants

1. What's your giant? What is the slow, grinding thing that's been wringing you dry? Have you ever said it out loud and committed to overcoming it?

2. The woman in the chapter had no strength left to beat her giant, so she pushed through the crowd and reached for the hem of Jesus' robe. What does pushing through the crowd to reach your goals look like for you?

3. Jesus stopped the whole crowd to find the woman, and call her "Daughter." Why is it sometimes tempting to grab the healing, or whatever quick fix we're after, but skip the relationship?

NOTES

Chapter Eleven — Take Authority Over Chaos

1. What chaos tends to sweep you up? The online pile-on, the spiraling argument, the issue on which everyone has lost their head?
2. The mob can’t survive a mirror. What’s your version of kneeling down to write in the dirt, slowing the moment instead of feeding it?
3. What can you get up from now, that has felt like it’s been holding you down?

NOTES

Chapter Twelve — Rise Above Betrayal

1. Peter and Judas failed the same night and ran in opposite directions. After you fail, what do you tend to do next? Do you seek forgiveness and redemption, or hunker down and let it fester?

2. What is your betrayal still whispering? Is it that you can’t trust anyone? That you brought it on yourself? What would refusing that lie sound like?

3. Better, not bitter. Without faking forgiveness or drinking the poison, what would rising above your betrayal actually look like this week?

NOTES

Chapter Thirteen — Forge Strength from Struggle

1. What’s the fire you’re in right now, or the scar you still carry? Have you been honest with God about the pain, or have you rushed past it?
2. Bethany Hamilton said she wouldn’t change what happened to her. What positive impact could your struggle be forged into that comfort never could have made?
3. Your scars become someone else’s map to freedom. Who may be currently walking a road you’ve already survived, and what’s stopping you from finding them?

NOTES

Chapter Fourteen — Stand Unshakeable

1. Where is your rigged room, the place where the verdict feels (or has felt) written before you even walk in?

2. Jesus stayed silent because some lies only grow when you feed them oxygen. When can silence be strength for you?

3. Coach Dungy won at the highest level without becoming the enraged screamer everyone said he had to be. What “required” version of success do you need the guts to refuse?

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Chapter Fifteen — He Still Is

1. This whole book turns on “was” becoming “still is.” What changes for you if Jesus is not a monument to admire, but still able to empower and inspire you for good?

2. Most of the badass faith in history has no name attached to it. What unseen, unclapped-for faithfulness is yours to live out on an ordinary day?

3. Last question of the book. Which blocks will you start laying this week to build the foundation that will bring more of the purpose, success, and positive impact you are ready for? And who do you know who may benefit from this book next?

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