

*Dedicated to 21st Century Shadrachs,
Meshachs, and Abed-Negos who refuse to
bow to the idols of this age. (Daniel 3)*

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Foreword

There is no doubt that our culture is turning numb. As Francis Anfuso so effectively points out, we are slowly becoming desensitized, calloused, and inoculated to the sinful world around us. Sin has crept in and taken hold. Now it is working its process to destroy us from the inside out.

Our youth are left floating. Our children are left in hiding. And our society is worse for the wear. Yet, there is hope.

As the enemy seeks to destroy, the Lord seeks to bring life. He has offered an alternative—something far more fruitful and fulfilling than the numb existence of this present age. And it's available to each and every one of us.

The response to which we are all called: to know Jesus Christ in a personal way, to spend significant time reading and meditating on His Word, and to learn to think God's thoughts after Him.

Life with Christ is far greater than any of us could imagine. Its beauty—its perfection—is proclaimed throughout Scripture.

A living expression of an individual who is alive to God.

A reminder of the new covenant found in Christ:

“I can do all this through him who gives me strength.”¹

New life! A daily relationship with our Savior! A life truly worth living!

“Christ in you, the hope of glory.”²

It is the resurrection of Jesus Christ that makes all this entirely possible and available to any human being who wants to know what it means to live a life that is not numb, but instead very much alive and useful for God.

Relevant truths...Life-changing realities...The great and final cure for a life left numb.

Luis Palau
World Evangelist
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¹ Philippians 4:13 (NIV)

² Colossian 1:27 (NIV)

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I thank Jesus Christ for raising me from the dead and my wife of 36 years, Suzie, for keeping me alive, sane, healthy, and happy since then.

Special thanks to my dear friend of 25 years: Bob Hasty. He first shared the marvelous title of this book with me with the caveat that I never use it. But, after years of spoiling him with my love and friendship, he relented. Thanks Bob!

I've written this book with the help of the *Fantastic Four*: Natalie Eiferd, Kathy Kunde, Betty Price, and Lisa Dunne. Great women of God who have tag-teamed this project to completion—each are brilliant, godly, and dedicated!

Thank you Natalie for being a marvelous overall editor. It's been a few years since we worked on *Perfectly Positioned* together. You continue to grow in wisdom. Your tough love was painful but brought the project to a new level.

Kathy, it was a joy to once again labor together. I trust your judgments implicitly. Every time you touched this book it increased in value and impact. Thank you!

Betty, your meticulous preciseness with the footnotes and references always adds a stamp of legitimacy that is much needed. Thanks so much!

Lisa, having known you and your husband Adrian for more than two decades, it has been a true joy to watch you grow into an accomplished wife, mother, author and university professor. It was likewise a privilege to have your own writings fuel my passion for this vital topic and then to labor with you to bring it to completion. I'm honored to have your name on the cover.

Francis Anfuso

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Introduction

There are defining moments in the history of every nation, and in each generation there are leaders who recognize and seize these opportunities. I believe America is at the threshold of a historic moment. I have been gripped by the promise of a company of forerunners who will define the markings of a people completely given to Jesus.

The children of Israel faced a similar situation in the book of Daniel chapter 3. Living in a foreign land, they were bombarded by a culture counter to all God had called them to—heralded to fall down and worship the popular idols of their day. An entire generation submitted to the societal “norms”. Lulled to sleep by the influence around them, the Israelites were rendered comatose and ignorant of the *greater call* on their lives to represent God to the world. Yet, three young reformers refused to bow to compromise or complacency, and as a result, they shifted the destiny of an entire nation. They asserted their convictions instead of the prevailing standard.

My heart was stirred as I read *Numb*. My spirit began to explode while hearing a father-in-the-faith implore this generation. Our nation longs for a new breed of leaders to emerge in this hour. We need a people who desire to know Jesus and to give itself wholeheartedly to His cause in the earth. The task requires revolutionaries who embrace the truth that they will never blend in, and that they were designed and anointed to shine light through darkness.

The world has nothing to offer you and me. The amusement and gratification of this system fades beneath the superior pleasure of knowing God. We were not fashioned to settle and be contained. Rather, we are lovingly purposed to embrace the expansive satisfaction of intimacy with Him. To neglect God is to omit the very thing we were created to do.

Years ago I heard someone describe a body of individuals who would be the most powerful generation in history because they would *choose God* in the midst of options. Never before have we been so saturated with possibility. The ease of travel, technological advancement, and instant access to information and communication networks provide us with a smorgasbord of immediate choice. However, in the face of this selection, there is a generation who is saying, “yes” to Jesus and “no” to substitutes. There is freedom and authority within the humility of electing Jesus despite the options.

You hold this book in your hands because you were born for greatness. But greatness can be realized only in a life abandoned to God. I dream of an entire generation no longer captive to the diversions of this world but surrendered and found complete in Jesus.

Banning Liebscher
Jesus Culture
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Prologue

I live in America—the numbest place on Earth—where you can reject more options in a single day than people in other nations are offered in a lifetime.

Our attention can shift from the silly to the benign, the sacred to the sublime, before fully digesting the last sound bite. I’m being sucker-punched when I change the channel, walk through a checkout stand, or stroll through a mall. That Victoria is trying to destroy my life and marriage is no secret. How many “F” and “S” bombs have to explode before we believe they’re worthy adjectives, merely adding spice to life?

I may be going numb, but I refuse to go quietly!

Numbness has always been a global malady. At an electronics store in Rome, Italy, I saw an advertisement for pornographic software. It read, “There’s nothing to hide. The only sin is to not view it.”

The patients are running the asylum, and moral absolutes are considered passé. The devil knows if he can make denial a way of life, a hardened heart will inevitably lead to a dead conscience.¹ These are strong sentences, but they have to be. The cure for numbness is not passivity, but passion. It is for this reason the first two chapters *The Assault* and *Numbness* thoroughly describe many factors contributing to the wave of numbness that attacks both our culture and the Church. It is a distressing x-ray revealing the severity of this problem.

But why go into such detail?

Because the solution found in the third and fourth chapters would not be either received or applied unless the extent of the predicament was first exposed. These last two chapters, *The Awakening* and *Counteroffensive*, require a high level of focus and commitment. Most people defer the price for change until they understand the seriousness of the situation.

¹ 1Timothy 4:2

I am not filled with despair. I am filled with hope. But my hope is based on God's plan and not our present dilemma. Change is essential for our spiritual health. I take heart in the fact that historically revivals and other moves of God, happen at exceptionally low points of cultural morality. Each time someone was willing to pay the price and say, "Enough is enough! We were created for better. God, send Your power to get us back on track."

I've written this book in collaboration with my good friend, Dr. Lisa Dunne. In her exceptional book, *Emerge*, she offers hope for our embattled culture without naiveté. Having thoroughly dissected the tsunami of challenges facing our increasingly listless planet, Dr. Lisa provides a hope-filled assessment.

Her hope coincides with God's!

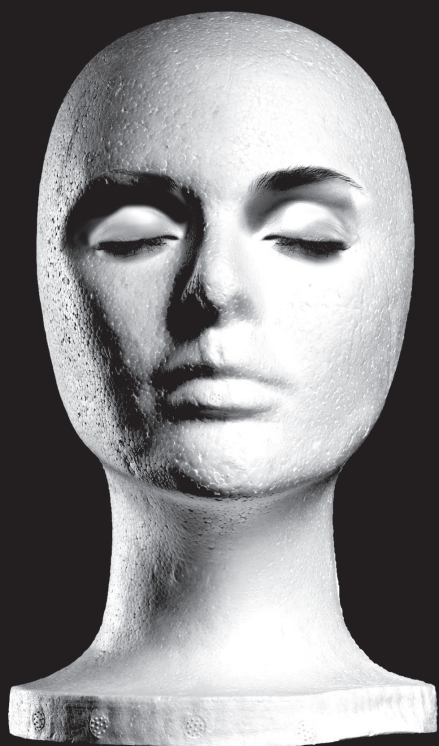
"For I know the plans I have for you,' says the Lord. 'They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a *hope*.'"² The prophet Jeremiah first penned this oft-quoted verse when the people of Israel were slaves in the middle of a 70-year captivity in Babylon. It gave hope to a people struggling with hopelessness.

For all those who reject numbness as your inevitable future, read on!

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Note: For the sake of brevity and impact we have placed the complete documentation of lengthy footnotes online at francisanfuso.com/numb.

² Jeremiah 29:11 (NLT)



CHAPTER

ONE

THE ASSAULT

The Gaga Generation

In a world of a billion voices, you have to scream to be heard or disrobe to be seen. Behavior that would have been regarded as bizarre a few years ago is now considered art—an enlightened expression of advanced individuality. Gone is the big fish in a little pond. Whatever we do is instantly compared to the best on the planet, even the best there ever was.

Generations who at one time received self-worth from their families, neighbors or a small circle of friends, now fight to establish their own brand of uniqueness, even if it is devoid of lasting value. Feeling *unimportant*, the talentless masses willingly throw themselves into the gladiatorial arena of reality TV. Why risk such public humiliation? Why suffer the mockery of millions when they have so little to offer? Because they're already humiliated! They live with a hollow sense of personal inconsequence. Unfortunately, their desperate leap to touch the rim of notoriety will only deepen the hurt.

Music icon Lady Gaga provides insight into the psyche of many today, "I felt disenfranchised by my school, and by the people in the school who'd make fun of me, and bully me, and tease me, and make me feel less cool."¹ Gaga admitted, while crying backstage before a concert at Madison Square Garden, "I still sometimes feel like a loser kid in high school."²

Gaga's goal is admirable. She wants to free others from the insecurities and rejection that she herself experienced. At her

1 Lady Gaga. Interviewed by Anderson Cooper. *60 Minutes*. CBS, June 5, 2011.

2 Lady Gaga Presents The Monster Ball Tour. Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/numb.

concerts she encourages fans to “reject anyone or anything that’s made you feel like you don’t belong.”³ She speaks to a whole generation who “feel disconnected from society, or disenfranchised, feel like a freak, feel like you don’t belong, or you don’t fit in, or you’ll never be great.”⁴

Yet, in their search for significance, many young people have become fame junkies, fantasizing about fame and fortune. Approximately 80% of 18- to 25-year olds “think getting rich is either the most important, or second most important, goal in their lives,” and about half of that same age group say fame is also highly valued.⁵ All but a tiny fraction will be deprived of both. Even the rare exceptions will awaken to the same reality that jolted Tiger Woods: riches and fame can’t fulfill if our inner fantasy is more desirable than our outer reality.

Jayson describes the evolution of the self-absorbed, narcissistic mindset. Since the early 1980s, this generation was “raised in the glow and glare of their parents’ omnipresent cameras. While experts say it’s natural for humans to seek attention, these young people revel in it. They’re accustomed to being noticed, having been showered with awards and accolades. Add in the anything-is-possible attitude typical of youth overall, and experts say that even among millennials of lesser economic means, there is an optimism that fame and fortune can happen to anyone.”⁶ Let’s not forget the end of the mythological figure, Narcissus. He was so vain he ultimately drowned trying to kiss his own reflection in a pool of water.

For many, even recognition for a horrific performance is preferable to no attention at all. The world is filled with people who will sacrifice dignity for fifteen minutes of fame. If that’s not an option, they will settle for fifteen minutes of infamy. The beast of superficiality is fed and personal identity remains as empty as ever. The truth is, unless we find our identity in the one true God, our

3 Lady Gaga. Interviewed by Anderson Cooper. *60 Minutes*. Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/numb.

4 *ibid*

5 Pew Research Center. A Portrait of “Generation Next.” Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/numb.

6 Jayson S. The goal: Wealth and fame... Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/numb.

soul will wash away into an ever-expanding ocean of insignificance.

Those who don't succeed in their attempts for notoriety settle for illusions via fantasy, entertainment, drugs, alcohol, perverted pleasures, or a robotic mindset. It's one thing to be an adrenaline junkie playing Russian roulette with your body, it's quite another to sell your soul for a momentary rush. The rush eventually slows to a death by a thousand cuts—a gradual evil that drains the life out of a person's heart.

Like a mannequin posing in a window—one becomes lifeless!

Crackberry

One of my closest friends, “Mountain Mike” Shreve, conducts *Ultimate Wilderness Adventures* into California's majestic Sierra Nevada mountain range. A couple of years ago, a 13-year-old girl went on this weeklong journey and God really touched her life.⁷ But just two years later, she declined his invitation to go again. The fact that cell phones, texting, and the Internet were not allowed was a deal-breaker. Her reasoning was, “I can't go for a week because I'll lose my place among my friends.”

It has come to that!

Technology offers the potential for either wonderful use or horrific abuse.

It is becoming painfully evident that many of today's greatest addictions are media related:

- “American college students describe their feelings when they have to abstain from using media in literally the same terms associated with drug and alcohol addictions: ‘in withdrawal, frantically craving, very anxious, extremely antsy, miserable, jittery, crazy.’”⁸
- The average video gamer is 35 years old.⁹

⁷ Ultimate Wilderness Adventures. Retrieved from <http://uwalaketahoe.com> on June 13, 2011.

⁸ University of Maryland. Students Addicted to Social Media. Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/numb.

⁹ Barker LE, Kirtland KA, Gregg EW, et al. Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/numb.

- Romantic e-books are predicted to soon surpass paper books in sales.¹⁰ Now a woman can have an imaginary fling without people seeing a hunk flaunting himself on the cover of her book.
- A University of Maryland study concludes that “most college students are not just unwilling, but functionally unable to be without their media links to the world.”¹¹ One student admitted, “I clearly am addicted and the dependency is sickening,” while another said, “I received 40 texts since we started doing this—in the last 15 minutes.”^{12, 13}
- One conclusion that the University of Maryland observed is that “the portability of all that media has changed students’ relationship not just to news and information, but to family and friends—it has, in other words, caused them to make distinctive social, and arguably moral, decisions.”¹⁴

Another conclusion of the study is that “teens and young adults today place an unprecedented priority on cultivating an almost minute-to-minute connection with friends and family.”¹⁵

Unless our daily reality is greater than our fantasy, we’ll wander from one reality-replacement to another. And there are plenty out there! Media is either directly or indirectly connected to five of the ten most common addictions:¹⁶

- gambling (online)
- video games
- Internet surfing
- compulsive shopping (online)
- work-related addictions

The potential to fall into addictive behavior is greater than ever.

¹⁰ Bosman J. Lusty Tales and Hot Sales. Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/numb.

¹¹ University of Maryland. Students Addicted to Social Media. Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/numb.

¹² University of Maryland. 24 Hours: Unplugged. Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/numb.

¹³ *ibid*

¹⁴ University of Maryland. A Day Without Media. Soundbites. Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/numb.

¹⁵ University of Maryland. A Day Without Media. Conclusions. Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/numb.

¹⁶ Additionally, the most common addictions in order are.... Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/numb.

Theaters promote the movie experience by inviting their viewers to “escape”. This started during the Great Depression of the 1930s when many people went to movies to get away from the pressures of life. Escape, which is defined as “a form of temporary distraction from reality”, is just as attractive to the depressed and weary today as it was 80 years ago.¹⁷

Where a movie offers escape for a few hours, television—on the other hand—jumps from such diverse, disconnected topics so frequently and abruptly that it’s impossible to fully react emotionally. “We have become so accustomed to (TV’s) discontinuities that we are no longer struck dumb, as any sane person would be, by a newscaster who having just reported that a nuclear war is inevitable goes on to say that he will be ‘right back after this word from Burger King.’”¹⁸

In her exhaustive study, *Emerge: Cracking the Cocoon of Media Socialization*, Dr. Lisa Dunne examined the media and its effects, “The list of new disorders are orthorexia nervosa, an obsession with healthy eating.” Heaven forbid the sickest and fattest nation in the world should suffer from the perverse pathology of nutrition! How awful!

The list continues with, “the terribly annoying disease of lexical dysanhedria, which keeps its poor victims from enjoying the discipline of reading. ‘Put away the book, Johnny; there is no need to torture your poor lexical dysanhedric mind with textbook knowledge. Get back to your video game.’ Personal discipline, it seems, is a trend experiencing such a rampant decline that anyone who is not spiraling downward with it is subject to social ridicule.”¹⁹

Dunne further expresses our cultural malaise, “the attention span of the average modern American appears to have dropped to the rough equivalent of a three-year-old. Thus, if a speaker plans to talk more than five minutes, he should be sure to give us some

¹⁷ Apple Dictionary 2.1.3.

¹⁸ Postman N. *Amusing Ourselves to Death*. Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/numb.

¹⁹ Dunne L. *Emerge: Cracking the Cocoon of Media Socialization*. 4GenPress; 2010.

crayons and a piece of bright red construction paper to keep us entertained.”²⁰

So where is God’s attention?

On us!

We have been created to find our truest fulfillment in worshipping one thing, actually one Person: our Creator.²¹ Addictions, on the other hand, are idols. They misdirect worship! Addictions are actually a worship disorder—a false comfort attempting to replace our true Comforter, the Holy Spirit.

In the Book of Proverbs, we see that the adulteress worships sex, the lazy person worships comfort, the greedy or stingy person worships money, the proud person worships himself, the gluttonous person worships food, and the alcoholic worships alcohol.^{22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27}

Tim Keller defines idols in his book, *Counterfeit Gods*. “It is anything more important to you than God, anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God, anything you seek to give you what only God can give.”²⁸

Idols pose as solutions to the problem, when in actuality *they are the problem*. Though our world increasingly markets fantasy as a valid substitute for reality, it is a sham—the worst fraud of all, which is just this: giving up our free will for bondage and numbness.

²⁰ Dunne L. *Emerge: Cracking the Cocoon of Media Socialization*. 4GenPress; 2010.

²¹ Revelation 4:11 (NKJV)

²² Proverbs 5 and 7

²³ Proverbs 10:4,26

²⁴ Proverbs 15:27; 23:6

²⁵ Proverbs 8:13; 13:10

²⁶ Proverbs 23:2,21

²⁷ Proverbs 20:1; 23:29

²⁸ Keller T. *Counterfeit Gods*. Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/numb.

Reality is a Prison

Something is terribly wrong when you wish you had a different life—when you don't look forward to getting up in the morning, when you believe your best days are behind you, or that past mistakes have disqualified you from ever having a great future. If you are rarely or never content, then sooner or later you'll try and replenish your inner emptiness with something. You may fill it with fantasy, immerse it in illusion, or drown it in deception; but, as nature abhors a vacuum, nothing stays empty for long.

For many, reality is no friend, and their only hope is that a future dream will replace their present nightmare. In the meantime, a vicarious life is the only life they know. Living is experienced in their imagination, through the feelings or actions of another. They substitute who they could become for what someone else already is. It may be through sports or a TV personality, the neighbor down the street, or even an imaginary Marvel comic character, but it's a surrogate existence at best.

In the long run, secondhand life is as emotionally deadly as secondhand smoke is physically destructive.

Our attempts at creating an alternate ending to our present life will only lead to spiritual and emotional voyeurism.

A voyeur is “a person who derives sexual gratification from observing the naked bodies or sexual acts of others, especially from a secret vantage point.”²⁹ It comes from an old French word, *voir*, and means “one who lies in wait.”

Sounds like the devil, doesn't it?

The Apostle Peter, a man who knew well the seductions of the enemy of his soul, once wrote, “Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.”³⁰

Nothing can blind us faster than filling our eyes with empty things.

²⁹ “voyeur.” TheFreeDictionary.com. 2009. Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/humb.

³⁰ 1Peter 5:8 (NIV)

Sex is an act of worship between a husband and wife, and should not be dragged through the gutter of sexual fantasy or past the portals of Peeping Toms. The phrase “Peeping Tom” refers to a person who was said to have watched Lady Godiva ride naked through the coventry. For such a self-absorbed action, he was struck blind.

Though porn has never been easier to access, like the pleasure-seeking men of Sodom mentioned in Genesis, our culture is “struck blind...trying to break down the door, both leaders and followers, leaving them groping in the dark”.³¹ Porn will never satisfy. No matter how much we view, we find ourselves once again chasing after that elusive high, giving in to our lower nature instead of our higher calling.

A pastor friend of mine asked his congregation what fruit of God’s Spirit they believed was most actively working in their lives.³² Out of the hundreds of responses, one fruit was missing: self-control.

The forgotten fruit, self-control, will have to be found if we are to ever live a life worth living. Richard Nisbett, who is considered “the world’s greatest authority on intelligence” states that “he’d rather have his son being high in self-control than intelligence. Self-control is key to a well-functioning life.”³³

Addicted to Fantasy

Of the 50 highest-grossing films of all time, 35 of them or 70% have supernatural or otherworldly themes, grossing over \$31 billion. An additional 13 of these highest-grossing films are fantasies, bringing in over \$10 billion more. These 48 of 50 highest-grossing films comprise 96% of the most popular films made in the last 20 years.^{34, 35} Most of these successful film series have video game spin-offs, so you can be an unreal person in an unreal world any time you want.

³¹ Genesis 19:11 (The Message)

³² Galatians 5:22–23

³³ Greenmeier L. What Causes Someone to Act on Violent...Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/numb.

³⁴ Box Office Mojo. All Time Box Office: Worldwide Grosses. Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/numb.

³⁵ *ibid*

Why is there such a fascination with witches, warlocks, vampires, aliens, demons, the paranormal, the supernatural, robots, other worlds, fantasy, and comic book super heroes?

Why do we substitute illusion for intimacy?

Is it because deep down we know we're capable of so much more? We long for life beyond our wildest dreams: true goodness, supernatural power, becoming all we were created to be and do.

Only God can fulfill these longings. He planted them in us!

Our Creator's ultimate purpose has always been to give us more of Himself. We know we're made to be more and to dwell in a place far more pristine than this weary planet. Yet every day we're under siege, struggling to survive—experiencing infinitely less than His intention.

The essence of all addictions is empowerment through fantasy—life in the unreal. From reality shows to real-life bondages, fantasy can fulfill—at least for the moment.

In his article entitled, *Crack and the Box*, Peter Hamill writes, “Years of living vicariously through televised entertainment could create an insatiable drive for constant amusement rivaling an addict’s craving for a drug-induced stupor.”³⁶

In 1936, Aldous Huxley wrote a novel entitled, *Brave New World*. It described his profound vision of the future. Following a similar theme, in 1948, George Orwell wrote *1984*. A few decades later, social critic Neil Postman wrote a brilliant exposé on the role and effects of entertainment within contemporary society: *Amusing Ourselves to Death*. In it Postman’s contrasts of Huxley’s and Orwell’s two visions of the future seem more relevant with each passing day.

We were keeping our eye on 1984. When the year came and the prophecy didn’t, thoughtful Americans sang softly in praise of themselves. The roots of liberal democracy had held. Wherever

³⁶ Hamill P. Crack and the Box. 1998. Washington Post.

else the terror had happened, we, at least, had not been visited by Orwellian nightmares.

But we had forgotten that alongside Orwell's dark vision, there was another--slightly older, slightly less well known, equally chilling: Aldous Huxley's Brave New World. Contrary to common belief even among the educated, Huxley and Orwell did not prophesy the same thing. Orwell warns that we will be overcome by an externally imposed oppression. But in Huxley's vision, no Big Brother is required to deprive people of their autonomy, maturity and history. As he saw it, people will come to love their oppression, to adore the technologies that undo their capacities to think.

What Orwell feared were those who would ban books. What Huxley feared was that there would be no reason to ban a book, for there would be no one who wanted to read one. Orwell feared those who would deprive us of information. Huxley feared those who would give us so much that we would be reduced to passivity and egoism. Orwell feared that the truth would be concealed from us. Huxley feared the truth would be drowned in a sea of irrelevance. Orwell feared we would become a captive culture. As Huxley remarked in Brave New World Revisited, the civil libertarians and rationalists who are ever on the alert to oppose tyranny 'failed to take into account man's almost infinite appetite for distractions.' In 1984, Huxley added that people are controlled by inflicting pain. In Brave New World, they are controlled by inflicting pleasure. In short, Orwell feared that what we hate will ruin us. Huxley feared that what we love will ruin us.³⁷

As Andrew Postman, Neil's son, would later write that these disembodied news segments that float on plastic smiles with topics ranging from violent crime to tips for healthy eating to celebrity news create "a sequencing of information so

³⁷ Postman N. *Amusing Ourselves to Death*. Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/numb.

random, so disparate in scale and value, as to be incoherent, even psychotic”.³⁸

Neil Postman himself wrote, “the content of much of our public discourse has become dangerous nonsense.”³⁹ He also states that we are “getting sillier by the minute.”⁴⁰

This sentiment is even truer today, more than 25 years after publication.

As a culture we are increasingly addicted to fantasy. Why does it have such power? Because it assaults our true identity and destiny: we were created by God and for God. Only His perfect reality can keep us from feasting on Earth’s shallow substitutes.

Snorkeling in a Septic Tank

The world is one giant living room, with everyone online simultaneously. In a single generation, society has shifted from a family-centered life to a media-centered existence. The average young adult today spends 7 hours and 38 minutes a day absorbed in screen time.⁴¹ This stands in direct contrast to the comparative input of parental influence: 14 minutes a day alone with Mom and less than five minutes a day alone with Dad.⁴²

Outgunned, parents succumb to the incessant siege of cultural persuasion.

Passive media swarms children, lowering their intellectual capacity and reducing their ability to think critically. The trend is not encouraging. As a nation, we are spiraling downward as evidenced by abysmal reading scores, declining math scores, and a host of other academic deficiencies. Never mind the drain of cognition.

The many faces of numbness bombard our lives: broken homes, mindless jobs, addictive habits, empty hearts, superficial

³⁸ Postman N. *Amusing Ourselves to Death*. Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/numb.

³⁹ *ibid*

⁴⁰ *ibid*

⁴¹ Kaiser Family Foundation. *Generation M2: Media in the....* Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/numb.

⁴² Parsley R. *Silent No More: Bringing Moral Clarity to America*. Strang Book Group; 2005.

relationships, and economic recklessness. We are being dragged unsuspectingly toward a precarious life without substance or purpose. To fill the void with meaningless drivel will render us disconnected from the Author of life. It's the only possible outcome!

In the age of a universal Internet and 24/7 media, electronic dumpster diving is a daily temptation! From the ease of our recliners we can instantly access oceans of information, entertainment or diversion.

It's not just incredibly convenient.

It's seriously dangerous!

Dunne notes our predicament. "We are more 'persuadable' today than ever before, stirred up by the swamp of values-free, politically-correct, nutritionally-deficient, drug-infested, family-disengaged lifestyles."⁴³

"American households with teenage children watch an average of fifty-nine hours of cable and network programming a week.⁴⁴ Preschoolers watch an average of more than 28 hours each week—more than four hours per day.⁴⁵ According to Ron Luce, "Each year teens absorb more than 15,000 sexual references, with less than 170 referring to abstinence, birth control, or sexually transmitted diseases."⁴⁶ According to a 2005 study by the Kaiser Family Foundation, the number of sexual scenes on television has nearly doubled since 1998.⁴⁷ No wonder 80% of teens between the ages of 15 and 17 have been exposed to multiple hard-core porn visuals.⁴⁸

Most parents give their children a loaded gun. A full 68% of 8- to 18-year-olds have a TV in their room, and 49% also have video game access in their rooms as well.⁴⁹ To ensure that no child

⁴³ Dunne L. *Emerge: Cracking the Cocoon of Media Socialization*. 4GenPress; 2010.

⁴⁴ Parsley R. *Silent No More: Bringing Moral Clarity to America*. Strang Book Group; 2005.

⁴⁵ Tandon PS, et al. Preschoolers' total daily screen time at... Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/numb.

⁴⁶ Luce R. *Battle Cry For A Generation: The Fight to Save America's Youth*. NexGen; 2005.

⁴⁷ Kaiser Family Foundation. Number of sexual scenes on... Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/numb.

⁴⁸ Family Safe Media. Pornography Statistics. Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/numb.

⁴⁹ Kaiser Family Foundation. Generation M:Media in the... Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/numb.

is left behind, marketing executives pump up the malevolent mental assault: “More than \$12 billion a year is currently spent on advertising and marketing to children in the US, doubled from 10 years ago.”⁵⁰ In our media-centered age, the dam that held back some of our culture’s destructive tendencies, has crumbled. Now a free-for-all of information, the good, the bad, and the sordid, leaves no person or age group unscathed.

Our society lacks the moral backbone to halt the spread of hyper-drugged, hyper-violent, hyper-sexed media. Its affect on the millions of youth who guzzle it down every day cannot be overestimated. Tragically, in this great deluge of information, we are losing our ability to hear!

What does it take to go deaf? Pain. Just like excessive decibels stab the eardrum; excessive, confusing noise produce throbbing pain.

It’s getting harder to hear anything clearly.

It seems we’re living in times similar to the Old Testament High Priest Eli and the fledgling prophet Samuel when “the word of the Lord was rare.”⁵¹

Why do I believe this?

Because I’m finding it hard to hear myself—harder to feel—hardest to truly love.

Perhaps I’m writing this book primarily for myself! God knows!

The noise of all this nonsense has become deafening!

I’m reminded of C.S. Lewis’ profound insight, “God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks to us in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.”

50 Mind on the Media. Shocking. Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/numb.

51 1Samuel 3:1 (NIV)

Overexposed and Underdeveloped

Abandoned by parents, exploited by peers, seduced by society, much of America is overexposed and underdeveloped.

We have seen so much, yet become so little!

Perhaps the greatest farce of our present age is evil masquerading as good.

Our age is a fashion show for evil. Simone Weil writes, “Imaginary evil is romantic and varied. Real evil is gloomy, monotonous, barren, boring. Imaginary good is boring. Real good is always new, marvelous, intoxicating.”⁵²

In the age of fake everything, evil has many facades. Phony love, false peace, and imitation intimacy run rampant. Perhaps the most undermining evil is the loss of our identity. Can we call it thievery, when in most cases, like Esau of old, we give away our identity for nothing?

Since the Garden of Eden, the devil’s goal in this celestial masquerade has been to trick us into forfeiting our heavenly wealth for a menagerie of earthly trinkets. Disguising himself as good, he appears to occupy the high ground, the moral superiority—a better plan than God’s. As he asked Eve, he cleverly poses, “Has God really said?”⁵³

“‘You won’t die!’ the serpent replied to the woman. ‘God knows that your eyes will be opened as soon as you eat it, and you will be like God, knowing both good and evil.’”⁵⁴ A few thousand years later, once again the devil attempted to marry good and evil by tempting the last Adam, Jesus. He misrepresented scripture and questioned the veracity of God’s Word. He still does! When we don’t know God’s truth, we are defenseless against the subtle lies of the enemy and incapable of being truly free.

The word numb literally means “taken or seized as by cold or grief.” It’s been defined as “deprived of the power to feel or move normally through cold or shock; emotionally unresponsive;

⁵² Weil S. *Gravity and Grace*. Rutledge; 1999.

⁵³ Genesis 3:1 (WEB)

⁵⁴ Genesis 3:5

indifferent; paralyzed.”⁵⁵ To sum it up, numb leaves us desensitized, powerless, unresponsive, and unable to feel fully alive.

In short, numb defines many in this generation!

Un-Conscience

Much of the numbness that people experience comes from a conscience that has ceased to feel. In the New Testament, Paul warned against this type of dead, hardened conscience that has been seared and become callous.⁵⁶ It is even more frightening when the deadness is not caused by delusion, but by a deliberate commitment to resist the will of God.

Our conscience is “that faculty of the mind, or inborn sense of right and wrong, by which we judge of the moral character of human conduct.”⁵⁷ Is our conscience alive and well, or is resuscitation needed?

Each of us responds to our conscience in one of two ways:

1. We allow it to *accuse* us, bringing about a renewed commitment to do what is right.
2. We make *excuses* for our behavior and resist this God-given compass.

The Bible speaks of these two options when it says, “the law (of God) is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them.”⁵⁸

In life, if we wait to get caught instead of turning ourselves in our conscience will become corrupted and polluted.⁵⁹ Scripture confirms this. “Everything is pure to those whose hearts are pure. But nothing is pure to those who are corrupt and unbelieving, because their minds and consciences are corrupted.”⁶⁰

⁵⁵ “numb.” TheFreeDictionary.com. 2009. Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/numb.

⁵⁶ 1Timothy 4:1–2 (ESV)

⁵⁷ “conscience.” Dictionary.com. 2011. Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/numb.

⁵⁸ Romans 2:15 (ESV)

⁵⁹ A “conscience void of offence” is to be sought and... Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/numb.

⁶⁰ Titus 1:15 (ESV)

Legendary UCLA basketball coach John Wooden said, “There is no pillow as soft as a clear conscience.” The opposite is also true. Who can rest with a guilty conscience?

We will find no peace in life without a peace-filled conscience!

May we take these words to heart: “Conscience is God’s built-in warning system. Be very happy when it hurts. Be very worried when it doesn’t.”⁶¹

Frostbitten and Leprous Souls

The primary causes of physical numbness are cold and disease.

Similarly, the principle reasons for emotional numbness are coldness of heart and grief of soul.

Losing sensation due to frigid temperatures is part of the process of frostbite—a gradually numbing of appendages, perhaps not even noticeable, will ultimately bring death, either to the appendage or, if not removed, the entire body.

The first stage of frostbite is something called *frostnip*. Bits of the face or fingers go numb due to prolonged exposure to extreme cold. If this frozen tissue can be thawed quickly, it can be saved.

We live in a world frozen in disappointment, loss and grief; it’s easy for a heart to grow cold. For many, survival means cutting away that which has become numb.

In addition to numbness caused by extreme cold, the loss of feeling through disease is most commonly attributed to leprosy.

One of the oldest known diseases to mankind, leprosy primarily affects the skin, and “in 90% of patients, the first sign of the disease is a feeling of numbness...temperature is the first sensation lost, followed by light touch, pain and then deep pressure.”⁶² It is curable, but without treatment, the leprosy infection can lead to severe deformities and even death. The disease “attacks nerve endings and destroys the body’s ability to feel pain and injury.

⁶¹ Amish proverb

⁶² DermNet NZ. Leprosy. 2009. Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/numb.

Without feeling pain, people injure themselves with fire, thorns, and rocks, even hot coffee cups. Injuries become infected and result in tissue loss.”⁶³

“Worldwide, two to three million people are estimated to be permanently disabled because of leprosy.”⁶⁴ By comparison, emotional leprosy is even more rampant, perhaps numbering in the billions. A sinful virus takes hold in our lives attacking our conscience. Over time, we cease to feel, become desensitized, and are unable to express emotional depth. This too can lead to severe emotional deformities and spiritual death.

Interestingly, leprosy occurs “most often during two different periods of life, between the ages of 10 and 14 and in those aged 35–44 years old. It is rarely seen in infants.”⁶⁵ In life, both of these stages are transitional times. During the pre-teen and early teen years young people search for their identity, a search that can open them up to many activities that feed emotional numbness.

Though anxiety disorders are more common for emerging adults (18–24), there are reports of eating disorders increasing for tweens.⁶⁶ For example, the Eating Disorder Foundation says that 27% of girls 12–18 years of age have significant eating disorder symptoms, 31% of female college students have eating disorders, and “46% of 10 year old girls are dieting, have a fear of ‘fatness,’ or are binge eating.”⁶⁷

In life, we suffer loss. In our 30s and 40s, having lived through the drugs and sexual experimentation, abortions, failed relationships, economic setbacks, and other habits, many people become jaded and crusted over emotionally. Grief can usher a normal and healthy season of mourning, or it can hold tormenting emotions captive.⁶⁸ The jolt of unfulfilled expectations, devastating events, or the death of a dream infects the soul with anguish. Eventually

⁶³ American Leprosy Missions. Leprosy. Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/humb.

⁶⁴ World Health Organization. Leprosy disabilities. Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/humb.

⁶⁵ DermNet NZ. Leprosy. 2009. Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/humb.

⁶⁶ Berger KS. *The Developing Person Through the Life Span*. Worth Publishing Inc.; 2010.

⁶⁷ The Eating Disorder Foundation. Frequently Asked... Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/humb.

⁶⁸ The seven emotional stages of this grieving process... Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/humb.

an emotional and even spiritual dysfunction surfaces. The sufferer is unwilling or incapable of processing the losses of life.

In the Bible, water is used as a symbol of the Word of God applied to our soul by the power of the Holy Spirit.⁶⁹ Jesus said we are born of water and spirit.⁷⁰ It is the water of God's Word that washes and cleanses us.⁷¹

When a part of our body is frostbitten, the blood in the tissue, half of which is water, freezes. The parts of our body furthest from our heart freeze first. Tissue that has fully frozen cannot revive and return to normalcy—it is dead. The Bible refers to individuals who have drifted so far from Christ's life-giving blood that they are twice dead, physically and spiritually.⁷²

The aphorism is true: born once, die twice; born twice, die once.

One of the greatest warnings in Scripture concerns a cold or dead heart. "Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life."⁷³

Only God can warm a frozen limb far from a cold heart!

Identity Theft

The first waves of numbness usually wash over us unsuspectingly. We begin to realize we don't know who we are. But rather than look to God, we look to others to define us. So begins the charade of identity shopping: since I don't know who I am, and you seem to know who you are, why don't I try being like you for a while.

Sadly, the shoe never fits!

The historic meaning of identity comes from a 17th century derivative of the word identical, meaning the same. "Its ultimate source was the Latin idem 'same'... forming the basis of the Latin identitās, which literally meant 'sameness'. Its English descendant identity arose from the notion of something always being the same

69 1Peter 1:23

70 John 3:5

71 Ephesians 5:26

72 Jude 1:12

73 Proverbs 4:23 (NIV)

or always being itself (rather than something else).”⁷⁴ So we see that if we cannot be true to ourselves, we have lost what most defines us: identity.

God’s vision for our lives is the best of all possible options. Until we embrace this reality we will vainly attempt to recreate ourselves in our own image. This will merely increase our struggle with chronic emptiness.

Who are we really?

A reflection of the latest celebrity?

A clone of a wished-for friend?

The imaginary persona of our dreams?

Or merely a self-inflicted, self-inflated camouflaged insecure self?

There is even a syndrome known as the Celebrity Worship Scale (CWS). The following quotes demonstrate its degrees of concentration.⁷⁵

1. *Entertainment-Social*: “I love to talk with others who admire my favorite celebrity” and “I like watching and hearing about my favorite celebrity when I am with a large group of people.”
2. *Intense-personal*: “I share with my favorite celebrity a special bond that cannot be described in words” and “When something bad happens to my favorite celebrity I feel like it happened to me.”
3. *Borderline-pathological*: “I have frequent thoughts about my favorite celebrity, even when I don’t want to” and “My favorite celebrity would immediately come to my rescue if I needed any type of help.”

Unfortunately, it doesn’t require much insight to see that celebrities are as numb and empty as the next person. Both genders are affected. True manhood, once hard-wired to protect, has digressed into an impotent army of predators. Women, fashioned in part for beauty, have become specimens to be tasted.

⁷⁴ Word-Origins.com. Word History: identity, 2011. Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/numb.

⁷⁵ Maltby J, Houran J, Lange R, et al. Thou Shalt Worship... Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/numb.

Where have the great men and women of honor gone? Even the natural order of the human genders wanders astray without God's vision.

This point was never made clearer than during my years of sharing with audiences of young people. On a number of occasions, I would take a cupcake out of its wrapper and ask if anyone wanted it. Eager hands would shoot up all over the room.

I'd then proceed to lick all of the frosting off the cupcake, making sure that every square inch of its surface had saliva on it. Groans would fill the room! Finally, I'd ask who still wanted the cupcake. Nervous laughter followed until a teenage boy somewhere in the room would see this as his moment to shine. Jumping up he'd run forward and devour the cupcake like a ravenous dog.

Screams and shrieks replaced the groans!

After the room calmed down, I would say, "Who wants a wife or husband with all of the frosting licked off?" It's amazing how quickly a room can get quiet. So much frosting had already been licked off of so many lives—so much identity has already been given away. They have lost sight of who they were created to be.

Every day, Hollywood is licking!

Fantasy is smothering once-virgin minds.

A desperate dream to be another person in another place is ending badly.

Yet, I do not believe we have reached the pinnacle of numbness.

We are merely experiencing the first tremors.

Massive shakings are ahead!

If we look to Him, God will not allow us to be caught off guard.



CHAPTER

TWO

NUMBNESS

Numbness is a 21st century pandemic!

Though not a new reality, its footsteps grow louder with each passing year.

Below are some things you might not believe but are true anyway:

- Sixty-five percent of the adult population in America is overweight, yet only 33 percent personally believe they are overweight.¹
- Lifestyle changes can prevent over 50% of all cancers.²
- The U.S. is a world leader in youth homicide.³
- Self-violence among teens is the highest in recorded history.⁴
- More women than men are heads of households in the United States for the first time in American history.⁵
- The third leading cause of death for American teens is suicide.⁶
- Americans spend more money on slot machines (850,000 are in existence) than on movies, baseball and theme parks combined.⁷

¹ "Not too long ago in Western culture, obesity was... Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/numb.

² Danaei G, et al. Causes of cancer in the world... Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/numb.

³ Teens are in great distress in our country. The U.S. is a... Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/numb.

⁴ Self-violence in our teen population has increased... Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/numb.

⁵ "Today, there are fewer boys who are successful... Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/numb.

⁶ Suicide is the third most common cause of death for... Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/numb.

⁷ CBS News: 60 Minutes. Slot Machines: The Big Gamble... Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/numb.

- Many people's entertainment habits exhibit symptoms comparable to a drug addict.⁸
- Sixty-four percent of Americans say they spend more time with their computer than with their significant other.⁹
- Fifty-six percent of divorce cases submitted to the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers involved "one party having an obsessive interest in pornographic websites," while 68% of divorce cases involve one spouse conducting an affair with someone they met over the Internet.¹⁰
- American teens are the most sexually active in history. Sixty percent of those 14 years and older in the United States have at least one sexually transmitted infection.¹¹
- Daily pornographic search engine requests—68 million (25% of total search engine requests).¹²
- Most children in the U.S. will be exposed to hardcore pornography on the Internet by age 11; some say the average is as young as 8 years of age.¹³
- Teen pregnancy in the U.S. is 3 to 10 times higher than any other industrialized nation.¹⁴
- Teens that do not have sex before age 18 are nearly three times less likely to drop out of high school than teens that do have sex before age 18.¹⁵
- Seven of every ten teens who have been sexually active wish that they had waited until they were older.¹⁶
- Nearly a third of university students (not just those who seek counseling) reported that in the last 12 months they've been so depressed that it's difficult to function.¹⁷

8 "Years of living vicariously through televised... Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/numb.

9 According to a recent LiveScience survey, "64 percent... Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/numb.

10 Fagan PF. The Quiet Family Killer: Pornography... Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/numb.

11 Another example of self-injury is found in our country's... Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/numb.

12 Every Man's Battle. Facts. 2011... Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/numb.

13 In the US, the average age of first exposure to... Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/numb.

14 University of North Carolina researchers demonstrated... Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/numb.

15 "Beyond regrets of wishing they would have waited... Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/numb.

16 Seven out of 10 teens that have been sexually active... Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/numb.

17 Gabriel T. Mental Health Needs Seen Growing at... Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/numb.

- Flash mob robberies, organized on social media like Twitter, are rising. “Over 90 percent of crimes committed by young people are done so in a group. Seeing themselves on the security videos of the robberies that are uploaded on YouTube or shown on the nightly news can be a thrill to teenagers. It’s a way of bragging. Not only can you show your friends, you can show the whole world.”¹⁸

Study after study demonstrates that we become like the company we keep, whether that company sits in our living room or emanates from our television set.¹⁹

How can you tell if you are getting numb?

If you just read through the above list without alarm, you are growing numb.

Frozen in Adolescence

In my late teens I had one date with the beautiful and bright daughter of a prominent New York City law school dean. I was 18 going on 8. She was 18 going on 28. After an excruciating couple of hours in my presence she slammed the door in my face saying, “Typical!”

Just what I always wanted to be: another slug in the rainforest of life. I can still vividly remember standing alone in the hallway of her parent’s high-rise Manhattan apartment, frozen in adolescence, feeling branded as hopelessly immature.

What causes someone, whom God created to be exceptional, to remain typical?

Is it the same mindset that deludes an entire generation into thinking of skulls as a fashion statement—to identify with the faceless and skinless symbols of death?

What potion turns a prince into a frog?

Perhaps it’s just an outward reflection of its emotional health.

¹⁸ Vaughan A. Teenage Flash Mob Robberies on the Rise... Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/numb.

¹⁹ A recent study on teenage brains, showing a decreased... Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/numb.

Nowhere is the cultural malaise more apparent than in the increasingly prolonged adolescence of the average American. A half-century of children have grown up with pleasure at their fingertips. The comforts of life do not create growth. No one has ever been transformed sitting in a hot tub eating Ben & Jerry's. Yet for many, laziness is the comfort-of-choice, and fantasies the preferred pastime.

What causes teen years to continue into the late twenties?

Neglecting God.

And what will it take for a generation to leave the broad land of fantasy for a narrow inheritance of promise and destiny?

Choosing God.

Jesus described the human condition 2,000 years ago, and it has never been truer, "the gateway to life is very narrow and the road is difficult, and only a few ever find it."²⁰ He challenges all of us to not bury our God-given talents for the nether-land of illusion, but to nurture them as treasured gifts to be used here and now.²¹

Suspended Animation

"Suspended animation" is a scientific term describing the human body and the slowing of life processes by external means without termination.²² Breathing, heartbeat, and other involuntary functions may still occur, but they can only be detected by artificial means. Extreme cold can be used to precipitate the slowing of an individual's functions; use of this process has led to the developing science called cryonics.²³

This state of metabolic hibernation is reminiscent of human emotional lethargy. Learning to work through pain is an important part of developing maturity, and even getting healed. Yet many would rather live in a state of perpetual adolescence than deal with the wounds of life.

²⁰ Matthew 7:14

²¹ Matthew 25:14–30

²² "suspended animation." *Wikipedia.org*... Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/numb.

²³ Britt R. New Hibernation Technique Might Work on Humans...Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/numb.

The pain of divorce leaves us indifferent to marriage.

The pain of face-to-face rejection leaves us searching for online connection.

The economic recession further perpetuates our regression. “Job-shop” has become “job-hop”. When “eighty percent of new jobs are contract jobs, we are in what’s called a ‘Do It Yourself Economy.’”²⁴

Jon Stewart’s quip at a college graduation commencement is both funny and scary: “What piece of wisdom can I impart to you about my journey that will somehow ease your transition from college back to your parents’ basement?”²⁵

Young people are hit the hardest. Forty percent drop out of college.²⁶ One in five 25 to 34-year-olds wind up floundering at home with their parents, sleeping in their childhood bedrooms.²⁷ Debt from easy credit, impulse buying, college loans, and even poor real estate investments annihilate any hope for a possible future.

For many, life has been suspended like the wait at an endless traffic light.

While some youth wisely use their time at home, others hunker down in the parental womb.

In the book, *Not Quite Adults*, two categories of young people are described.

*The majority of young adults are treaders—treading water with low-wage jobs with no future and who are at risk of sinking. Swimmers are moving forward, albeit slowing [sic]. They are getting their ducks in a row but doing it right. I’d say it’s about 60–40 treaders to swimmers. It’s the fast starters, those who get out the gate quickly but start treading, that are most at risk. The economy isn’t there to support them.*²⁸

²⁴ Fitzsimmons M. The New 20-Somethings: Why Won’t... Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/numb.

²⁵ Stewart J. Commencement Address at The College of William & Mary. May 21, 2004.

²⁶ Weber E. Why Do 40 Percent Drop Out of College? Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/numb.

²⁷ Van Gelder L. Mom, Dad, I’m Home! More. Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/numb.

²⁸ Settersten R, Ray B. *Not Quite Adults*. Bantam; 2010.

While these challenges could motivate young people to welcome maturity, this generation, raised to avoid pain, dreads adulthood.

Sleep Walking

There's a scene in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* where Lady Macbeth sleepwalks through the royal castle, tormented with guilt for murdering her father-in-law. In her dream, unable to wash her hands of the blood from the murder, she pleads, "Out, damned spot!" Ultimately, she drowns in remorse and goes insane.

The corridors of earth are jammed with sleepwalkers, mangled mortals tormented by the guilt and shame of past actions—yet to be resolved. "Sleepwalkers often have little or no memory of the incident, as they are not truly conscious. Although their eyes are open, their expression is dim and glazed over." I cannot tell you how many times in recent years I've spoken to dim and glazed over individuals and audiences.²⁹ They seem to be sleeping through every aspect of their lives and constitute the primary reason for writing this book!

Numbness is epidemic in our families, culture, and even in our churches. Though the cause of this emotional and spiritual shallowness can vary from person to person, its effects and ultimate cure are relatively consistent.

I grew up in New York City, which at the time, I felt was the numbest place on earth. The very act of riding the subway was dehumanizing—countless blank, expressionless faces, crammed in shoulder-to-shoulder like cattle. No one ever talked, let alone looked another in the eye, without fear of hearing, in a thick New York accent, "What-a-you lookin' at?"

People surrounded me; yet, I was completely alone.

As sleepwalking can be passed on from parent to child, numbness can likewise be transferred to those closest to us.

I've seen it spread across families, churches, neighborhoods, cities, and even a nation. I am so alarmed by its present

²⁹ Peretz L, Malhotra A, Pillar G. Sleep disorders... Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/numb.

pervasive effects, I often find my heart screaming, “Wake up! You’re created for far more than this! Stop wasting your magnificent life!” But people would think I was mad if I ran down the street yelling what I’m really thinking.

So, I stuff it, and cry, and pray, and ask God to revive us once again.

You’re Not Bored

You may think you’re bored, but you’re actually numb.

A numb Christian is not just the most dangerous person on earth; he’s the most pathetic. Everything God does is designed to lead us into intimacy with Him, to set us free from our boredom, loneliness, and self-absorbed distractions. He loves us enough to not allow us to be satisfied with less than Himself.

Even what we would consider to be an innate desire, really reveals a craving for God. Nowhere is this concept more apparent than in our culture’s insatiable thirst for sex. The most celebrated athlete in the world lost his marriage due to an inability to control his sexual passions; the head of the most powerful financial institution in the world allegedly raped a maid in a hotel room; one of Hollywood’s biggest stars divorced because of marital infidelities.

Yet, sex without commitment only leads to exploiting another person for temporary gratification. No one wants to be exploited, nor does he feel good when he exploits others. Everyone wants safe, healthy relationships. This longing for love isn’t the problem. “God is love!”³⁰

When we say, “I want sex!”

God says, “No, you want intimacy!”

“You want the ultimate pleasure of knowing Me!”

Problems arrive when we make love a god. Pleasure is not the problem until we make it a god. God created sensual pleasure: the eye for beauty, the ear for music, the nose for flowers, taste

for food, and the breathtaking euphoria of sexual intimacy for a husband and wife.

God is a God of pleasure!

Likewise, money isn't evil, until we love it more than God and it bankrupts life.³¹ When we become "lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God," we destroy our potential!³²

Everyone experiences a measure of pleasure. Everyone wins something. The Devil is happy to sell the pleasure of Connecticut and Vermont Avenues, as long as he monopolizes the pleasure of Boardwalk and Park Place.

You're a winner! But you've won nothing of real value.

God alone can connect us to the eternal pleasures that will meet every need in our life.³³

The only hope we have to overcome the seduction of destructive pleasures is to resist lesser pleasures for the God-given greater ones. The Law of Displacement states that you cannot move *away from a thought*, you can only move *toward* a new thought. God wants to replace misguided thoughts fixed on idle pleasures, with His new, perfect ones, fixed on the truly eternal.³⁴

Unless you guard the epicenter of your affections—your heart—you'll never live the life you've always dreamed of living.³⁵

God is not a God of *can't* and *don't*, He's a God of *can* and *do*!

He's not trying to crash your party. He's inviting you to His!

Vicarious Life

A woman went to her pastor asking for prayer. She told him that a certain actor in a soap opera was in trouble and asked him to join in interceding for the TV character. The surprised pastor responded, "But this person is not real!" She quickly answered,

³¹ "He who loves pleasure will be a poor man; he who loves wine and oil..." Proverbs 21:17 (NKJV)

³² 2Timothy 3:4 (NKJV)

³³ "As for me, I will see Your face in righteousness; I shall... Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/numb.

³⁴ Colossians 3:1-3

³⁵ "Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life." Proverbs 4:23

“I know, I know, but he really needs our prayers.”

Richard Schickel writes in *Intimate Strangers* that every day people spend hours of virtual face-to-face TV time with media celebrities. It has created a new form of relationship based on the “illusion of intimacy” that is both entrapping and “insidiously subliminal in its working”.³⁶

Dunne describes this vicarious life. “In today’s generation, it is no longer the parents, teachers, priests, and pastors who are serving as the agents of socialization. It is the actors, the singers, and the athletes with attitude—in short, the entertainers. And what have they taught us?”³⁷ That the applause of man is more desired than the will of God is an unfulfilling trap!

We have been created in the image and likeness of God, offered a script in His pageantry, called to be princes and princesses in His Kingdom. Yet, when we obsess over celebrities and famous personalities we spend our lives trying to reflect flawed, deformed humanity, not the perfect Creator.

In essence, we trade an eternity of pleasure in God’s presence for a few nights in a shabby motel called Earth.

The word vicarious is defined as “experienced in the imagination through the feelings or actions of another person.”³⁸ When we live vicariously through other people, we exchange their imaginary lives for our hopes and dreams, and in some sick way, their “reality” for our reality.

Over and over again, the devil offers an endless menu of numbing substitutes for oneness with God.

Morphine was originally developed as a cough suppressant. Yet, by the late 1800s, it had become a popular recreational drug. A German drug company named Bayer believed it had found a morphine replacement. So it advertised diacetylmorphine as an over the counter “non-addictive morphine substitute.” The new product Heroin derived its name from the Greek word

³⁶ Schickel R. *Intimate Strangers: The Culture of Celebrity*. Ivan R. Dee; 2000.

³⁷ Dunne L. *Emerge: Cracking the Cocoon of Media Socialization*. 4GenPress; 2010.

³⁸ Apple Dictionary 2.1.3.

heros, because of its seemingly heroic affects on the user.^{39, 40} Unfortunately, if you've ever known a heroin addict, the last thing they are is heroic.

Many would rip off their best friend in order to get another fix.

As is always the case, one numb-substitute leads to another. These substitutes become habits, which ultimately shape our brain.

When oversaturated with emotion, the human brain responds by taking one of two pathways: it becomes hypervigilant or frozen. We involuntarily react to what we repeatedly think, do, hear, say, and believe. Continuous exposure to violence leads to violent behavior (now proven in over 1000 studies). Repeated exposure to the stress and distress of modern culture can likewise create a life filled with anxiety.

Chronic stress, especially early in life, causes the brain's control center to become imbalanced, resulting in anxiety, mental illness, obsessions, and compulsions. When a certain segment of the brain, the amygdala, is damaged, an individual becomes unable to read emotion, particularly fear. Several recent studies show that many teens, the heaviest media users in our culture, are increasingly unable to discern emotions, especially fear and anger. LeDoux even found that when the amygdala was damaged in monkeys, they became hypersexual. Doesn't numb, depressed, obsessive, hyper-sexualized, compulsive, and out-of-control accurately describe much of today's culture? Thrill-seeking actions, combined with unhealthy human interaction, seem to short-circuit the brain, resulting in the emotional paralysis we call numbness.

Fantasy Kids

A 2011 study found that today's children are often happier with their online lives than they are with reality. In a virtual world they can be who they want to be, and exit anytime by clicking a button.

³⁹ Narconon. Heroin History Timeline. Heroinaddiction.com. Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/numb.

⁴⁰ "heroin." *Online Etymology Dictionary*. 2010. Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/numb.

Perhaps this is why so many are willing to quit on everything—even life!

One survey participant said, “You can say anything online. You can talk to people that you don’t normally speak to and you can edit your pictures so you look better. It is as if you are a completely different person.”⁴¹

Forty-seven percent of children said they behaved differently online than they did in normal life stating that they felt more powerful and confident in the virtual world.⁴²

Peter Bradley, psychiatrist and deputy director of Kidscape, expressed concern that children’s desire to adopt a different identity online meant they were being divorced from reality.⁴³ He concluded,

*These findings suggest that children see cyberspace as detachable from the real world and a place where they explore parts of their behavior and personality that they possibly would not show in real life. We can’t allow cyber-worlds to be happier places than our real communities, otherwise we are creating a generation of young people not functioning adequately in our society.*⁴⁴

But that was not the only troublesome finding:⁴⁵

- One in eight young people admitted contact with strangers online.
- 60% also acknowledged lying about their age.
- A full 40% confessed to not telling the truth about personal relationships.

Bradley warned that children are putting themselves and their friends at serious risk by communicating with potentially malevolent strangers. “We were alarmed by the number of risks being taken by teenagers whilst online,” he added. “Safe online

⁴¹ Thomas L. Generation net: The youngsters who... Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/numb.

⁴² *ibid*

⁴³ Kidscape is a London-based charity established... Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/numb.

⁴⁴ Rasmussen RH. One in two lie about personal details... Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/numb.

⁴⁵ Thomas L. Generation net: The youngsters who prefer... Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/numb.

behavior is taught in schools, but teenagers seem to be unable to relate the risks to themselves.”

Online escapades can also be expensive. An 11-year-old ran up a \$1,700 bill on his mother's debit card playing Xbox video games.⁴⁶ A spokesman for the cyber company stated it was the mother's responsibility to use the parental controls that could have prevented the child from running up such an exorbitant bill.

How many of these statistics would decrease if parents were more involved with and aware of their children's online personas? Children should not need to look to high-risk strangers in search of meaningful relationships.

May each of us be fully immersed, not in fantasies that will destroy our future and potential, but in a satisfying personal relationship with our loving Creator.

Clones and Zombies

When I first began to travel and speak as a young minister, I encountered a 40-year-old man who asked for prayer for something so private and personal he needed to talk with me alone. I asked him what he wanted me to pray for. Embarrassed, he said he had an addiction to fur.

I thought I had misunderstood him, so I asked him again what his addiction was. Again he said “fur.”

I listened, totally focused and carefully reading his lips as he spoke, even leaning forward so as not to miss a single syllable. By the third repetition I was too embarrassed to ask him to say it again, so, not wanting to appear naïve when it came to fur addictions, I nodded as if I knew exactly what he was talking about.

I didn't have a clue.

He shared a bit more, but never elaborated on how his fur fetish worked. I then prayed for him, though I have to confess,

⁴⁶ Chalk A. Kid Rings Up \$1,700 Xbox Live Bill.... Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/numb.

⁴⁷ James 1:23–24

I felt completely out of my league.

In the nearly four decades I have spent in ministry I have seen such a wide variety of addictions, I can only conclude this: humans will gravitate to whatever means of comfort, entertainment, or even alter-identity is available to them, in an attempt to fill their deep sense of un-fulfillment.

If we don't embrace what God intends to inspire us we'll eventually embrace what the devil intends to destroy us.

Like the strongman, Samson, how many have lost their strength in Delilah's lap? Like King David, how many have surfed the Internet one too many nights, only to be enticed by Bathsheba?

We were intended to be sons and daughters of God, not *Masters of the Universe*. We were intended to be men and women with characters of iron, not *Iron Men*. We were intended to be people whose lives are covered by the blood of Jesus, not covered with the blood of zombies and vampires.

Unless we allow God to make our lives exceptional, there will be nothing wondrous about us. We will find ourselves stranded in history's long line of moral zombies and culture clones—false reflections of fallen humanity, not flawless incarnations of Christ-like immortality.

We have looked into the mirror and forgotten who we really are.⁴⁷ Everyone can see from nature's unspoiled creation that there is a perfect God.⁴⁸ In addition, we all get a shot at following our inner conscience.⁴⁹ The combination of these two immutable facts leaves us without excuse.⁵⁰

There is a God. He is perfect, and we are not. We have all sinned and come short of God's perfect standard.⁵¹ Only one Person could absorb the consequence for our sin—God Himself, the Lord Jesus Christ.⁵²

⁴⁸ Romans 1:20

⁴⁹ Romans 2:15

⁵⁰ Romans 1:20

⁵¹ Romans 3:23

⁵² 2Corinthians 5:21

We are made in the image of our Creator, called to be saints of the Most High God, but given a free will.^{53, 54, 55} We must choose to reflect either the imagination of fallen man or embrace the destiny of a holy God.⁵⁶

“So leave the corruption and compromise; leave it for good,’ says God. ‘Don’t link up with those who will pollute you. I want you all for Myself. I’ll be a Father to you; you’ll be sons and daughters to Me.’”

Moments Define Us

The Devil wields many weapons of mass seduction.

Duped and deceived by his treachery, we believe and then spread his lies. Seduction has been defined as “persuading somebody to do something wrong.”⁵⁷ In my youth, I earned a doctorate in seduction! Sometimes I acted as seducer, but more often than not, I succumbed to the role of seductee.

When I was 19 years old, my twin brother, Joe, and I attended a football game between the long-standing rivalry—Princeton and Rutgers. By the time Joe’s school, Rutgers, had won the game, I was completely drunk.

Caught up in the celebration, I decided to shimmy to the top of a goal post, 20 feet in the air. With my belly at the very tip, hundreds of revelers below tore at the goal post. As the metal pole snapped and began to hurtle toward the ground, I held on for dear life. Then, just four feet from crushing me beneath its massive weight, the pole abruptly stopped, and I was violently shaken off on to the ground. Other than having the wind knocked out of me, I was surprisingly unhurt.

As I lay there dazed, an older man walked up to see if I was okay. After determining that I was basically fine, he looked into my eyes and said, “You’re an idiot!”

53 Genesis 1:26

54 Romans 1:7

55 2Timothy 2:21

56 2Corinthians 6:17–18a

57 “seduce.” The Free Online Dictionary. 2009. Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/numb.

It was a defining moment! Until then I had never known who I really was. Now, after 19 years of speculation, I finally had clarification.

I was an idiot!

Though this humorous image of one of my lower moments didn't describe all of me, it certainly represented a partial view of me at that unstable moment. How many people wake up every day eager to climb the imaginary goalposts of shallow recognition, not anticipating that they will soon fall?

Many will not be as fortunate as I was.

Snapshots of my life have defined me before and since. Now, in my right mind, I most want God's heart to be my ultimate incarnation. I may for a moment have bowed to stupidity, lust, or anger, but I forbid any of those distorted impressions to be my legacy.

My Creator best defines who I am.

I will gaze into His eyes to see my true reflection.

Convenient Theology

Christians often think they are immune to this epidemic of numbness. They think they are doing better than most. But their false sense of security couldn't be further from the truth. This is the age of the fair-weather Christian, the Sunday believer, the undisciplined disciple.

Christians who embrace Christ only when it is convenient will not be ready for the subtle deceptions ahead!

When the future Anti-Christ, spoken of in the Book of Revelation, finally arrives upon the scene, he will present himself an ambassador of good; the supposed answer to evil on earth. In fact, he will be just the opposite, the man of sin come to earth with counterfeit power, signs and miracles.⁵⁸ "He will use every kind of evil deception to fool those on their way to destruction, because

⁵⁸ 2Thessalonians 2:10

they refuse to love and accept the truth that would save them.”⁵⁹

Whenever we attempt to redefine good—evil always wins.

It becomes a Trojan horse.⁶⁰ The gift that kills!

We invent truth and even use the words of Jesus out of context to promote self-serving philosophies, saying, “The truth will set you free.”⁶¹ Jesus clearly defined the only truth that truly liberates.

“He said to the people who believed in Him, ‘You are truly My disciples if you remain faithful to My teachings. And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.’”⁶²

This flawed concept of convenient theology, creating truth in our own image, was also pervasive in the Book of Judges when “everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”⁶³

Today, this attitude infuses not only the culture—it’s in the Church!

“Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared...”⁶⁴

During the first century, Peter warned of those who would twist and distort the truth of God’s Word. Every age hosts them, and there is no shortage today. He wrote that these “untaught and unstable people twist (torture or pervert) to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures.”⁶⁵

“You’re going to find that there will be times when people will have no stomach for solid teaching, but will fill up on spiritual junk food—catchy opinions that tickle their fancy.”⁶⁶ Or as another translation of this verse reads, “For there will be a time when people will not tolerate sound teaching. Instead, following

⁵⁹ 2Thessalonians 2:11

⁶⁰ “trojan horse.” *Wikipedia.org*. June 2011. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trojan_Horse on June 20, 2011.

⁶¹ John 8:32b

⁶² John 8:31–32

⁶³ Judges 17:6

⁶⁴ 1Timothy 4:1–2 (ESV)

⁶⁵ 2Peter 3:16a (NKJV)

⁶⁶ 2Timothy 4:3 (Message)

their own desires, they will accumulate teachers for themselves, because they have an insatiable curiosity to hear new things.”⁶⁷ Thus the admonition of the previous scripture, “preach the word (God’s Word, not our word); be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.”⁶⁸

But, in the end, truth will stand, trumping all falsehoods. “For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth.”⁶⁹ The question is: Will we be on the side of truth when the race is over? The Bible cautions, “The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but he who heeds counsel is wise.”⁷⁰ Only God’s Word is pure truth and worthy of following.⁷¹

Convenient theology is here—built on man’s whim and not God’s will.

It is the slipperiest of all slopes!

Even fair-weather Christians are being deceived.⁷²

World-Class Chameleons

Our world is changing at such breakneck speed we will soon be wearing a neck brace. Not all of it is good. Though a leopard cannot change his spots, a chameleon easily adapts his color to his surroundings. The danger of this type of inconsistency for a Christian, saying one thing and living another, has never been greater. Will we find ourselves standing before a God who longs for relationship, only to hear Him say, “I never knew you.”⁷³

In the end, we will either naïvely bow before the momentary gods of Earth, or fearlessly stand, like the mighty three in the Book of Daniel, refusing to be intimidated. “Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered King Nebuchadnezzar, ‘Your threat means

⁶⁷ 2Timothy 4:3 (ESV)

⁶⁸ 2Timothy 4:2 (ESV)

⁶⁹ 2Corinthians 13:8 (NIV)

⁷⁰ Proverbs 12:15 (NKJV)

⁷¹ John 17:17

⁷² Matthew 24:24

⁷³ Matthew 7:23a (NIV)

nothing to us. If you throw us in the fire, the God we serve can rescue us from your roaring furnace and anything else you might cook up, O king. But even if He doesn't, it wouldn't make a bit of difference, O king. We still wouldn't serve your gods or worship the gold statue you set up."⁷⁴

The trumpets are making a horribly uncertain sound.

Sadly, much of God's family is beginning to bow.

Abraham's nephew, Lot, whom Scripture graciously calls a righteous man, seriously lacked conviction. After choosing the best land for himself, rather than deferring to the "brains of the operation," Uncle Abraham, Lot made a shrewd real estate investment in the Chernobyl of his day: Sodom.^{75, 76}

The residents of Sodom were so debased that one night, as Lot was visited by angels appearing as men, "all the men of Sodom, young and old, came from all over the city and surrounded the house. They shouted to Lot, 'Where are the men who came to spend the night with you? Bring them out to us so we can have sex with them!'"⁷⁷

The contemptible actions of the men in his city came as no surprise to Lot. Apparently, he had grown to live with it.

Have we grown to live with the attitudes and actions of those around us? Or do we conscientiously refuse to bow, to laugh, to comply with the crowd's depravity?

Lot then offers one of the most spineless solutions ever conceived by a gutless father. "Look, I have two virgin daughters. Let me bring them out to you, and you can do with them as you wish."⁷⁸

I have twin daughters. They rightfully expected me to protect them, and I have. I would fight to the death to keep predators from molesting them, no matter how smooth talking the predators might be.

⁷⁴ Daniel 3:16–18 (Message)

⁷⁵ 2Peter 2:7–8

⁷⁶ Genesis 13:11

⁷⁷ Genesis 19:4b–5

⁷⁸ Genesis 19:8

When they were 12 years old and about to enter adolescence, I took them each out on a special dinner date in which I pledged to watch over them throughout their teen years. I gave them beautiful rings to seal our father-daughter commitment.

Fifteen years later, they gave these rings back to me on their wedding day, as I gave their hand to their new protector, their husband.

Is it any wonder that Lot's daughters lost respect for their father after he was willing to turn them over to repugnant men?

Even when Lot's angelic guests tried to rescue him from the certain destruction of the city, he continued to wallow in indecisiveness. Then, "the angels became insistent. 'Hurry,' they said to Lot. 'Take your wife and your two daughters who are here. Get out right now, or you will be swept away in the destruction of the city!' When Lot still hesitated, the angels seized his hand and the hands of his wife and two daughters and rushed them to safety outside the city, for the LORD was merciful."⁷⁹

At this point Lot could audition as lead singer for the *Hesitations*. Not unlike the vacillating countrymen whom Elijah the prophet charged: "How long are you going to hesitate between two opinions?"⁸⁰ Lot was like a little boy being pulled by an adult hand.

He should've been leading his family! Not allowing them to be led by strangers!

Are you leading your family? Or are you letting strangers raise them? Are you letting amoral actors, musicians, and celebrities do with them as they wish?

Instead of leaving his sin completely behind, he bargains with God by begging, "Oh no, my lord!...See, there is a small village nearby. Please let me go there instead; don't you see how small it is? Then my life will be saved."⁸¹

⁷⁹ Genesis 19:15–16

⁸⁰ 1Kings 18:21

⁸¹ Genesis 19:18,20

Sin always starts small and then grows big enough to enslave us. We try to rationalize by saying, “It’s just one little sin: one binge, one line of cocaine, one hookup, one adulterous affair!”

It should come as no surprise that later Lot’s wife wouldn’t listen to him and consequently perished. While his two daughters, under cover of darkness in a cave, got their father drunk and conceived the progenitors of Israel’s greatest enemies: the Ammonites and the Moabites.⁸²

Lot’s sin left a legacy of pain for all of God’s chosen people.

Even the mighty father of faith, Abraham, at one of his weakest moments, morphed into a spineless chameleon. Faced with a violent consequence if he revealed Sarah as his wife and not his sister, Abraham lies first to Pharaoh in Egypt and then to King Abimelech of the Philistines.^{83,84}

As is often the case with generational miss-steps, Abraham’s son Isaac also succumbed to the same fear. He lied to a future king of the Philistines, another King Abimelech, saying his beautiful wife Rebekah was also his sister.⁸⁵

Chameleons are really the problem, not the solution.

During my own chameleon phase, much to my shame, I once gave a girl I had lived with for a year and a half, someone I said I loved, \$100 to abort our baby. I had told her emphatically I didn’t believe in marriage and didn’t want a child. She then walked into the clinic alone, while I waited, coward that I was, in the car.

It remains the most humiliating and reprehensible thing I have ever done.

Ironically, three months later she gave me \$100 to board a plane and get out of her life.

Without having to list all of my glaring stupidities, I am most grateful that the forgiveness of God is real and accessible to me and all of us.

⁸² Genesis 19:30

⁸³ Genesis 12:10–20

⁸⁴ Genesis 20:1–18

⁸⁵ Genesis 26:6–12

Thankfully, being a chameleon is curable.

A young lady I highly respect was trying to get her fiancé, who was hesitating, to make the right decision. As she ran her hand down the middle of his back, she asked with concern, "What's that?"

He responded with equal unease, "I don't know?"

Then looking him in the eyes she retorted, "It's a spine! You can use it any time you want to!"



CHAPTER

THREE

THE AWAKENING

Intervention

One night, when I was in my early 20s and a very young Christian, a home nearby caught fire. Our town of 200 had only a volunteer fire department, so I knew it would take a while for a truck and help to arrive. By the time word spread, the house was completely engulfed in flames. Being young and eager to help, I ran to the scene as fast as I could.

When I arrived, I saw that the house on fire belonged to a 90-year-old woman I knew. She was a key figure in praying for the powerful revival that had come to our little country church months before. This only added to my sense of urgency! I imagined this dear lady lying helplessly inside, and so with all of my strength, I lunged aggressively at the front door to kick it open.

In movies, the hero kicks the door open, runs into the burning building and rescues the family in distress. In my case, the door was slightly ajar so that when I kicked it I was thrown completely off balance. Falling on my side, I hurt my leg. Now, unable to walk, with flames nearby and smoke billowing from the doorway, my only option was to try to crawl away. I wasn't successful at this either. After a few agonizingly helpless seconds, others finally arrived and pulled me away before a wall of the building collapsed.

I was grateful, but thoroughly embarrassed. Instead of acting as the rescuer, I became the rescued. My humiliation increased when I discovered I had been mistaken; the house on fire was abandoned. The sweet, elderly saint lived next door.

Intervention is defined as “action taken to improve a situation.” On that day I did not champion this word, but I did learn some important things about myself:

- I was open to take a risk.
- I was prone to impetuosity.
- I was willing to give my life for a cause.

All three of these insights have proven extremely helpful for me through the years—and might cause pause for reflection for you as well.

So, how does this story apply today?

I believe much of the world is in flames—economically, politically, financially, spiritually, even emotionally! No doubt, in more ways than I know. Catastrophe threatens from within and without. Our own lusts consume us. Our base passions overwhelm our senses. They are not from God. Like the story above:

- We have taken too many risks.
- We have been prone to impetuosity.
- We have given our lives to things that are *worthless*, when we have been created to lay down our lives for that which is *priceless*.

The Bible gives us one of its strongest warnings when John the Beloved writes:¹

Do not love this world nor the things it offers you, for when you love the world, you do not have the love of the Father in you. For the world offers only a craving for physical pleasure, a craving for everything we see, and pride in our achievements and possessions. These are not from the Father, but are from this world. And this world is fading away, along with everything that people crave. But anyone who does what pleases God will live forever.

God is not surprised by the infection within us. He knew this generational virus, once restricted to a doomed rebellion in a

¹ 1John 2:15–17

Garden, would become airborne. We would breathe in the fumes of its foolishness every day, for we “used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil—the commander of the powers in the unseen world. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God.”²

Yet, He prepared an antidote.

It requires patience and courage, but when received by a humble soul, God’s remedy is always successful. “Gently instruct those who oppose the truth. Perhaps God will change those people’s hearts, and they will learn the truth. Then they will come to their senses and escape from the devil’s trap. For they have been held captive by him to do whatever he wants.”³

God the Father designed a rescue mission for His wayward children before we were even conceived. He planned for His own Son to make the greatest sacrifice of all: to willingly give His life in our place.

Christ’s intervention has completely changed the potential outcome for each of our lives. But now it’s our turn to intervene—to partner with Him—to give our lives as He gave His! Jesus said, “No one can take My life from Me. I sacrifice it voluntarily.”⁴ And so must we!

Millions of *numb* are about to be awakened.

- Media Addicts will see and hear truth that satisfies.
- Emotional Lepers will sense God’s presence.
- Frostbitten Souls will receive the warmth only Jesus can give.
- Fantasy Kids will crave reality more than illusion.
- The Perpetually Adolescent will reach maturity.
- The Overexposed and Underdeveloped will experience fulfillment.
- Celebrity Wannabes will find true identity.
- Chameleon Christians will reflect Jesus at last.

² Ephesians 2:2

³ 2Timothy 2:25–26

⁴ John 10:18a

Will you be a part of this courageous band of rescuers, or one of the helpless numb waiting to be rescued?

Nerve Beginnings

There is a price for long-term numbness.

We not only forget what we know—we forfeit who we are.

Such is the case for severe burn victims. The more serious the burn, the less likely the recovery. First-degree burns, though bothersome, produce a singed rash. Second-degree burns result in painful blisters, scarring, and—in acute cases—skin grafting. But when third-degree burns occur, the entire dermis of the skin—including blood capillaries, nerve endings, sweat glands, and hair follicles—are destroyed.

And yet there is no pain. Amputation is the only solution.

The damage is plainly beyond repair.

This should be a point of fear: when past wounds cause us to stop feeling and caring. And if, God forbid, the charred and blackened finality of fourth-degree burns should leave us functionally impaired—we might never become all God intended.

Numbness that is thrust upon us is sad, but understandable.

Numbness that is self-inflicted is far more tragic.

In Muay Thai, a combat sport from Thailand, combatants confront and strike one another, inflicting significant pain. Fighters train for combat by abusing their shins, kicking banana trees. The consequences for this self-imposed numbness are quite severe later in life. Many of these fighters suffer from shinbone calcification and walk with canes as early as their 40s. Similarly, because they relentlessly pound their fists, boxers are unable to pick up pennies due to nerve damage in their hands.

Long-term emotional or spiritual numbness also produces devastating results. For example, self-imposed protection by suppressing feelings creates a pattern of non-response. Eventually we are no longer able to respond at all. And when

we cease to feel, in some significant way, we stop living.

Why is the world numb? The Bible provides a clear and emphatic answer, “the whole world is under the control of the evil one.”⁵

What is the cure for this seeming universal bondage?

We need to find our nerve!

Nerves are said to “convey impulses between a part of the central nervous system and some other body region.”⁶ Colloquially, we use the word *nerve*, to mean *courage*, *control under pressure*, and *boldness*. If this is true, then where does our ability to find our nerve begin?

The fact is true: courage comes from God alone!

God is the center of our *nerve*—the source of all bravery—the One who gives us a supernatural backbone!

The Bible shows a lot of *nerve* when it declares that the followers of Jesus “can do all things through Christ who strengthens [us].”⁷

Whoever God has created me to be; whatever He’s challenged me to believe and do; if I lean on Jesus...

I can *be* it!

I can *believe* it!

I can *do* it!

If God is truly the source of courage, then He will provide all the *nerve* we need.

Pretend Games

Unless we see our lives as God sees them, we’ll be tempted to exaggerate and pretend to be something we’re not.

In 2011, Pastor Jim Moats from Newville, Pennsylvania, was caught lying, claiming to have been a Navy SEAL during the

⁵ 1John 5:19a

⁶ “nerve.” TheFreeDictionary.com. 2007. Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/numb.

⁷ Philippians 4:13 (NKJV)

Vietnam War. He had perpetuated the fraud to his congregation for five years.

He admitted, “I never served as an actual SEAL. It was my dream!” Telling the members of his congregation about the deception he confessed: “I bring a shame and a reproach upon the name of Christ, I bring a shame and a reproach upon my church, and I bring a shame and a reproach upon my family.”⁸

Sadly, a representative of Jesus Christ said things that weren’t true.

Equally as tragic, others have refused to say things that were.

An example of this is an obituary:

For so long, I was blinded by anger, unforgiveness, and a heart easily injured, which contributed to years of separation from my family. I offer no excuses, only apologies and heartfelt regrets for any word I have spoken unkindly, for the times I remained silent of any comforting words, any painful action extended or just my absence that brought on pain and suffering to my loved ones...

He then mentions his brother, daughter and their spouses by name.

*For those grandchildren I met only briefly or did not meet at all, I extend to you only love and pride for the people you have become or are becoming. All my anger, unforgiveness and woundedness have dissipated into just unconditional love for you all. It is my earnest prayer that love and healing, not anger, will be in the ripples across time and the generations. I was truly blind, but now I see so clearly. I have reached up and grasped the hand of God.*⁹

It’s encouraging that this father and grandfather came to his senses at the end of his long life. That took some courage. But it is far more saddening that he waited until his life was nearly over.

⁸ Miller D. Newville pastor admits his tale of being a Navy... Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/numb.

⁹ Duckworth M obituary. July 22, 2008. Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/numb.

Reaching out in person before he died would have been truly courageous!

How many indispensable, life-affirming words have not been said? How many brave sentences were never spoken? Words like, “I never told you how much I love you! I’m so sorry!” How many life-giving words have gone to the grave because a father or mother bowed to fear, pride, or selfishness?

It makes me sick to think that on my own deathbed I might look back with regret that I lacked boldness to say or do something.

I have the privilege of ministering each month to forty young women with emotional scars. From within a wonderful restorative community, they were asked to describe someone beautiful and tell what makes him or her beautiful.

Their united response was that true beauty is seen in someone willing to be real. One young lady said, “What makes people beautiful is that they’re always real. They’re not afraid to be who they are—sharing their real emotions, feelings, thoughts, and ideas. They are confident and uncomplicated. They never play mind games and are always honest and candid. When I see a person living her life in this way, it makes me yearn to live my life that way also, and gives me the confidence to believe I can do so.”

God agrees!

The Word of God says, “Don’t just *pretend* to love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good.”¹⁰ Get rid of all pretension, which literally means, “attempting to impress by affecting greater importance, talent, or culture than is actually possessed.”¹¹

Put an end to pretentious Christianity!

Some of Christ’s followers demonstrate a form of godliness, but deny its power or, in other words, its realness. The Bible says, “from such people turn away!”¹²

¹⁰ Romans 12:9

¹¹ Apple Dictionary 2.1.3

¹² 2Timothy 3:5 (NKJV)

Riding Red Bull

My wife, Suzie, and I, along with our twin daughters, Deborah and Havilah, have been close friends with Mike and Dawn Shreve, and their children Ryan and Jennifer, for more than 30 years. We have now shared over two decades of Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays together.

Unfortunately, Ryan was an adrenaline junkie.

From climbing sheer rock faces in Yosemite to wake boarding and skiing, he loved the rush of living on the edge and had suffered a string of concussions to prove it. Even his profession as a paramedic, working closely with fire fighters, demonstrated his love of adventure. One day, while wake boarding and attempting a dangerous flip, he fell hard. His limp body was life-flighted to a nearby hospital.

Family, friends, and co-workers immensely loved Ryan. For 26 days scores of caring souls made a daily pilgrimage to his hospital bedside. People flew in from across the country. Each on a mission: to help a friend, to be there in his hour of need, to do whatever they could.

Yet as the weeks went by, and Ryan's condition worsened, it became painfully evident that his strong, resilient body was finally wearing out. Repeated head trauma throughout the previous summer had rendered his brain vulnerable, and his lungs weak, never again to regain their strength.

Over and over again Ryan's mom would say, even in the most challenging moments, "I'm so grateful! I'm so grateful!" She was grateful to God, her friends, and Ryan's army of supporters and caregivers.

On the day Ryan passed away, dozens of friends, family, and fire fighters stood vigil in the hallways. The night before, more than a 100 friends came by the hospital to pay their respects. It was truly astounding! Referring to the outpouring of support, one seasoned nurse said, "It's restored my faith in humanity!"

Nothing more could have been done!

As we spent countless hours with the family musing over what precipitated these life-altering events, we came to some conclusions. Ryan's willingness to plough forward, against seemingly insurmountable odds brought him to many a mountaintop: as a skier, climber, wake-boarder, paramedic, and fire fighter. Yet, on this occasion, especially with his excellent medical background and a few physiological abnormalities that he should have discerned as serious, he knew better than to continue wake boarding.

Unfortunately, he believed the lie, "It's not my time!"

Ryan's premature death begs the question: When is enough, enough? When do the risks outweigh the gains? When does our addiction to "Go BIG!" to "Live on the edge!" topple an avalanche of tears? Is it when a misguided illusion says bigger is always better? Ryan's life was cut short, unnecessarily.

He remains frozen in our memories at 24 years old!

But not all risk-taking is created equal. People have risked their lives—and even given their lives—to go to the moon, to dethrone tyrannical dictators, or to rescue a helpless soul in a burning building. These courageous situations have at their very foundation the betterment of humankind, helping a fellow man, even sacrificing a life for another.

Is there any ultimate value in mastering a high-risk trick just for the sake of doing it? People willingly forfeit their lives on the altar of fun, the operating table of thrills, and the precipice of pleasure.

Our lives are worth so much more than a fleeting rush!

Yet, *extreme* has become the emotional release of choice for a numb generation.

Romanticizing reckless behavior makes us merely pied pipers of shame. Who was the perpetrator of that fraud? The father of lies—who, two thousand years ago, even tempted Jesus to "Go Big!" and jump off the temple in Jerusalem.¹³

13 Matthew 4:6

Jesus told him to take a hike!

To whom do we owe our allegiance?

We should be safeguarding our lives and our children's lives rather than taunting death. Ryan was trained to save life, and yet would not save his own. He was adept at discerning trauma, yet did not recognize his own addiction to adrenalin. Was there really any glory in his nickname, Shreval Kenival? Do we really want our lives to be snatched from the hearts of loved ones on mere whims? What are we chasing after? If it's pleasure for pleasure's sake, then expect no gold or glory at the end of that rainbow, just worn-out hopes, misused passions, and broken dreams.

When the curse of carelessness comes knocking at your door to lure your friends or your children, will you let them be led away without a fight? Will you parrot the lie, "It's their life! Who am I to tell them how to live? What can I do?"

You are their friend! You are their brother, their sister!

You are the person who is supposed to protect them from destroying themselves!

Faithful are the challenges of a friend, but the person who applauds everything you do is not your true friend.¹⁴

Throughout history, every civilized society has established laws for the protection of its citizens. Though a law can be autocratic, speed limits are necessary; they save lives. It's a proven fact!

Do you know your limits?

Will you be a true friend, and help others find theirs?

Don't ever think that Ryan (and millions like him) are saying in eternity, "Do what I did!" I believe, and his family believes, if he had life to do over again, he would have done it differently.

The good news is: even now we can retain some value by learning from the mistakes of adrenaline junkies. We can take advantage of the second chance many of them never had.

GO BIG...but know when to GO HOME!

Live life to the fullest, but always make sure you have a life left to live.

Don't gamble your entire future for the buzz of cheating death.

Eventually death will win!

Nature abhors a vacuum. We can't ask someone to stop doing something he loves without replacing it with something really worth loving. We must face the fact that the *hunger* or *emptiness* inside each of us can be filled by only one Person, the one who created the hunger in the first place, our God and Creator, the Lord Jesus Christ.

After spending many reckless years trying to fill the hole inside of my own heart with everything imaginable, I finally surrendered my life to the God who created me. I gave my heart to Jesus and He's given me more pleasure than I could have ever hoped for. More thrills and fewer spills is a great way to live.

If you want to GO BIG, then GO BIG for Jesus! He went BIG for you!

I was present when it was time for Ryan's parents to take him off life-support. The ICU doctor, obviously saddened and with his voice cracking said, "I wish I had better news for you. We're losing him. I'm so sorry. I'm a person of faith as well, but sometimes you lose them. We've tried everything, but it's just not working. When he goes, he'll go quickly. You should go in and be with him."

Those are the words parents never want to hear about their son or daughter.

I stood there holding Mike and Dawn. Throughout the entire process they had been resilient. Now, they remained motionless. Then Mike broke the ice and reaching out, put his arm around the doctor. He looked into the doctor's eyes and said, "Thank you doctor! Thank you for taking care of our son. We know you did the best you could. You've got a tough job! We've been praying for you. We so appreciate all of your help."

It was one of the most selfless, heroic things I've ever seen.

Mike was being told his only son was dying, and yet he decided to comfort the doctor. Amazing! He rejected the numbness we all felt and instead clung to the cross of Jesus.

His response affirmed once again: if people could see Jesus in us, they would want what we have. They would want Him.

At Ryan's funeral, when Mike shared about Jesus, many received Him.

Mike perfectly modeled the response of our Father in Heaven, who was also broken-hearted at the death of His Son. Yet, if we will receive it, He will comfort each of us, every day—the very ones His Son died for.

Lord of All, or Not Lord At All

Is it possible that the primary reason for numbness within much of the Church is due to what's known as “easy believism”—claiming Jesus as Savior, but not knowing Him as Lord?

We confess belief in Him but do not follow Him.

We are not His disciples, not His disciplined learners.

The Bible describes Christians as “believers” four times in the New Testament, but it refers to them as “disciples” 262 times. It mentions God as “Savior” 24 times in the New Testament, but it refers to Him as “Lord” a whopping 711 times. Many believers claim Jesus as Savior, but few are disciples who know Him as the Lord of their lives. This, I believe, is the root cause of much of the impotence within the Church of Jesus Christ.

Jesus clearly connected the dots. How we refer to ourselves, how we live, and who we really are, are always linked. He clearly admonished, “What you say flows from what is in your heart.”¹⁵ Then, in the very next sentence, He takes off the gloves and goes right for the jugular of truth. Challenging our relational

¹⁵ Luke 6:45b

dysfunction He says, “So why do you keep calling me ‘Lord, Lord!’ when you don’t do what I say?”¹⁶

Think about that statement!

Don’t allow your soul to parrot a feeble answer, or worse yet, to proclaim a sorry excuse. Only if we let the impact of this question penetrate deep within us will it have His intended effect.

In the past, when I have read this chilling question authored by the God of the Universe, I have tried to get through it as quickly as possible. Hoping to deflect its impact, I would imagine Jesus was referring to someone else: anyone but me.¹⁷ Now I embrace the question. Like the first disciples, whom Jesus prophesied would all forsake Him, my heart is grieved to admit I am the person He is addressing. “They were very sad and began to say to him one after the other, ‘Surely not I, Lord?’”¹⁸

Jesus offers an analogy of the destruction that follows someone refusing to follow Him as Lord:¹⁹

I will show you what it’s like when someone comes to Me, listens to My teaching, and then follows it. It is like a person building a house who digs deep and lays the foundation on solid rock. When the floodwaters rise and break against that house, it stands firm because it is well built. But anyone who hears and doesn’t obey is like a person who builds a house without a foundation. When the floods sweep down against that house, it will collapse into a heap of ruins.

Floods are coming! Build wisely!

Everything that can be shaken will be shaken!

Your future, and perhaps even the future of those around you, depends on it!

¹⁶ Luke 6:46

¹⁷ Acts 10:14

¹⁸ Matthew 26:22 (NIV)

¹⁹ Luke 6:47–49

Gifted and Great

In the groundbreaking best seller *GrownUp Digital*, a \$4.5 million study was conducted examining the first truly global generation: the Net Generation. Though the study's conclusion is certainly debatable, it is also quite compelling. "...the evidence is strong that they are the smartest generation ever."²⁰ With all of their challenges and shortcomings, a digitally savvy age group is now ready to educate their parents. "For the first time there are things that parents want to be able to know about and do, where the kids are, in fact, the authority..."²¹

What sets this next generation apart from its predecessors?
Some extraordinary qualities!

*Eight characteristics, or norms, describe the typical Net Gener and differentiate them from their boomer parents. They prize freedom and freedom of choice. They want to customize things, make them their own. They're natural collaborators, who enjoy a conversation, not a lecture. They'll scrutinize you and your organization. They insist on integrity. They want to have fun, even at work and at school. Speed is normal. Innovation is part of life.*²²

Is there anything inherently wrong with freedom, customization, collaboration, conversation, integrity, fun, speed, or innovation? Of course not! Granted, freedom can lead to license, and speed can produce stress, but these innate characteristics are some pretty exceptional qualities.

Who wouldn't want to go to a church where people got set *free*; where ministries were *customized* to meet the needs of every segment of the congregation; where everyone *collaborated* in healthy relational *communication*; where leaders led with *integrity*; where the atmosphere was charged with *fun*; where things moved fast enough so you didn't feel like you were watching paint dry, and where the *creativity* of God was absolutely evident?

²⁰ Tapscott D. *Grown Up Digital: How The Net Generation Is Changing Your World*. McGraw-Hill: 2008.

²¹ *ibid*

²² *ibid*.

Sounds like a church for me!

Like you and me, the next generation is flawed but loved. It is essential that we view them as talented, not primarily tormented; experientially adept, not spiritually inept; skilled, not just predominantly self-willed. Only then can we build bridges of faith, not walls of failure. If we embrace the role of encourager, not discourager, it will fill their hearts not kill their spirits. I have found this to be true, over and over again.

The fact that many of us have grown up with an inner longing to be exceptional, to even do the extraordinary, is not just because a parent, teacher, or motivational speaker inspired us one day. It exists in all of us because our One-of-a-kind Creator hardwired us with this desire. God has placed this seed of unique calling and destiny inside each of us. From our heavenly Father's perspective, every person He created is totally unique, and capable of doing and being what God considers remarkable. But how are we preparing? Unless our goals match God's unparalleled plan, they are ultimately misguided and not worth pursuing.

We cannot add one measure of genuine excitement to the script God has already written. Who could improve on perfect? But we can and must yield to God's sublime plan and allow Him to take His rightful place as the Lord and God of our lives.

Unless our God-given reality is seen as superior to any man-created fantasy, we will spend our lives chasing our tail. "Always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth,"²³ the very truth Jesus promised would set us free.²⁴

Instead of creating alternate stories impossible to enjoy, we can discover the very life God intended. Only a daily dependency on God can keep our eye single and filled with light that leads to life.²⁵ While it's great to dream, it's even more critical that our hopes and dreams are based on God's reality and not wishful thinking.

²³ 2Timothy 3:7 (NKJV)

²⁴ John 8:32

²⁵ Luke 11:34

Reluctant To Lead

Much of my Christian life has been spent with young people. They are and will always be those most open to receiving Jesus. As far as I'm concerned, they are also the most invigorating group to be around. I spend many hours each week enjoying their fresh and spontaneous taste of life. In so many ways, they encapsulate the qualities I most value. If the best of these characteristics can be cultivated, they will certainly change our world for good. This has always been God's hope, and it should be ours as well.

But there is one perilous fault that has increasingly seeped into their impressionable lives—the reluctance to lead. Not a reluctance to lead in self-centered pursuits. There is no shortage of “Boys or Girls Gone Wild”. I'm referring to God-centered, bold-as-a-lion leadership.

For a dozen years, I've conducted a weekly fathering class with interns from a number of nations. They range from 17 to 27 years old. Recently, our second-year interns were struggling over trust issues with one another. I recommended they choose one person who could lead discussions about their relational difficulties. Much to my surprise, they chose the youngest person in their class, a young lady from Latin America, barely 18 years old. Though she certainly personified marvelous Christ-like qualities we all admired, what struck me most was the willingness of men and women much older than her to not only allow her to lead them, but also to desire her to lead them. More poignant was that their choice reflected their feelings of insecurities as leaders. The conclusion was unmistakable: many in this next generation are reluctant to lead.

My own generation of young Christians never seemed to lack willing leaders. Though their abilities could certainly be brought into question, their eagerness to step up and out was never at issue. What has happened to change this pattern?

Though the jury is still out in my final assessment, I have come to a few conclusions:

- Debilitating insecurities have been planted deep within the psyche of this present generation. This lack of confidence has been fed by a variety of events: broken homes, lack of nurturing, over- or under-protective parents, and a spirit of sarcasm and cynicism. All of this has been further exacerbated by an unstable economic and moral climate that feed these anxieties.
- Add the combative nature of those who mock God, Christians, and the Bible, coupled with the millions who have been hurt in hypocritical or unhealthy church environments, and you are left with many Christian young people consumed with self-doubt. Because their past has been so unstable, their future seems just as unsettling.

They feel vulnerable, defenseless, and fragile!

The only cure for this shaky foundation is a healed and transformed relationship with the God who is eager to rescue, willing to revive, and able to reaffirm our true identity and destiny. Undoubtedly, it will take a whole-hearted commitment to be retooled in order to experience the abundant life Jesus promised, but far more than our lone desire, this hope is God's will and plan for our lives.²⁶

If we can trust Him, He will not fail us! Our lives will be fully healed and restored!

Courage Under Faith

My older brother, Victor, tells the story of the weakest man he ever knew: Huntington Hartford. At 21, he inherited over 500 million dollars but cast no shadow of his own. Set to take the world by storm, Hartford instead squandered or was swindled out of much of his fortune.

Many people wanted to know him when he was somebody but abandoned him when he was nobody. For many years he rarely

²⁶ John 10:10

left his high-rise apartment, didn't know if it was day or night, compulsively talked about how sad life was, and eventually died a lonely, miserable recluse. Selfish, scarred and scared, like so many, he never reached his leadership potential.

The fear of leading is not new. Everyone fights its insidious grip; few overcome it. From feeble Lot who lost his family's respect and led his daughters into an incestuous cave, to outspoken Peter who warmed himself by the fires of the world, denied Jesus, and later wept bitterly. At times we have to hate what we have become in order to embrace what we are meant to be. It will take courage to be a rescuer in this age of rampant numbness! It will take even more courage to first reject numbness in ourselves.

In the ancient nation of Israel, during the time of Judges, there was a generation who had not known war. For 80 years, their land had been at peace. But when the children of Israel sinned, the peace was shattered. An evil general named Sisera was allowed to ruthlessly oppress them for 20 years.

Then they cried out to the Lord.²⁷

At that time, Deborah was Israel's prophet and judge. She prophesied that God would give Israel victory over Sisera, even though they were untrained warriors with inferior weapons, and few in number. But Deborah inspired the people to stand and believe God. Apart from her, Israel's judges could hardly be called role models. Jephthah sacrificed his daughter, Samson murdered his first wife, and Gideon promoted the worship of fertility gods.

When Israel fought Sisera, God graciously sent a downpour of rain. The defeated general fled on foot and ran into the tent of Jael.²⁸ He tried to persuade her to lie—to tell those looking for him he wasn't there.²⁹ But she had a different plan. "...when Sisera fell asleep from exhaustion, Jael quietly crept up to him with a hammer and tent peg. Then she drove the tent peg through his temple and into the ground, and so he died."³⁰

²⁷ Judges 4:2–3

²⁸ Judges 4:17–18

²⁹ Judges 4:19–20

³⁰ Judges 4:21

Jael's name meant mountain goat. She certainly was that: strong and stubborn, willing to lead when others feared. She exemplifies the generation I am praying will soon rise up and kill the spiritual and emotional enemies allowed into its tent. It has in essence made friends of enemies. Or as the songwriter wrote, "the thing that's kept me alive so long is now killing me."³¹

Many in Jael's generation had not known war. Not knowing how to fight in the Spirit, they were willing to be led by tyrants. A seismic shift in their spiritual temperature was desperately needed! So too in our day!

We need young Davids to lead God's people into battle.

We need young Esthers to intercede for life before the King.

We need young Daniels to fearlessly face deception and intimidation.

We need men and women of conviction, like Jael, to stand in the gap of fear.

God, revive Your Church! Awaken the lost!

Shake us out of our complacency!

We want more!

We were made for more!

31 Song by Bob Bennett "Lord of the Past"



CHAPTER

FOUR

COUNTER-OFFENSIVE

Reigniting Your Passion

Spiritual renewals restore our heart for God!

Supernatural revivals raise that which is dead in us!

A fresh breath of God resuscitates our spirit!

God will not fail us! He promises: “I *restore* the crushed spirit of the humble and *revive* the courage of those with *repentant* hearts.”¹

Seeing with God’s eyes makes all the difference! “If we view the human condition as inherently hopeless, our survival depends on prisons, psychologists, and pharmaceutical companies. If we view the human condition as hopeful, however, then the power of transformation rests within each of us.”² If Jesus lives in us, then we have reason to hope!³

When we allow the Word of God to die in our hearts, the truth will not only need *restoration*; it will first need *resurrection*. In the Old Testament, King Josiah didn’t just begin to re-read the Bible; he had to first find it.⁴ It wasn’t misplaced; it had been discarded, exchanged for something more desirable.

What has replaced the Word of God in your own life?
Entertainment? Fun? Work? Career? Idolatry? Or just idleness?

Many have sown the wind of distraction and now reap the whirlwind of destruction. Personal preference has replaced God-given purpose, while passivity has superseded passion.

¹ Isaiah 57:15

² Dunne L. *Emergence: Cracking the Cocoon of Media Socialization*. 4GenPress; 2010.

³ Colossians 1:27

⁴ 2Kings 22

Some reading this book will need to *find* connection to the Bible again. Somewhere along the line it became a relic stored in a dusty attic. You know it's important, but it's ceased to be essential for your survival. Your emaciated soul is desperately in need of its life-giving properties. There are no substitutes for daily bread! Only God's Word is quick and powerful enough to raise the dead!⁵ Until you admit your need, you'll continue to attempt to fill the numb places in your heart with cheap imitations.

Life without the living passion of God's Word is tedious and dreary at best. If your fire has grown cold, rekindling is no longer an option. There's only one way to see your life turn around. For "you will find [Him] when you seek [Him] with all your heart."⁶

Our greatest enemy is the part of us that's willing to settle for the way things are. Don't pamper your passivity! Kill it! Your opportunities for doing so are fading fast.

Today may be your best chance to change—don't let it slip by!

The New Common

What begins in *Hell* is, more often than not, *common* on Earth. Only what is birthed in *Heaven* can truly be called *normal*. Much of the planet has been seduced by what society calls "normal," and will realize all too late, that God alone determines what is normal and healthy. For us mere mortals, common is a moving target.

In 2010, Barna Group Research conducted 5,000 interviews to determine current drifts in the church in America. They found six primary trends:⁷

1. *The Christian Church is becoming less theologically literate.*
A doctrinal free-for-all is coming to a church near you. Either the next generation will adopt sound biblical teaching or it will decline into error and gross deception. Eternal outcomes await both choices.

⁵ Hebrews 4:12

⁶ Jeremiah 29:13 (NIV)

⁷ Barna Group. Six Megathemes Emerge from Barna.... Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/numb.

2. *Christians are becoming more ingrown and less outreach-oriented.* Because of the stigma of peer pressure, today's teens are less interested in sharing their faith with friends than in the past. It will cost them more than many want to pay. Fewer people believe in God and absolute truth and, therefore, are not looking to find a church.
3. *Growing numbers of people are less interested in spiritual principles and more desirous of learning pragmatic solutions for life.* More teens are mainly focused on education, career development, friendships and travel. Faith is important to them but less prized than personal achievements and fulfilling dreams. Self-absorption rules!
4. *Among Christians, interest in participating in community action is escalating.* While young people continue to be more self-indulgent than self-sacrificing, on a positive note, they demonstrate increasing interest in justice and community service.
5. *The postmodern insistence on tolerance is winning over the Christian Church.* Fear of being labeled "judgmental" opens avenues to an array of morally and spiritually errant behaviors and philosophies. Young people lack critical discernment.
6. *The influence of Christianity on culture and individual lives is largely invisible.* The faults and negative traits of churches and Christians are far more likely to be covered by the media than the attributes.

In order for us to reach this next generation, the church and every sincere Christian must address the six trends listed above:

1. *Theological Literacy*—A successful church must know what the Bible teaches, and communicate it effectively.
2. *Outreach-Orientation*—We must create new onramps and opportunities to reach out and touch those who need Jesus.

3. *Spiritual Principles*—We must pray and believe for a supernatural revival to awaken spiritual interest.
4. *Community Action*—We must represent Jesus with good deeds and caring actions to help open hearts and minds.
5. *Love not Tolerance*—We must love and accept all people, but not accept all of their beliefs as true. Some truths are non-negotiable. In the end, truth will not conform to us. We must conform to truth.
6. *Visible Christianity*—We must display visible, Christ-like fruit in order to positively influence our culture.

We are called to be the *salt* and *light* of the earth.⁸

Salt preserves what is good, melts what is cold, and flavors what is bland.

Light eradicates darkness, shows direction, and reveals the truth.

By blending into the world, adopting its shallow values, and compromising Biblical wisdom, we misrepresent God and induce nothing but regret. Eventually, we become exactly what we detest, living and dying in mediocrity. The ever-shifting sand of conviction summons the civilization-altering question, “If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?”⁹ It is a question that must be answered, not with mere words, but with a well-lived life.

If we, as Christ’s church, misrepresent Jesus, then we lose the essence of our purpose. Either we reflect the likeness of Jesus, or tarnish it and live a forgettable life. We must change, reflect our true Source, or accept the reality that we have become completely irrelevant.

The God of second chances awaits our decision.

⁸ Matthew 5:13–16

⁹ Psalm 11:3

The New Normal

In 1850, the average American got 9.5 hours of sleep each night. By 1950, it had dropped to 8 hours. Now it's between 6.5 and 7 hours per night, and it's continuing to dwindle.¹⁰ Many of us are chronically *rushed*, chronically *late*, and chronically *exhausted*. Americans work longer workweeks and take shorter vacations than other nationalities, yet struggle all the while.^{11,12,13} We are breaking the “speed limit of life!”¹⁴

The complications of today may actually prepare you for bigger battles ahead. Are you facing or denying them? The only cure for *denial* is *denying self*: Jesus said, “Deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Me.”

We all have a tendency toward a *normalcy bias*—the mental state people settle into when facing a disaster. It causes us to underestimate the possibility that a disaster could occur and then hampers us in coping with its effects. We often interpret warnings in an overly optimistic way. We assume, because it never has happened to me, it never will happen.

We are left unprepared and ultimately unhinged!

Are you suffering from a normalcy bias? Have you been reading this book believing the need and urgency for your own life has been overstated? That's the normalcy bias! It says, “I believe I'm basically okay, because I can't face not being okay!”

Should we believe for the best, or prepare for the worst?

Both!

Right now the levees in Sacramento, where I live, are the worst in America. New Orleans used to have the worst, until Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans in August 2005 and the levee system failed, flooding more than 80% of the city.

¹⁰ The Grand Rapids Press. National Sleep Foundation... Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/numb.

¹¹ Working time. *Wikipedia.org*. Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/numb.

¹² CNN Money. Americans waste \$67 billion in vacation days. Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/numb.

¹³ Pazner M. A Widespread Struggle To Make Ends Meet. Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/numb.

¹⁴ Swenson R. *Margin: Restoring Emotional, Physical*... Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/numb.

Imagine if the people in charge of maintaining Sacramento's levees told each other, "We need to have positive attitudes about our levees!" "We need to believe for the best!" "Things could always be worse!"

That's the last thing I'd want to hear them saying. I'd want them to be up to their eyeballs planning for worst-case scenarios!

Over and over again, throughout history, people have consistently underestimated their problems until it was too late.

During World War II, the actual danger Jewish people were facing in Nazi-occupied Europe was continually minimized—mostly by Jewish people themselves. Whenever the gross mistreatment of Jews was reported, they refused to believe it. When rumors circulated of death camps where Jews were incinerated, they dismissed them as too outrageous to believe. Who could do such unspeakable things? It was beyond their normal. They were unable to believe it was actually happening.

Thus the present *Jewish Defense League's* motto: "*Never again!*"¹⁵ Never again will we be blind-sided by an unthinkable reality!

While visiting the Holocaust museum in Jerusalem, I read account after account of Nazi leaders mocking naïve Jews who continued to express disbelief that such atrocities could happen to them. Even as they were herded into concentration camp "showers," which were actually gas chambers, they refused to face reality.

Let me share some unthinkable realities with you:

Unless the church in America changes quickly, it will resemble the church in Europe—empty buildings standing as reminders of greater days when God once had His way.

Unless we pray for, love, reach out to, teach and train the next generation of young people, there will not be a new generation of whole-hearted followers of Jesus in America.

Unless we recognize the need to fall on our faces before a holy God and repent of our compromise and coldness of heart, we will

¹⁵ Jewish Defense League. Ideology & Advocacy. Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/numb.

miss the last opportunity to see God once again transform families, churches and a nation.

I am not overstating. If anything, I am understating the enormity of our situation! Perhaps if I were less numb, I'd say it more passionately.

No Victims In Heaven

There are no victims in Heaven, only celebrating saints rejoicing in the price Jesus paid to purchase their salvation. If you're not filled with gratitude for what Jesus did for you when He died on the cross, eternity in Heaven won't change that. Our gratitude begins on Earth, and is a direct indication of our salvation.

An unappreciative person is an unsaved person!

Jesus made Himself a victim so we could be victors, but He will never force us to be grateful. He will never trick us into accepting His identity and destiny for our lives.

I've heard it said, "The person who loves you the most is the one who tells you what you don't want to hear." So, please hear this: *we are a nation of villains claiming to be victims*. Our society distorts reality calling right "wrong" and wrong "right"; good "evil" and evil "good"; saints "sinners" and sinners "saints"; men "women" and women "men"; truth "lies" and lies "truth". Our society treats humans as animals and animals as humans, the sane as insane and the insane as sane, and lust as love, and love as hate.

You can choose to wallow in self-pity as I did for six months when I was a suicidal atheist, or you can choose to believe the truth and stop living a lie. It's always a choice in life: medicate the symptoms or eradicate the root.

I have spent the last 12 years meeting weekly with young men and women who beg me to tell them the truth more aggressively—to take the gloves off—to stop sugar-coating.

What they're saying is, *"I'm numb—disconnected from my emotions. Please! Help me feel again!"*

And while I strive to use words as scalpels and not swords—to unpack pain without damaging spirits, there is a danger in soliciting someone else to uncover our destiny. Only one Person can help us be who we're created to be, and that's our all-powerful God and Creator.

“God has given us everything we need for living a godly life.”¹⁶

We must take responsibility for our own lack and thank God for the grace and mercy we have received that we will never deserve.

To God be the glory for the great things He has done!

Exact Expressions

On Earth, the rage is three dimensional. Three tangible dimensions consist of width, length, and height. The Bible speaks of God's love in terms of four dimensions: “And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how *wide*, how *long*, how *high*, and how *deep* His love is.”¹⁷ It sounds like *deep* is the fourth dimension! With the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, we are now fully immersed in the age of deep calling to deep.¹⁸

¹⁹ Since God is always deep, to commune with Him, we must go deep as well.

In theaters, it will cost a few dollars more to see movies in 3D. In the Spirit realm, it will cost everything to establish a focused relationship with our Creator—to see our own lives as God intended—in 4D.

In the energy realm, it costs more and more to fill a gas tank—to gain the power needed to get from here to there. So, too, in the Spirit! Filling your spiritual tank today will cost more than ever before—and it's going to go up. In the end, it will all come down to one essential: going deep enough to hear a deep call.

My older brother, Victor, shared a principle with me that has been very helpful. Paul the Apostle writes that his goal in life was “to

¹⁶ 2Peter 1:3

¹⁷ Ephesians 3:18

¹⁸ Romans 8:9–11

¹⁹ Psalm 42:7

stay within the boundaries of God's plan..." The Greek word here for boundaries is *metron*. It refers to the sphere of influence. It is the measure of field to plow.

God gives each of us a field. If we remain within it, He will provide all the resources necessary to produce lasting fruit in our lives. It is this fruit Jesus referred to when he said, "I appointed you to go and produce lasting fruit..."²⁰

In the New Testament, the Greek word for "character" is used only once. It describes Jesus as the "exact expression" of the Father. "The Son radiates God's own glory and expresses the very character of God..."²¹ This is the word used when kings stamp their images on coins. It is this image of Himself that God wants to imprint on us, as painful as it sometimes seems.

We are each called to an exact expression of God. We are not God, but we are created to reflect Him as His sons and daughters.

Is your life engraved with the image of your Creator? Are you presently living within your *metron*—the boundaries of your life? This must become the *new normal*. Outside of this God-intended safe parameter, you and I are on our own and will most certainly flounder.

But the question we have to ask ourselves is the same question Joseph the Patriarch, Moses, and Mary the mother of Jesus each asked: *Who has God created me to be?*

Striving to be someone other than who God created me to be is a waste of my time, a misunderstanding of God's plan, and a misrepresentation of His heart.

Call it *providential* or *prophetic*, sovereign or *spirit-led*; God finishes only what He starts. He fulfills what He alone knows is eternal. Therefore, the most important question we should ask before launching anything is: Who's initiating what I'm doing? If it's me, it's doomed to fail. If it's birthed in my fallen heart, it's a flighty wish upon a star!

²⁰ John 15:16

²¹ Hebrews 1:3

In the most sane, lucid moments of life, the only questions that have any real consequence are: “God, what are you thinking? Only You know what’s best, what’s real, what will last. What’s on Your heart?”

The only answers that have real consequence will call you from God’s deep place.

The Disciplined Life

We can’t just swat mosquitoes; we have to drain the swamp.

We can’t experience *convergence* in our lives if we continually give into *convenience*. Convergence, the harmony between spirit, soul and body, can happen only when we refuse the easy way and follow the road God chooses.

We can’t blame the next generation when frankly the *numb apple* hasn’t fallen far from the *numb tree*!

We shouldn’t whine when we’re *hungry* or complain when we’re *thirsty*, for it is only when we feel thoroughly empty that we desperately lean totally upon God. Jesus affirmed this when He said, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.”²²

Accept, too, that this infilling will last no more than a day. We can’t live on yesterday’s manna; it turns rancid and unfit to eat. In order to keep faith alive and fresh, we have to draw from God’s Spirit every day. The Bible says, “as newborn babes desire the sincere milk of the word...”²³ It’s the only way to live.

It is actually impossible to be a strong, healthy Christian without a vibrant connection to God’s Word. *Biblica*, a Bible resource company, conducted a study that determined Christians who spend four times a week engaged in the Word are 231% more likely to disciple other believers. Christians who engage scripture less than four times a week were 57% more likely to engage in destructive behaviors.²⁴

²² Matthew 5:6 (NIV)

²³ Peter 2:2 (KJV)

²⁴ Cole A, Owigho PC. Center for Bible Engagement... Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/numb.

In my youth, I would stay up late to seek the Lord; however, as I've gotten older, I get up early, pretty much every morning, to pray and get into the Word while listening to worship music. This uninterrupted time alone with the Lord is vital for me. In these moments, I hear His voice and know His direction for my life and those I lead.

Simply fleeing from darkness will not transform us. We must run toward the light of God. C.S. Lewis wrote, "Sunlight is the great disinfectant."

Seeking God means seeking godly community. I'm thankful that since receiving Jesus, I've always had a vital connection to a local church. Some of the churches I've attended have been healthier than others, but this act of obedience to scripture is essential. The Bible commands: "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching..."²⁵ This discipline has proven to be a crucial safeguard for my life.

Super Heroes

From the Greek gods of Mount Olympus to our modern day comic equivalents, man has always had a fascination with superheroes, and even supervillains. Why? Because God hardwired us to want to add His "super" to our "natural." We also intuitively know that there is super-good and super-evil, God and the devil.

Lady Gaga says it this way, "You have that freedom to pull that superstar out of yourself that you were born to be."²⁶ We're fascinated by the supernatural because we intensely want to be more than what we are. No one wants that to happen more than God.

I read a blog recently that compared Bible heroes with modern comic superheroes.²⁷

²⁵ Hebrews 10:25 (NIV)

²⁶ Lady Gaga. Interviewed by Anderson Cooper. *60 Minutes*. CBS. June 5, 2011.

²⁷ Rives J. 5 Superheroes of the Bible. 2011. Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/numb.

- *Elijah* ran a 13-mile marathon faster than Ahab's chariot. Sounds like *Flash*!
- "Moses' superpower, like *Captain Planet*, allowed him to control nature. He controlled the wind and water when he split the Red Sea and later caused water to stream out of a rock by hitting it."²⁸
- *Samson*, the *Superman* of his age, killed 1,000 men in one day with the jawbone of a donkey.
- *David*, more like *Batman*, used his courage and wisdom to slay supervillain Goliath.
- Though only three in number and not household names, nevertheless, David's mighty men remind us of the *Fantastic Four*. *Jashobeam* killed 800 enemy warriors in a single battle with his spear.²⁹ *Eleazar* "killed Philistines until his hand was too tired to lift his sword."³⁰ Finally, *Shammah* "held his ground in the middle of the field and beat back the Philistines."³¹ All three escaped the clutches of numbness and became superheroes for God.

Jesus, God come to Earth, healed people of sickness and disease, delivered them from demonic strongholds, and miraculously performed signs and wonders, even raising the dead. He was the original Superhero. Yet, He never dangled these super-human feats as an unattainable carrot before frail humanity.

Jesus even guaranteed, "I tell you the solemn truth, the person who believes in me will perform the miraculous deeds that I am doing, and will perform greater deeds than these, because I am going to the Father."³²

If we'll let Him, God will propel our lives from *subzero* to *superhero*, from *average* to *exceptional*, from *one-in-a-billion*

²⁸ Rives J. 5 Superheroes of the Bible. 2011. Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/numb.

²⁹ 2Samuel 23:8

³⁰ 2Samuel 23:10

³¹ 2Samuel 23:12

³² John 14:12 (NET)

to *one-of-a-kind*. But never forget, without Jesus, all we'll ever become is a mild-mannered version of Clark Kent.

Perfect Pleasure

Unless the pleasure we find in God is greater than the pleasure we find in sin, we succumb to the evils of Earth rather than obtain the holiness of Heaven.

A fascinating God imparted a zealous need for fascination. If we refuse to allow the Creator of the Universe to fascinate us, we will chase after pleasure imposters. Boredom, dullness, and passivity eventually fill the void.

C.S. Lewis describes it like this: “We are half-hearted creatures fooling about with alcohol and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered to us. We are like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because we cannot imagine what is meant by an offer of a holiday at the sea.”³³

Unless we respond to God's fascination, the allure of the immediate pleasure of sin trumps the fear of sin's long-term consequence. The secret to conquering sin is satisfaction in God. The One who created eternal pleasure dispenses it liberally. The Psalmist knew it first hand: “In Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.”³⁴

Wouldn't the God who made sunsets and starry nights know something about beauty? Is it too hard to imagine that the Creator of laughter knows all about fun? Certainly, the rest offered by the Prince of Peace would compare to none. Since He avails all pleasures to us, the pleasures are ours to choose. Will they be superior pleasures that satisfy and fill to overflowing, or the shallow sensations that last for a moment, leaving us empty and filled with regret?

Be drawn to *beauty*—the beauty of *holiness*!

Seek *pleasure*—the pleasure of His *company*!

³³ Lewis CS. “The Weight of Glory.” The Weight of Glory... Complete footnote: franciscanfuso.com/numb.

³⁴ Psalm 16:11b (NKJV)

Let your heart be filled with *desire*—the desire to know *Him*!

Deep down, we each have a longing to love and be loved in an infinite way. That's the primary hook behind the *Twilight* book and movie series. Its principle audience, teenage girls, looks for love beyond the physical. The deepest of all desires is to be "*first loved*" and "*then to love*." Until we believe God is fascinated with us, we will search in vain to find someone who is!

We were created first for God's pleasure!³⁵ He loves to love us. But the admission price to this endlessly delightful relationship requires complete surrender and commitment.

Fully Awake

What would it take for our behavior to dramatically change?

In a book entitled *The Day America Told the Truth*, a survey was conducted in which 7% of Americans privately admitted they would kill a stranger for as little as \$2 million.³⁶ This statistic no longer surprises me. Our sin nature regularly defaults to evil over good. Generally speaking, significant pleasure or serious pain provides the best antidotes for apathy and selfishness.

So what would it take for someone to do good, selfless good, even heroic good? How about a mega-dose of God, His nature, and love! We would need to be empowered to love Him more than our own lives, to love our neighbors more than we love ourselves, and to esteem others as more important.³⁸

What would it take to bring Christians together in prayer? A nuclear explosion in a nearby city? By the evening of September 11, 2001, our church was filled with hundreds of people praying hot, broken prayers. I've never heard more passionate praying than on that tragic day.

What would it take for pastors to come together to pray for one another? One of their fellow pastors being martyred? It's happened

³⁵ Revelation 4:11

³⁶ Patterson J, Kim P. *The Day America Told The Truth...* Complete footnote: francisanfuso.com/numb.

³⁷ Ephesians 2:3

³⁸ Philippians 2:3

before, is happening now in other nations, and will most likely be coming to a city near you.

What would it take to live *fully awake*?

As a young Christian, I read a quote from the great missionary C.T. Studd, “Preach as though you’ll never preach again. What a dying man would say to dying men.” He followed this challenge by sacrificially laying down his life on the mission field. Though I am not a perfect example of this approach to life, I have tried ever since to live every day of my life as if it might be my last: my last time to worship, to pray, and to express love, my last moment to be *fully awake*!

The God who, because of my mother’s prayers, saved me on Mother’s Day, May 14, 1972, deserves no less than my complete surrender to His will and purpose for my life. He rescued me from eternal destruction and separation for the very purpose of living a fully conscious, fully committed life. Nothing less is acceptable! If I cannot yield, I am wasting both my time and God’s. What do I really believe? That my life is *worth preserving*, or that God is *worth proclaiming*?

How you and I live is what we really believe! Show me how you treat your spouse, and we’ll see what you believe about *marriage*. Tell me how you care for your children, and we’ll know your convictions about *family*.

When Jesus died and rose again, He broke the power of sin and death. The Bible says I no longer need to fear death: “...only by dying could He (Jesus) break the power of the devil, who had the power of death. Only in this way could He set free all who have lived their lives as slaves to the fear of dying.”³⁹

Jesus Himself challenges me, “Don’t be afraid of those who want to kill your body; they cannot touch your soul. Fear only God, who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”⁴⁰

³⁹ Hebrews 2:14–15

⁴⁰ Matthew 10:28

Facing Revival

Would you and I be willing to pay the price of seeing God move in such power as to witness families, cities, states, and nations dramatically transformed? A holy revolution of faith would unseat the unseen, evil power brokers that hold men and women captive.

What if the cost of such a personal and corporate revival was doable, would you and I afford to see it happen? The qualifier to this perhaps greatest-of-all-questions is, “The cost of revival is within reach”. But precious few throughout history have been willing to pay. To usher in true revival, we must be willing to sacrifice what we want for what God wants.

Of the handful of nation-transforming revivals that have taken place since Pentecost and the birth of the church, many consider the Welsh revival of 1904 the most Earth-shaking and Heaven-summoning. It came, as revivals invariably do, during a low-tide spiritual moment. Empty churches, cold hearts, lethargic Christians, and flourishing evil. Sounds like much of the church and culture in North America and Europe today.

Up steps a 27-year-old miner named Evan Roberts with a far younger band of men and women, each eager to see God move as He did in the beginning of creation: “...and darkness was upon the face of the deep.”⁴¹ And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.”⁴²

When the depth of man’s heart is filled with darkness, God shows up and says, “ ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.”⁴³ Did He intend this command for exclusive periods of history? Or can it declare its power now? The Bible is crystal clear. “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.”⁴⁴ Jesus still wants to fill darkness with light! He still longs to remove the depth of sin that imprisons human hearts.

⁴¹ Joyner R. *The Power to Change the World*. MorningStar Publications; 2006.

⁴² Genesis 1:2 (KJV)

⁴³ Genesis 1:3 (KJV)

⁴⁴ Hebrews 13:8 (NKJV)

Roberts had a comprehensive, Biblical plan. He listed the key elements needed for God to have His way in us. They became known as *The Four Points*.

1. The past must be clear, every sin confessed to God, any wrong to man reconciled. There is no room for compromise with sin. Everything doubtful must be removed once and for all out of our lives.
2. No cloud caused by unforgiveness may exist between a believer and God.
3. Prompt, unquestioning obedience, to the Spirit of God must follow repentance.
4. Public confession of Christ must become a way of life.

With these four convictions as a filter of faith, the fires of the Welsh revival received their perpetual spark from prayer! It was said of Evan Roberts: “Prayer was the keynote of his tireless life. His soul appeared to be saturated through with the spirit of prayer...whenever one looked on his face, he seemed engaged in intercession.”

His personal entreaty to the Lord, which he repeated over and over again, was “BEND ME!”

God heard it, did it, and millions of people from around the world were never the same again. “The degree to which Wales was impacted by this revival in such a short period of time does not have a counterpart anywhere in history. It was almost as if the nation had been converted in a day.”⁴⁵

At times when Christians unite in prayer, God sovereignly moves in power. He thus provides a platform for anointed ministers to preach the gospel to a hungry audience, in order for their hearts to turn to Him.

⁴⁵ Joyner R. *The Power to Change the World*. MorningStar Publications; 2006.

Will we face the duplicity in us, our churches, and within our culture, or will we bow to fear, doubt, and turn away?

Will I put an end to the *numbness* buried in my own heart?

This is the question that haunts me; may it haunt you as well.

And may, at the end of our soul searching, we come to the best-of-all conclusions: that the only life worth living is the fully abandoned one, a life that makes God smile and the devil tremble.

Storming Heaven

The storms of Earth compel us to storm Heaven!

The history of the church of Jesus Christ has been shaped by those willing to break free from the pack—to risk it all for the sake of obeying God’s Spirit even if it costs their lives. These were the true world changers!

In the fourth century an Asian monk named Telemachus, who spent much of his adult life in prayer, believed he heard God’s Spirit tell him to go to Rome. Traveling on foot, it took him weeks to get there. When he arrived a celebration for a military victory was taking place, so he followed a crowd to the Coliseum. Inside, he saw gladiators stand before the Roman Emperor and say, “We who are about to die salute you!”

When Telemachus realized the gladiators were about to fight to the death for the sheer entertainment of the crowd, he cried out, “In the name of Christ, stop!” At first, due to the roar of the massive gathering, he wasn’t heard. But as the fighting began, he made his way down through the throng to the arena floor. Climbing over the wall he continued to yell, “In the name of Christ, stop!”

The crowd mistakenly thought this tiny man in a funny robe was part of the festivities, but when they realized his intent, they became angry and belligerent toward him. Telemachus continued to plead with the gladiators, “In the name of Christ, stop!” until one of them thrust him through with a sword.

Falling to the Coliseum sand in death, he implored, "In the name of Christ, stop!"

Suddenly, the atmosphere changed!

The gladiators stopped fighting and just stared at Telemachus' body lying dead before them. The crowd likewise became mute!

Slowly, one spectator at a time left the stadium, until it was abandoned. No one knew it, but this would be the last event between gladiators in the Roman Coliseum. Never again would another person be killed for the entertainment of a crowd.

One man, obeyed God, traveled for weeks to a foreign city, and then fearlessly did what no one had ever done. After centuries of apathy, one holy, surrendered, and committed soul proclaimed, "Enough is enough! I am willing to give my life to change this tide of injustice."

Telemachus' life and death inspires all of us today!

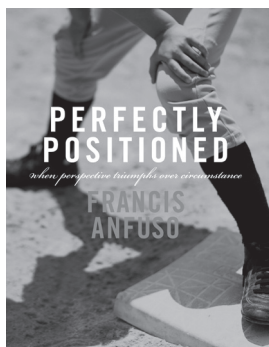
Who among us will stand up and become a difference-maker?
Who will inspire those who are too numb to do what they know is right? Who will pay the ultimate price and awaken the conscience of a generation?

Revival is coming! It's up around the bend! It's within reach!

You were made for it, and it was made for you!

RECOMMENDED BOOKS

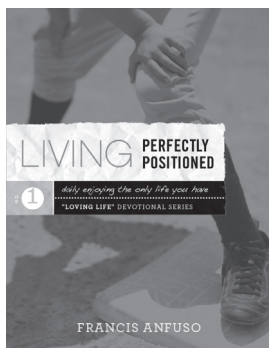
Other titles by Francis Anfuso



Perfectly Positioned—

When Prospective Triumphs Over Circumstance*

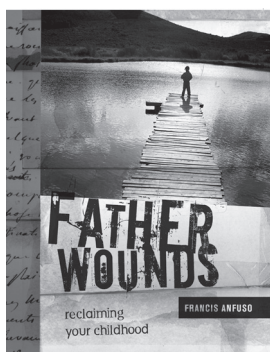
Do you wish God had written a different script for you? Do you see your life as an exquisite feast or burnt toast? Are you eating and enjoying every bite or is it boring, bland and predictable? Are you filled with regret and shame or hope and healing? Our lives begin to be truly transformed when we stop asking God to change our circumstances, and allow Him to change our perspective! Behind every challenging situation there is a loving God whose victorious perspective is far greater than the trials we face. God's will is that we would embrace the life He has given us, instead of wishing for what does not exist and would not satisfy even if it did. If you have come to the realization that you have fished all night and caught nothing, it is not an accident. Keep fishing! God has perfectly positioned you to read this book. The breakthrough you have been longing for is just ahead!



Living Perfectly Positioned—

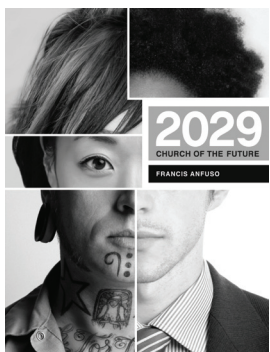
"Loving Life" Devotional Series

This book could be called: "The Greatest Hits of Perfectly Positioned." The best of the best revelations are in bite-size, one-a-day pieces. Instead of wishing you had a different script for your life, God can renew your mind to enjoy the only life you have. By changing your perspective, you will see your life changed! God's will is that we would embrace the life He has given us, instead of wishing for what does not exist and would not satisfy even if it did. If you have come to the realization that you have fished all night and caught nothing, it's not an accident. Keep fishing! God has perfectly positioned you to read this book. The breakthrough you have been longing for is just ahead!



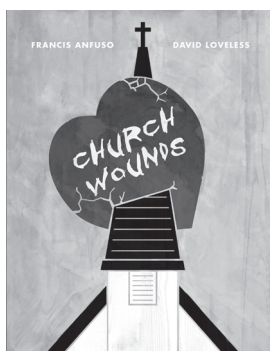
Father Wounds—Reclaiming Your Childhood*

As an abandoned and abused son, my soul suffered long-term destruction. But my wounded heart was exactly what God wanted to heal and restore. I discovered God is the Father I always wanted. He's the perfect Dad I needed all along. God can help you forgive the parent who hurt you. He wants to heal you completely and use you mightily in the lives of others! Today is the day to step into the wholeness and destiny God has for His children! (Find video clips online at rockspots.tv)



2029—The Church of the Future*

You can comprehend the future if you study the past and discern the present. God is not hiding what is about to happen. He longs to reveal it to us. In 1989, Francis Anfuso wrote *We've Got a Future—The 21st Century Church*. Now, two decades after its release, the book reads like a detailed depiction of today's church. But the story is far from finished. This next volume details what is about to unfold—where the church must go, and the significant role you can play. 2029 is a glimpse into our future. A taste of what will shortly come to pass. Now is not the time for the Church to shrink back and recoil as the battle rages. Instead, we are approaching our finest hour.



Church Wounds—

Francis Anfuso and David Loveless*

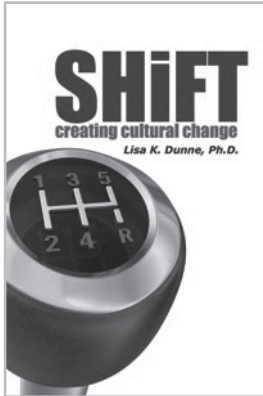
Our wounds don't have to disable us. They're meant to be a doorway into the restored life God always intended. God wants to heal us, if we want to be. For God to free us, we must allow Him to touch our pain. *Church Wounds* examines the most common hurts inflicted by Christians on Christians: hypocrisy, judgmentalism, leader insensitivities, and abuse, plus many more. Read the stories of those who were not just hurt—but healed; and then experience the healing yourself.

*Book available in MP3, read by author

Printed books and MP3's by Francis Anfuso may be purchased at francisanfuso.com

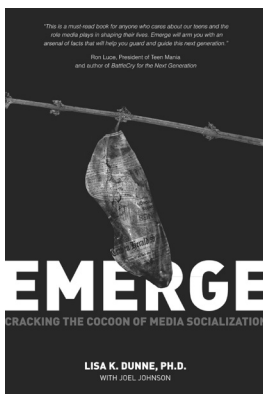
RECOMMENDED BOOKS

Other titles by Dr. Lisa Dunne



Shift: Creating Cultural Change (2011)

America is in great distress today--financially, socially, morally, academically, spiritually. From rising STI rates to cutting to bullying, there is an audible echo of emptiness across the land. Families are failing. Our nation's schools are in utter disrepair, as organic, life-giving curiosities of learning have been replaced with sterile, lifeless models of cookie-cutter curricula. But despite the current reality, neuroscience and theology both agree: There is hope. In SHIFT, Dr. Dunne examines emerging social systems in Western culture, focusing on the transgenerational roots of the separation of hearts and minds. SHIFT details a faith-based approach to intentional, positive, prosocial change built on the examples of a few determined individuals who refused to look the other way. SHIFT will encourage you to find a place of potential impact within your realm of influence. Effective change takes place one region at a time, one city at a time, one family at a time. Instead of Band-Aid solutions that overpromise and underdeliver, it's time for a foundational shift. You can be a catalyst for change.



Emerge: Cracking the Cocoon of Media Socialization (2010)

In an age of constant virtual connectivity, mainstream media has been adopted as a member of the American family, and with this unique amalgamation of sibling status and digital domination comes an inherent power of persuasion. Emerge exposes the subtle socialization of Western society, unraveling a compelling cultural timeline that has laid the foundation for media's primal, intoxicating influence on human behavior. Outlining the depth and breadth of the cultural shift through the lenses of sociology, psychology, religion, and neuroscience, Dr. Dunne analyses the strategic thrust of entertainment media and its ultimate impact on worldview, offering tools to crack the cocoon and break free of the stronghold of socialization.