

YOU'RE STRONGER THAN YOU THINK

THE POWER TO
DO WHAT YOU FEEL
YOU CAN'T



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Details inside.

Dr. Les Parrott

#1 *NEW YORK TIMES* BESTSELLING AUTHOR

You're Stronger Than You Think practically brings us face-to-face with truth, and what happens is what God promises: freedom! Freedom to clear our minds, own our weaknesses, and find His totally sufficient strength. This is a book you don't want to miss!

—**Kay Arthur**, co-CEO of Precept Ministries International

Sometimes when you're in pain, struggle, or difficulty, it's easy to believe either that you have no strengths or that you've lost them. Les's message is so valuable in helping you to find real and dependable sources of strength that you didn't know you had.

—**Dr. Henry Cloud**, coauthor of *Boundaries*

I finished this book thoroughly convinced I never wanted another “near life” experience, and I was motivated and equipped to focus my energies toward a God-honoring, adventurous life.

—**Bill Donahue, PhD**, teacher and bestselling author

This phenomenal masterpiece aligns the mind, heart, and soul in harmony with one another and creates the essence of living life and loving life to the fullest. The completeness of this story-filled resource leaves no guessing when it comes to the validity of life and the value of pure hope, hope that does not disappoint.

—**Thelma Wells, MMin, DD (honorary)**, founder of the Ready to Win Conferences

WHAT READERS ARE SAYING ABOUT *YOU'RE STRONGER THAN YOU THINK*

You had me hooked from the first paragraph.

This book connects well to the lost dreams that we all have left behind.

Unusually fresh insight on a far too common topic.

Everyone I know could relate to and benefit from this book.

Very thought provoking!

Today more than ever, people need to know that there is hope out there. This book will encourage, challenge, and equip people to live the abundant life.

This book captured my attention from the beginning.

Absolutely intriguing! . . . Appropriate for a broad base of ages.

Very relevant! The issues that are addressed in this book relate to everyone, sometime in their lives. We all need to know how to reach beyond our fears and realize our future potential.

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You're Stronger Than You Think: The Power to Do What You Feel You Can't

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INTRODUCTION

LIFE IS AN ADVENTURE— IF YOU SUMMON THE STRENGTH

May you live all the days of your life.

—JONATHAN SWIFT

It all started—the idea for this book—with an honest conversation between two friends. It went something like this:

“I have to confess something,” my friend Bill whispered. We were sitting across the table from each other at a crowded restaurant. I put down my fork and leaned in to listen as Bill continued. “I cried this week while watching a movie trailer on an airplane.”

“What?” I asked, half thinking Bill might be joking.

“It was for a kids’ movie, but something about it really got to me,” he continued.

The way Bill spoke, I could tell he was serious.

“Did anyone see you crying?” I asked, with all the insensitivity I was trained to conceal as a psychologist.

“That’s not the point,” Bill said, “but, yes, I got a few strange looks.”

“What was it?”

“The trailer was for a movie called *Where the Wild Things Are*, and it had this powerful music playing, and then, one by one, these short sentences appeared on the screen. The first one said, ‘Inside all of us is hope.’ It faded from the screen as the music kept playing, and then the next sentence appeared: ‘Inside all of us is fear.’ The next sentence made me wince,” Bill said. “‘Inside all of us is regret.’ And then these words, ‘Inside all of us is adventure.’”

“Adventure?” I said. “I didn’t see that coming.”

“Neither did I,” said Bill. “But do you know what I feel when I hear those words? I feel like I don’t want to miss out on my own life. I don’t want to wake up one day and regret that my hopes were never realized. I don’t want to play it safe by just waiting

Because of the routines we follow, we often forget that life is an ongoing adventure.

MAYA ANGELOU

on the future. But sometimes I have this fear that keeps me from pursuing my adventure. You know what I mean? Something inside me says maybe I can’t handle the adventure or maybe the adventure is too big a risk. Maybe I’m not strong enough.”

“No, I get it,” I told Bill. “I *do* know that feeling. It’s like you have this perpetual hope that someday your *real* life will begin, but you start to think that maybe that’s a false hope. You’re slogging through the stress and pressures of today while you hold that hope in front of you.”

“That’s it! And you eventually realize that you’ve deluded yourself with a false hope because you’re feeling that you’re going to miss out on your great journey.”

“And that’s when regret sneaks up on you?”

“Regret, or maybe just the feeling of being inadequate . . . or powerless,” Bill said. “Maybe it’s just fear. Whatever it is, it keeps you from stepping out of your comfort zone to do what you feel

you can't." Bill scanned the restaurant for a moment. "I bet nearly everybody in here, if they thought about it, would feel the same way. We're all so pessimistic. Everybody sees the glass as half empty."

"Not really," I said. "Almost all of the people in here, if you asked them, would tell you they are optimists."

"How can you be so sure?" Bill asked.

IS THE GLASS REALLY HALF FULL?

As it turned out, I had recently done some research on this very issue and had discovered a massive study on the subject. It shows that the vast majority of us—all over the world—see the proverbial glass as half full. At the annual meeting of the Association for Psychological Science in San Francisco, researchers reported on a poll that included 140 countries, representing 95 percent of the world's population. It revealed that 89 percent of us expect the next five years to be as good as or better than our current lives.¹

So how is it that we succumb to the feeling that we "can't" when we believe our future holds real promise? How can there be such a disconnect between what we say and what we feel? It doesn't make much sense—until you realize that while we may have confidence in the future, we don't always have confidence in our ability to make it through the present. We may see a bolder, brighter tomorrow, but when we look at where we are today, our strength fades. We give up before we even start pursuing that brighter future, yet we keep holding out hope that "someday" our lives will be different.

In the meantime, a vague feeling of discontent begins to seep into our souls while we're not looking. Then something like a trailer for a children's movie reminds us that if we are not

Most people don't aim too high and miss. They aim too low and hit.

BOB MOAWAD

intentional, our lives will become encumbered with regrets, not so much about what we did but about what we didn't do. If we are not intentional, we become people who "wish we had" instead of those who are "glad we did."

All of this raises the question of how we humans can balance the optimism we hold for the future with the uneasiness we hold in the present. Or, simply put, If the glass is really half full, why do I feel so empty?

WAITING FOR YOUR LIFE TO START . . . SOMEDAY

How content are you with your life right now? Chances are, if you are like most people, you feel you're doing okay, but you're going to be more content, more deeply satisfied with who you are as a person and with the life you are leading somewhere down the road. You're likely feeling a bit unsettled, maybe even restless. Is that right?

Maybe you've heard this little lyric. It makes such a simple but profound point:

*Each morning he stacked up the letters he'd write
Tomorrow.*

*And think of the folks he would fill with delight
Tomorrow.*

*It was too bad, indeed, he was busy today,
And hadn't a minute to stop on his way;
More time he would have to give others he'd say
Tomorrow.*

*The greatest of workers this man would have been
Tomorrow.*

*The world would have known him, had he ever seen
Tomorrow.*

*But the fact is he died and he faded from view,
And all that he left here when living was through
Was a mountain of things he intended to do
Tomorrow.²*

Do you ever fear ending up like the man in the poem, who died while waiting for the future? Do you ever feel as if you're waiting for your life—real life—to begin? Do you ever feel as if the pressures and fatigue of your daily routine are keeping you stuck, while you continue to hold out hope that the adventure of your life will start—someday?

Maybe the adventure of your life has been put on hold because of something beyond your control. Maybe you've been hit by a curveball, and you're just trying to survive the pain or hardship. Life on hold.

Down deep you know there is more to this life than merely surviving it. You know your future holds promise. And yet the uncertainty and powerlessness you sometimes feel cause you to question your ability to rise above your current circumstances and keep you from doing what you need to do.

There has to be a better way, right? There is. And I'm going to show it to you. With a counterintuitive approach, I'm going to help you plug into the ultimate power source. I'm not going to tell you to think more positively. You've heard that message before. No, this book is going to show you where to look—right now—for the strength you didn't know you had.

We examine each day before us with barely a glance and say, "No, this isn't one I've been looking for," and wait in a bored sort of way for the next, when we are convinced, our lives will start for real.

TOM HENNEN

EVERYONE NEEDS MORE STRENGTH

Two human experiences keep us from living the lives we long for. The first experience is the result of a hope deferred—a choice we made out of fear. The second is the result of a hope dashed—a circumstance that was thrust upon us. Let's take a look at each.

Deferred Hope

Life's true adventure begins only when we summon the strength to do what we are afraid of. This can be anything: starting a new career, writing a book, going back to school, or pursuing a relationship. It can be anything that takes us to a place where our unfulfilled dreams are found. In fact, the adventure of living begins when we leap over the great abyss of whatever is holding us back. Most of us tiptoe to the edge of the chasm and catch a glimpse of what's possible on the other side. We may even get excited about what we see—until we look over the edge at what lies below and decide to back away. What keeps us from taking that leap? Fear that we might not make it, right? We see the leap as too great, at least for right now. We believe that we may fall short and the consequences could be dreadful. But we don't give up on the idea. We decide that we'll come back to it, *someday*. We'll take some time and maybe think of how we might build a bridge over the abyss. Or we might wait for better leaping conditions. *And who knows*, we think, *if we wait awhile, the distance may get shorter*.

Whatever our rationale, we put off taking the big leap. We bide our time with the routine of a life that we hope will eventually take us across the chasm. One day stacks on another, and as time passes, we think about the great abyss in our quieter moments. We wonder if we should take the leap soon. But the busyness of our days once again pulls us back from the edge, and we perpetually postpone the leap. Why? Because we are afraid we do not have the strength to make it.

Dashed Hope

Life's great adventure is sometimes foiled by circumstances beyond our control. We don't necessarily lack the strength and courage to leap over the abyss, but we are grappling with a roadblock that puts an end to the journey we were pursuing. We now carry a burden that is sapping us of strength. An obstacle of some kind has thrown us for a loop, and we're suffering from its effects.

No matter how blessed your life may be, if you live on this planet long enough, you will eventually come face-to-face with a sobering season of unexpected pain or hardship. "Not to have felt pain," says an old Jewish proverb, "is not to have been human." A major jolt is inevitable. It may be a job loss, a physical illness, a divorce, an addiction, a relational betrayal, grief, a natural disaster, or any number of other issues that cause emotional suffering. Of course, what causes heart-wrenching pain for some people may barely faze others. But you can count on this: Nobody—not a single soul—is immune to pain.

Albert Einstein said, "Either we suffer in health or we suffer in soul." Some suffer more, and some less, but *all* suffer. We may express our anguish

in different ways, but each one of us knows the sting of hardship and heartache, disease and disaster, trials and troubles. And each of us knows that it is in these times, when our dreams have been dashed, that we need the strength we didn't know we had.

Some people spend their entire lives indefinitely preparing to live.

ABRAHAM MASLOW

FINDING STRENGTH WHERE YOU DIDN'T KNOW TO LOOK

Remember the egg on the cover of this book? It's just a matter of time until it cracks under the pressure, right? Not necessarily. It's not as weak as you might think. The truth is, eggshells are far

stronger than they look because their dome shape is able to withstand great pressure. In fact, in one experiment by the Ontario Science Center in Toronto, staff members recorded an experiment in which one unbroken egg was able to support a person weighing two hundred pounds.³

So whether you are facing a dream that's been deferred or a dream that's been dashed, this book is written for you. It will show you where and how to find the strength you're looking for.

I have divided this book into three parts: the power of your mind, the power of your heart, and the power of your soul.⁴ These are the internal wells where your strength is most likely to reside.

Part 1: The Power of Your Mind

Few experts would dispute the fact that the beginning of renewed strength starts with how we think. We use our minds to analyze, figure out, and plan. Our minds hold our knowledge and understanding.

We've all heard about the undeniable power of our attitudes. But in this section, I propose a new way of drawing strength from our minds. It has to do with simplicity (chapter 1). It has to do with finding strength by clearing our heads in order to discover what should have been obvious all along. Too often, we make life more complicated than it needs to be, and as a result, we get bogged down and become sluggish and exhausted. This section will show you how to travel light and think more simply and, in turn, find fresh resolve and a new tenacity.

I will also show you how to think with expectancy (chapter 2). "Hope deferred makes the heart sick," says the ancient proverb, "but a dream fulfilled is a tree of life."⁵ The difference between deferment and fulfillment is found in how we frame our hopes, our wishes, and our dreams. We can frame them with worry, for example, and they are sure to stagnate. Or we can frame them

with eager anticipation, and we've suddenly infused them with strength—an electrifying power to see possibilities more clearly than we ever have before. All of this is found in the way we think. And that's the power of our minds.

A good head and a good heart are always a formidable combination.

NELSON MANDELA

Part 2: The Power of Your Heart

While the cognitive part of us may be a starting place for strength, our hearts hold a wealth of power when we know where to tap it. And that, paradoxically, begins by finding the strength that comes when we own our weakness (chapter 3). We realize this goes against conventional wisdom. It runs against the grain of anyone who is trying to appear powerful. But that's the point. This book is about authentic strength that comes from the inside out, not about building a strong facade. And that's why vulnerability, as we will see, is instrumental in finding the emotional power in our hearts.

The same is true of being known (chapter 4). The strength that is found in our hearts will never be optimized until it is connected to other people. When we get too caught up in the busyness of our lives, we lose the meaningful bonds we share with others and, ultimately, with God. And that's why our strength is so often depleted. The bonds built through healthy connection create a dynamic energy within our hearts. They stir our emotions to conjure up strength.

Part 3: The Power of Your Soul

The ultimate source of strength resides deep within our souls. After I show you how to mine the power of your mind and tap the power of your heart, I will show you how to hit your greatest source of power and strength when we look unabashedly into your spirit. For it is there that a sacred secret resides. What is it?

To empty yourself of your striving for strength (chapter 5). Sure, it sounds incongruent, maybe even absurd. But this deeply spiritual surrender, when done properly, is the only way to find the abiding strength your soul desires.

In chapter 6 you will discover a boldness that will likely surprise you. “Boldness,” said German poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, “has genius and power and magic in it.” It can catch you off guard when you see it emerging from within. Yet it is in your soul that your faith, no matter how feeble, can conjure up courage. It is in your soul that you will discover a power greater than you ever imagined, and it comes through a counterintuitive strategy that taps the ultimate power. It is there that you find a direct line to the strength that only God can give. And it rests within the power of your soul.

The word *strong* comes from the Latin word *stringere*, which means to bind tight. Because of the aspect of binding, it eventually

I don't want to get to the end of my life and find that I lived just the length of it. I want to have lived the width of it as well.

DIANE ACKERMAN

also gave us the English word *string*. In a very real sense, this book is going to show you how to tie a taut string around your mind, your heart, and eventually, your soul—uniting and binding them tightly together—to create a powerful grip of renewed strength that banishes every inclination

you might have to say, “I can’t.” It stiff-arms every urge to quit. It makes no room for excuses. Instead, it provides you with the unfathomable power to hold on to a hope that will not disappoint you.⁶ It will make you mentally strong, emotionally strong, and spiritually strong. It will give you strength to stand up to your Goliath, whatever it is, look it straight in the eye, and do what you heretofore felt you couldn’t.

MY PROMISE TO YOU

If I were to sit down with you and ask why you picked up this book, what would you say? I'm guessing that within minutes, if you felt safe, you'd tell me about a specific situation—a hurdle or a challenge—that is calling into question your resilience or depleting your strength.

And I would listen. I'd listen carefully and sincerely.

Of course, we can't do that through this book, because it's a one-sided conversation. The closest you and I can come to a dialogue is through my website, www.StrongerBook.com, which provides a way for me to hear from you. And I hope I will. I want to know your story. I want to know your thoughts and hear your questions as you move through the chapters of this book.

Every word has been written with you in mind. I've pored over each sentence because I want to be sure my message is clear. Most of all, I've prayed for you, the reader, that this book will serve as a means to nothing less than a breakthrough for you. I don't know the specifics of your life, of course, but I know enough about human experience to believe the message of this book can serve as a pivot point in your life.

The world is full of suffering; it is also full of overcoming it.

HELEN KELLER

Here's my pledge: You will find no pat answers or spiritual platitudes in these pages. No sanctimonious sayings or stories of false humility. You won't find the proverbial "three easy steps" or ridiculously simple quick fixes. No philosophical mumbo jumbo or psychobabble.

I've written this book for everyone who needs the strength to face down the obstacles that stand between them and their better selves—their better tomorrows. This book is for you if you sometimes wrestle with feelings of insecurity. It's for you if you

sometimes doubt yourself. It's for you if you occasionally feel inadequate in your job or as a parent or a spouse. It's for you if you have a broken heart. It's for you if you are afraid to move outside your comfort zone. It's for you if you feel discouraged or overwhelmed by responsibilities.

My pledge, from the outset, is to be real and to offer uncomplicated truth to those who are standing before an obstacle or are staring across their own abyss and are eager to find the strength to do what they feel they can't. If that describes you, then this book is for you.

LIVING STRONG

Before I jump into the heart of this book, consider this parable: An elderly man, in the final days of his life, is lying in bed alone. He awakens to see a group of people crowded around his bed. Their faces are loving but sad. Confused, the old man smiles weakly and whispers, "You must be my childhood friends, come to say good-bye. I am so grateful."

Moving closer, the tallest figure gently grasps the old man's hand and replies, "Yes, we are your best and oldest friends, but long ago you abandoned us, for we are the unfulfilled promises of your youth. We are the unrealized hopes, dreams, and plans that you once felt deeply in your heart but never pursued. We are the unique talents that you never refined, the special gifts that you never discovered. Old friend, we have come not to comfort you but to die with you."

At the end of our lives, we don't want to end up like this old man. Nobody does. We don't want to see our unfulfilled promises and unrealized dreams gather around to visit us in our final days. We want to live life to the full. We want to find the strength to discover true meaning and fulfillment within our obstacles. And we want to muster the strength to take the dreaded leap across the

chasm of our fears. None of us want to merely endure. And none of us want to put life on hold and spend our time in perpetual limbo—indefinitely preparing to live.

Some of you, fearing you don't have what it takes to overcome or succeed, give in to weakness. Others show an unflinching determination to find a way through difficulty and keep moving forward. The difference between you is found in realizing that—if you know where to look—you're stronger than you think.

—Les

PART 1
**THE POWER
OF YOUR MIND**

*As he thinks in his heart,
so is he.*

—THE BIBLE

The human brain weighs just three pounds and is composed of mostly water. Yet it has been called the most sophisticated information system on Earth. To say that the human brain is amazing is an understatement.

Consider what your brain is doing right now, while you are reading these words. Your



occipital lobes, near the back of your head, are processing how you see this sentence. And the frontal lobes of your cerebral cortex are engaged in thinking through the meaning of these words. They are helping you see how the content might apply to you. Meanwhile, you just blinked because of the motor area of your brain. The cerebellum, in the lower portion of your brain, enables you to hold this book in your hands, as well as do anything else you're doing right now that calls for balance and coordination—like sitting. All the while, your metabolism and hormonal functions, such as the ones that regulate the water and sugar levels in your body, are currently being controlled by your pituitary gland, deep inside your brain. And if you are sitting outside on a park bench on a cold, wintry day while you're reading this, your hypothalamus is responsible for warning you to go inside by causing you to shiver. You'll remember what you're reading in this paragraph because of your hippocampus, whose job it is to translate short-term memory into long-term memory. It also enables you to remember that the point of this elaborate example is to underscore how complex and marvelous your brain is.

We don't have to read the *Journal of Neuroscience* to realize that the human brain is remarkable. We've all heard how even the most advanced computers can't hold a candle to the human brain. In fact, a computer comparable to the human brain would need to be able to perform more than 38 thousand trillion operations per second.¹ Our brains make computers look like Tinkertoy sets. We can, for example, recognize a friend right after she's had her hair cut. When we hear "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?" we don't expect a weather report. When someone asks us if we know Bob Thompson, who plays the trumpet in the school band and lives on Maple Street, we answer yes, but we know that his name is actually Bill, not Bob, and that he plays the trombone and moved away six months ago. We can recognize something

as a chair, whether it's a beanbag, a Chippendale side chair, or a throne. We can understand words even when they are misspelled. Or fill in the blanks when letters are missing.

As you are reading the words on this page, your brain is sending electrical impulses through a network of brain cells so small that thousands of them could fit into the period at the end of this sentence. We take this kind of mental work for granted, but computers can't even come close. The brain simply runs too efficiently for it to be a fair competition.

As I said, to say the human brain is amazing is simply an understatement. Complete understanding of the brain will be a long time coming. But truth be told, the physical human brain is child's play compared to the intangible human mind. "The mind is its own place," said English poet John Milton, "and in it self, can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n."² Scientists have pretty well mapped out the terrain of the brain, but they are far from understanding the complexities of the mind. After all, it's not possible to x-ray the mind. It's beyond physical location. French philosopher René Descartes declared that the mind, while it might live in the brain, was a nonmaterial thing, entirely separate from the physical tissues found inside the head. Furthermore, said Descartes, in one of history's most memorable sound bites, "I think, therefore I am." His point was that consciousness is the only sure evidence that we actually exist. Pardon the pun, but the mind is pretty heady. It leaves scientists and philosophers alike with much to ponder.

What scientists *do* know about the mind is that it is an intensely private part of each individual. Nobody but the owner has access to its intuitive and rational parts. No one else can know your mind unless you choose to share it. Your mind holds your sense of self. It is synonymous with your thoughts. Thus, you "make up your mind," you "change your mind," or you are

sometimes “of two minds.” In fact, it’s sometimes said that the mind is what your brain does. Your mind, in a word, thinks.

THINKING SIMPLY AND EXPECTANTLY

In the two chapters in part 1, I will show you how to tap the power of your mind—how to think with strength.

Chapter 1, “Think Simply,” reveals the “sacred gift” offered to those who learn how to clear their heads. We all long for that gift, when we think about it, but we too often neglect it. By the way, thinking simply is not simple thinking. To say it another way, thinking simply is not the same as being simpleminded. And it’s certainly not the same as being a simpleton. A simpleton is a fool, someone who lacks wisdom and knowledge: “A prudent person foresees danger and takes precautions. The simpleton goes blindly on and suffers the consequences.”³ The simpleton uses poor judgment—the very thing *simple* thinking guards against. In fact, as you will see in chapter 1, thinking simply is the only sure path to wisdom.

Chapter 2, “Think Expectantly,” takes an even more powerful step toward mining the power of your mind. Hundreds of studies in this area have stunned even the researchers. In one classic example, blindfolded subjects can be told that a hot knife will be applied to their skin for only a second. In reality, “a cold knife touches the skin very lightly and produces a burn blister. The heat, obviously, is furnished by the mind.”⁴ This chapter will show you how to harness your expectations and gain more meaningful results. In fact, it will show you how thinking expectantly can tap into the ultimate meaning of life with a hope that will not disappoint.

YOUR MIND IS STRONGER THAN YOU KNOW

Before we jump into the first two chapters, I want to remind you of a story you have surely encountered before:

A fierce and powerful lion once ruled the forest. His great size

and regal demeanor made him unapproachable, and he was feared by all the other creatures of his kingdom. From a safe distance they watched his mighty, muscular frame move along the forest paths, and his reputed bravery became legendary.

One day, he came upon a child who had never heard of him and his fearful power. The child approached him innocently, and lo and behold, the lion shrank back and cowered behind a tree, shaking with fear.

“What’s wrong?” the child asked kindly.

The lion could scarcely speak because he was trembling so. “I—I’m . . . afraid.”

“But you’re a lion. I thought lions were strong and brave.”

“Not me,” the lion answered miserably. “Everyone thinks I’m powerful and fearless, but everything scares me. I’m not strong at all.”

“You poor thing. I’m on my way to see a very wise man who may be able to help you. I’ve heard he can do amazing things.”

“Do you really think he could make me strong and brave?”

“Let’s go and see.”

So off went the lion and the child to find the wise man who could make the lion strong. When they found him, the wise man looked into the lion’s eyes and said, “You’ve been strong and brave all along. But here’s a badge to wear that will remind you that the strength you seek is already in you.”

By now, you have probably realized that this scenario is from the film *The Wizard of Oz*, based on the book *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, by L. Frank Baum. You may also recall what the Wizard offered Dorothy’s three companions: He gave the Tin Woodman a ticking heart, and to the Scarecrow he gave a diploma, which made him “officially” smart. As for the Cowardly Lion, he received only a tangible reminder of what was already inside him, ready to be appropriated. The Wizard might have said to the Cowardly Lion, “You’re stronger than you think.”

1

THINK SIMPLY THERE'S STRENGTH IN CLEARING YOUR HEAD

The intuitive mind is a sacred gift and the rational mind is a faithful servant. We have created a society that honors the servant and has forgotten the gift.

—ALBERT EINSTEIN

Josh Waitzkin caught his first glimpses of chess sets when he was just six years old. One day, he was walking with his mother through a park in Manhattan, heading for the monkey bars. When Josh spotted an elderly man sitting at one of the park's chess tables, he impulsively ran over to the gentleman and asked, "Wanna play?"

Josh's mom apologized and explained that Josh didn't know how to play chess. But the man welcomed little Josh to the table and began to set up the pieces. That's when something strange happened. "As we moved the pieces," Josh recounted as an adult, "I felt like I had done this before." A crowd soon gathered around the board, as the young boy seemed to know instinctually what to do. Josh's mother was confused and a little concerned about her son. Without warning, he seemed to move into another dimension, where the complexities of chess came easily.

Josh, it turned out, was a prodigy—gifted beyond belief. He returned again and again to the park to play chess with the locals. He was a phenomenon, a natural. The park guys leveraged his raw talent and taught Josh their aggressive, intuitive style of competition. And it paid off.

At age seven, Josh began his classical study of the game with his first formal teacher. From age nine on, he dominated the U.S. scholastic chess scene. He won the National Primary Championship, the National Junior High Championship, and while in the fifth grade, the National Elementary Championship. At the age of eleven, he played a match with World Champion Garry Kasparov in a simultaneous exhibition. At thirteen, Josh earned the title of National Master.¹

Under the tutelage of a strict and demanding teacher, Josh learned complex formulas and endless combinations of moves. He could outthink nearly any opponent. But somewhere along the line, his thinking became too complex. His head was filled with so many strategies that his brain began locking up.

God's providence is on the side of clear heads.

HENRY WARD BEECHER

The film *Searching for Bobby Fischer* depicts a particularly tense match with another prodigy. The two are playing alone, with cameras making their game visible to parents and trainers in another room.² As Josh's teacher watches, Josh struggles with his next, critical move. He sees the pieces on the board, but he can't see what to do next.

"It's there. See it, Josh," his teacher whispers to himself. Suddenly Josh's mind clears, and he sees the board empty of its pieces. He immediately knows his next move, and it's the winning one.

Seeing an *empty* board? How could that help him? As it turns out, Josh's teacher had to show his pupil the most important move he would make in becoming a champion: how to clear his head.

As part of the training process, he literally had to help Josh think more simply. Josh had to unlearn the patterns and formulations he had devised and developed. He had to learn how to think beyond the pieces on the board.

“You’re letting the pieces get in your way,” his teacher would say. “You’ve got to clear your mind,” he said on one occasion and then swept the pieces off the board with his arm. “Now make your next move.”

It was his way of helping Josh uncover his true strength. It’s what allowed Josh to recover his giftedness and power as a player. The clutter and complexity of too much information and too much thinking were holding Josh back. It was slowing him down. What Josh needed was to clear his head to regain his strength.

It may sound paradoxical, but it’s true. And the same principle applies to all of us. We can make life more complicated than it needs to be. We can cloud our minds with too much thinking, too much analyzing. And when we do, we lose the strength and clarity we need to make the next move.

That’s why I dedicate the first chapter of this book to helping you think more simply. I dedicate this chapter to the idea of clearing your head.

ARE YOU THINKING TOO MUCH?

“Life is deep and simple, and what our society gives us is shallow and complicated.” These are the words of the renowned Fred Rogers, better known as Mister Rogers, on the children’s television program *Mr. Rogers’ Neighborhood*. He uttered the words shortly before he passed away. What an insightful sentence. Life *is* deep and simple. And yet we so often make it more complicated than it needs to be—because we think too much.

Just about anything can trigger overthinking: Your boss makes a sarcastic comment; your spouse doesn’t call when you

expect it; a colleague seems short with you in an e-mail; a friend makes a flippant comment about your weight; you're nervous about a doctor's appointment. The list is endless. You ruminate on these situations, postulating possible explanations for other people's actions, picking apart scenarios, replaying the events in your head, and coming up with alternate endings—basically creating a “thought fog” in your brain.

You may think you're gaining valuable insight by analyzing every detail, but you're not. Overthinking is not your friend. It

We are dying from overthinking. We are slowly killing ourselves by thinking about everything. Think. Think. Think.

ANTHONY HOPKINS

makes your mind tense, keeps you stuck in your head, and immobilizes your motivations. So the question remains: Are you thinking too much?

If you're like most people, you probably are. We live in a self-analytical culture. Most of us complicate our existence on occasion because our minds are

working overtime. What are we busy thinking about? Take your pick: relationships, health, money, work, the future—the normal stuff. The stuff life is made of. That's why overthinking is so endemic.

Fold together a few of the mental tensions bombarding your brain—say a dozen or more of them in a single week—and you have a surefire recipe for a fuzzy head. What's the result? You literally become weaker. People sometimes joke about how it hurts to think, and there's actually an element of truth to that. Scientists from the University of Illinois have proof that overthinking makes us tired. It has to do with the fact that our brains need glucose to function, and when our thoughts are running in high gear, we use up glucose faster than we do when our brains aren't running at high speed.³ The result is mental fatigue and exhaustion.

Overthinking really does strain your brain. And that's not all. Overthinking dulls your focus. Your physical energy ebbs. You lose

perspective, and little problems can seem to be disasters. You feel overwhelmed or sometimes even out of control. These tensions paralyze your brain and cloud your mind. Worries, obsessions, and concerns overload your thinking, complicate your life, and weaken your efforts to take healthy strides forward.

Imagine this scenario: You're a young mother with a toddler and a baby who's teething. The washing machine quit working yesterday just as you got the first load in, but that's okay because the repairman is coming, and the piles of laundry on the floor will be gone by tonight. You're thinking you'll order carryout for dinner. That will save time and allow you to work on the laundry while the kids nap. *This will work*, you decide. *I just need to be flexible.*

Then the phone rings. It's your husband, who says he really needs you to work some magic on dinner tonight because he's bringing home a client from out of town (the client who made demeaning remarks to you the last time he visited, and you still haven't managed to put that behind you). At this point, your brain is shifting into high gear. *Okay, forget the laundry. I'll push the piles into the bedroom, close the door until tomorrow, and concentrate on dinner. Although it won't matter what I make. Having to play host to that guy again is going to ruin what's left of my day!*

You've no sooner pulled out your recipe file than you hear, "Mommy, something's wrong!" You drop the recipes and arrive in the living room to see the goldfish lying on their sides at the top of the water and your toddler struggling to put the lid back on the Elmer's glue bottle.

Any one of these "irritations" by itself would be just that—an irritation. But all together . . . How focused are you on dinner or the fish or the laundry now? Maybe all you can focus on is putting the kids to sleep as soon as possible and crawling under the covers yourself.

Be honest. Do you ever catch your mind working overtime?

Do you find yourself dwelling on past events and situations and overanalyzing them, replaying them, worrying about how you handled them? If so, you're not alone, and this chapter is going to help you regain the strength and clarity your cluttered mind has been stealing from you. First, we're going to take a closer look at the idea of mind fog.

HOW MIND FOG DEVELOPS

Legendary golfer Chi Chi Rodriguez has long lamented his poor putting ability. "If I could putt, you would've never heard of Arnold Palmer," he has been known to say. But Rodriguez wasn't always a poor putter. Early in his career he was a great putter. What happened?

"I never knew what I did putting," Rodriguez said. "I just knew that there was a hole, there was a ball, there was a putter, I was supposed to knock the ball in the hole. . . . A magazine paid me \$50 to figure out what I did putting, and I haven't putted good since."⁴

So what happened to Chi Chi's putting? Overthinking happened. Actually, it happened to his mind, and that's what threw his putting out of whack. We know this because a group of scientists studying the "paralysis of analysis" have shown that

Clear thinking requires courage rather than intelligence.

THOMAS S. SZASZ

thinking too much has an impact on a person's performance. Golfers provide a good example. Too much analysis makes their game worse. Neuroscientist Michael Anderson, of the University of St. Andrews in Scotland, says that the loss of performance in nearly any area

is the result of an effect called verbal overshadowing.⁵ This occurs when we activate the language centers of our brains and, in a sense, overload them when we need to be accessing other areas of our brains that give us new perspectives.⁶

That's the point of thinking simply. Clearing our minds puts an end to our stuckness. It loosens up our paralysis analysis and relaxes the tension in our heads. *When you clear your head—when you still your rational mind enough to make room for your intuitive mind—you're creating space for wisdom. You're not letting go of rational thoughts; you're just making sure that your intuition and personal perceptions aren't being pushed aside by excessive reasoning and overthinking.* Thinking simply opens the way for us to regain the strength and clarity that are lost through making life more complicated than it needs to be.

Now before you dismiss that last statement—and maybe the rest of the book—let me be clear: Life is hard, and challenges *are* complex. Your plate may be so full right now that there's no room for a fork. Maybe you're dealing with a rebellious teen, a parent's terminal illness, the foreclosure of your home, or even all three. Under no circumstances are we minimizing or dismissing the difficulties you face on a daily basis. My point isn't that life is easy but rather that when you analyze and re-analyze your problems in an attempt to solve them, you actually lose clarity instead of gain it and are unable to appropriate the resources you need in order to deal with life as you know it.

So if too much thinking gets in the way of finding solutions, where do we find the clarity we need? When Josh Waitzkin was stuck in a chess game, he found the solution when he imagined the chessboard cleared of its pieces. In the same way, a clear head makes it easier to see wisely.

The man who has understanding has everything.

JEWISH PROVERB

THE POWER OF A CLEAR HEAD

On a summer Saturday afternoon, Gary Klein, a cognitive psychologist, sat in a fire station in Cleveland, Ohio, waiting for the

alarm to sound. Klein explores how people think, and he believes that people dismiss too readily the power of gut instinct. Here's how one writer described a scenario from Klein's research:

Klein and his research team are attempting to crack a mystery that has intrigued psychologists for decades: How do people who work in unpredictable situations make life-and-death decisions? And how do they do it so well? According to decision-making models, they should fail more often than they succeed. There is too much uncertainty and too little time for them to make good choices. Yet again and again, they do the right thing. Klein wants to know why.

At 3:21 PM, the alarm goes off. Klein, an assistant, and an emergency-rescue crew scramble aboard an EMS truck. Three minutes later, they pull up to a house in a suburban neighborhood. A man is lying facedown on the front lawn. Blood is pooling all around him. He slipped on a ladder and pushed his arm through a plate-glass window, slicing an artery. The head of the rescue team—Klein calls him “Lieutenant M”—quickly estimates that the man has already lost two units of blood. If he loses two more, he'll die.

Even as he leaps from the truck, the lieutenant knows by judging the amount of blood on the ground that the man has ripped an artery. In an instant, he applies pressure to the man's arm. Emergency-medical procedure dictates that the victim should be checked for other injuries before he is moved. But there isn't time. The lieutenant orders his crew members to get the man into the truck. As the vehicle races to the hospital, a crew member puts inflatable pants on the victim to stabilize his blood pressure. This marks another real-time judgment call: Had they put the pants

on the victim before moving him, the crew would have lost precious seconds.

The ambulance pulls up to the hospital's ER. Klein looks at his watch: It's 3:31 PM. In a matter of minutes, the lieutenant made several critical decisions that ultimately saved the man's life. But he ignored the conventional rules of decision making. He didn't ponder the best course of action or weigh his options. He didn't rely on deductive thinking or on an analysis of probabilities. How did he know what to do? When Klein asked him, the lieutenant shrugged and said that he simply drew on his experience.⁷

After more than two decades of studying cases like this, Klein had concluded that the lieutenant harnessed his inherent intuition. His instinctual perceptions allowed him to cut through the complexities of time pressure, high stakes, personal responsibilities, and shifting conditions. He wasn't thinking through procedures, and he certainly wasn't swayed by emotions; he was working with a clear head and going with his gut. In Klein's words, the lieutenant's intuition infused his work with power.⁸

DO YOU HAVE THE SACRED GIFT?

Intuition—that effortless, immediate, unreasoned sense of truth—has a strange reputation. Skilled decision makers know that they can depend on their intuition, but at the same time they may feel uncomfortable trusting a source of power that seems so unintended or maybe even ethereal.

When Klein asked the fire-fighting lieutenant how he knew just what to do when he saw the man with a torn artery lying in his front yard, he shrugged and said he didn't know. Intuition is like that. It's often inexplicable. In fact, experts say that intuition is recognizing things without knowing how we do the recognizing.

For curious reasons, we are drawn to certain cues and not others within our awareness. Although they seem to emerge from an obscure inner force, they actually begin with a perception of some-

God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.

REINHOLD NIEBUHR

thing outside—a facial expression, a tone of voice, a visual inconsistency so fleeting that we’re not even aware we noticed.⁹ But as a result, we somehow know what goals to pursue, what to expect, and how to respond.

Consider a Formula 1 driver who braked sharply when nearing a hairpin turn without knowing why—and as a result avoided hitting a pileup of cars on the track ahead, undoubtedly saving his life.

“The driver couldn’t explain why he felt he should stop, but the urge was much stronger than his desire to win the race,” explains Professor G. P. Hodgkinson of Leeds University. “The driver underwent forensic analysis by psychologists afterwards, where he was shown a video to mentally relive the event. In hindsight he realized that the crowd, which would have normally been cheering him on, wasn’t looking at him coming up to the bend but was looking the other way in a static, frozen way. That was the cue. He didn’t consciously process this, but he knew something was wrong and stopped in time.”¹⁰

According to Hodgkinson, intuition is the result of the way our brains store, process, and retrieve information on a subconscious level. In other words, our intuition taps into information that is underneath our conscious awareness. When we overthink, we prevent our intuitive minds from doing their work.

By the way, you don’t have to drive race cars to experience this phenomenon. Try asking a gourmet cook how she knows to do things that aren’t in the recipe or how she can cook a fantastic dish

without a recipe at all. She can't explain it. Try asking people who have an intuition about knowing they've met the person they are going to marry when it's been only a few days. They will tell you they "just know" and nothing more. It's what led philosopher Blaise Pascal to say, "The heart has reasons which reason does not know."

Some people think of intuition as an inborn trait that some people get and others don't. But scientists disagree. They don't see just some people as being blessed with intuition. They say all of us hold an intuitive capacity. They say intuition grows within *all* of us. And all of us can access this part of ourselves if we learn to clear our minds.

Those who say they lack intuition are essentially paralyzed, because they are relying exclusively on their rational minds. Psychologist Antoine Bechara, at the University of Southern California, studied brain-damaged patients who could not form emotional intuitions when making a decision. They were left to decide through purely deliberate reasoning. "They ended up doing such a complicated analysis, factoring everything in, that it could take them hours to decide between two kinds of cereal," Bechara says.¹¹

Let's face it: We need to access our intuitive minds if we are to move forward in our lives. This "sacred gift," as Albert Einstein called it, is a major source of strength. So how do we access that gift?

It is in lonely solitude that God delivers his best thoughts, and the mind needs to be still and quiet to receive them.

CHARLES R. SWINDOLL

LISTENING TO THAT STILL, SMALL VOICE

When Albert Einstein labeled the intuitive mind a sacred gift, he was commenting on its spiritual implications. To ignore the spiritual profundity of the insightful whispers we hear in our intuitive minds is to miss out on their potential power.

But is Einstein right? Could it be that divine guidance actually comes to us through our intuitive minds? Could those unreasoned moments really be heavenly whispers?

Here's what science tells us: If God is on our minds, if we think about relating to God over time, our brains make some surprising

One of the highest and noblest functions of man's mind is to listen to God, and so to read his mind, and think his thoughts after him.

JOHN R. W. STOTT

changes. Literally. Neural functioning actually begins to alter. It turns out that being "transformed by the renewing of your mind" is more than metaphorical.¹² Neurological renewal occurs when we focus on God: "Different circuits become activated, while others become deactivated. New dendrites are formed, new synaptic connections are made, and

the brain becomes more sensitive to subtle realms of experience."¹³

That's right. The more we relate to God, the more our brains become attuned to hearing that "still, small voice."

But here's the hitch: You have to have a clear head if you want to hear clearly from God's Spirit. That is, you have to relax the tension around your overthinking in order to make room for your intuition. The word *intuition* comes from the Latin word *intueri*, which is roughly translated as "to contemplate." So your intuition stems from what you are considering, what you are attuned to. If you want to hear from God, you've got to be attuned to his Spirit. When you are, you can become sensitive to the sacred gift of God's whispers.

If you're not attuned to God, you miss out on the sacred gift. John, the author of several biblical writings, puts it bluntly: "He who belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God."¹⁴ It's echoed many times throughout the pages of the Bible: "The person who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with him."¹⁵

The bottom line is this: You can derive amazing power and strength in your life when God speaks to you through your intuitive mind. But the complexities of your rational mind—with all its worries, obsessions, and fears—often keep your intuitive mind shut down. God wants to speak to you through your mind, but you've got to clear your head to hear his sacred whispers.

IF THE DEVIL IS IN THE DETAILS, GOD IS IN THE BIG PICTURE

When Gary Klein was conducting his research at the Cleveland fire station, he noticed that when the most experienced commanders confronted a fire, the biggest question they had to deal with wasn't, What do I do? but, What's going on? In other words, they looked at the big picture. That's what their experience buys them. They aren't hurriedly wondering what procedure to follow or what technique to use; they have their wits about them as they survey the scene. They are contemplating, within an instant, what is happening so that their actions come from understanding. In a word, they are approaching the scene with wisdom.

It's the same for those of us who seek God. We don't have to scuttle through life wondering what to do next. We are aware of God's ways, and our attunement, our focus on God, guides our actions. We ask ourselves, *What's going on with God here?*

Too often, in an attempt to follow God, we get hung up on *doing* godly things: attending church, reading the Bible, giving money, volunteering our time, and all the rest. But we don't hear God's Spirit speaking into our minds because our minds are too cluttered. We're so busy *doing* that we don't take time to *be*. And then, when we are finally still long enough to contemplate God, we wonder why we're not more clearly aware of God's speaking.¹⁶

But if we're honest, we *do* know why. A recent survey of more than twenty thousand Christians between the ages of fifteen and

eighty-eight found that busyness is the greatest challenge we face in attuning to God. Sixty percent say that it's "often" or "always" true that "the busyness of life gets in the way of developing my relationship with God." And when pastors respond to that question, the result bumps up to 65 percent.¹⁷

So what can we do? How can we calm the chaos and complexity in our hurried heads? The answer is actually quite simple. It's found in this short sentence: "Be still, and know that I am God!"¹⁸

I can almost hear you asking, "How in the world can I be still when life is so fast?" That's a fair question. God does not expect us to be contemplative monks in order to hear his inner voice. He merely asks that we be attuned to his presence—even in the calamity and chaos of our lives. Being still does not necessarily mean retreating to a quiet place. It means quieting our minds, even in the midst of chaos, by not trying to figure everything out. It means not striving so hard. It means putting our minds at ease and letting God be God. It means seeing the big picture.

KNOWING WHEN TO TAKE OFF YOUR SHOES

"We may ignore, but we can nowhere evade, the presence of God. The world is crowded with Him. He walks everywhere incognito," wrote C. S. Lewis in *Letters to Malcolm*. Lewis, of course, did not mean that it's a game of trying to figure out where God is. Quite the contrary. God is everywhere, even in the most common of places, when we quiet our minds enough to notice. You see, the complexity of our rational minds—so often troubled with deadlines, worries, tasks, and drives—keeps us looking down. It forces us to focus, almost exclusively, on our own stories. It prevents us from looking up to see the bigger story. And the bigger story, the story of all stories, is that God is God.

For some reason, we have a tough time remembering that. Whenever we overthink our own stories, we narrow our personal

perspectives. Our vision shrinks. We focus on questions such as, What's happening to me? instead of asking, What's God doing here? Our narrow outlook limits what *could* be, and instead, we complicate the situation and busy ourselves with what *should* be. In short, we forget to be still and know that God is God.

"Earth's crammed with heaven, and every common bush
afire with God," said Elizabeth Barrett Browning. "But only he
who sees takes off his shoes; the rest sit round and pick black-
berries." Isn't it true? Don't you feel that you're sometimes missing
out on God's dramatic movement because you aren't sensitive to
the holy ground you're walking on? Oblivious to what God could
be doing, we miss the spectacular signs of his activity because we're
overly focused on the details and complications of our own lives.

Of course, it's not always easy to see and hear God in the
common places. Our myopic vision sees to that. And relaxing our
minds enough to let God be God is unquestionably challenging.
That's why even as a sincere God-follower you unknowingly end
up walking over holy ground on your way to pick blackberries,
never realizing what could have happened if you had taken off
your proverbial shoes.

The only thing that makes these efforts easier is wisdom.¹⁹ Of course,

that's a tall order. Thomas Carlyle said wisdom is the highest
achievement of humankind. So don't expect it to come overnight.
But you *can* expect it. Wisdom is the by-product of routinely,
over time, clearing your head. And the holy moments you experi-
ence with God are moments of wisdom. The more you experi-
ence, the more wisdom you acquire. Soon you'll have a history of
sacred moments with God, and you'll be proficient at hearing his
whispers.

Try this: When your mind is filled with the clutter of

**The difference between
worldliness and godliness
is a renewed mind.**

ERWIN W. LUTZER

overthinking—ask God for wisdom. It sounds too simple, I know. But I urge you to ask. In fact, ask boldly, without a second thought. And make it a habit. The invitation is as clear as day: “If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously.”²⁰

I can easily fall into the routine of coming home from lecturing at the university at the end of the day and unknowingly walk over “holy ground” in the playroom of our home where my two little boys are huddled around a project of building with their blocks. Why? Because I’m on my way to check my e-mail, never realizing what might have happened if I’d taken off my proverbial—or maybe literal—shoes and knelt down on the floor to connect with my kids. But if, before walking into our home’s front door, I whisper a clarifying prayer, asking God for wisdom, I can tell you that my head is almost sure to clear and I’m not about to miss out on the sacred moment on the floor with my two little boys.

When you clear your head—when you still your rational mind enough to make room for your intuitive mind—you’re creating space for God to give you wisdom. And as you acquire wisdom, you begin to integrate knowledge, experience, and deep understanding. You learn to tolerate the uncertainties of life as well as its ups and downs. You have an awareness of how things play out over time and of how God can help you make sense of them. Wise people generally share an optimism that keeps them moving forward, and they experience a certain amount of calm when facing difficult decisions. In other words, they see the big picture.

Consider Tami. She’s suffered more hardship than anyone should ever have to endure. Her father died when she was in her teens. Her mother suffered from debilitating depression. Tami’s marriage to a verbally abusive man ended after six years because he had an affair with another woman. Yet in spite of these jolts, Tami made choices to keep moving forward with her life by learning from her experiences. In fact, as a single mom, she learned to

leverage her past to help others and managed to earn a degree in counseling. Today, she's a wise and trusted counselor in Seattle, with a waiting list of clients who want to see her. Why? Because Tami, more than most, embodies a quiet confidence and can see the big picture.

The English word *wisdom* is derived from an old Anglo-Saxon word meaning “to see.” And in Greek, the word for wisdom means “clear.” Wisdom is what enables us to see the big picture. Wisdom is what enables us to “see” God.

So, wisdom is the bridge between your cluttered, harried mind and the deeper yearnings of your God-given spirit. Take off your shoes as you cross over that bridge, for you will be on holy ground.

GIVE PEACE A CHANCE

You may have heard of the political doctrine of achieving “peace through strength.” But for God-followers, it's the other way around: Strength comes through peace. God promises that when you are feeling your weakest, when you are broken and frail, he will keep you in “perfect peace” when your mind is focused on him. Why? Because, as the prophet Isaiah said, “The LORD GOD is the eternal Rock.”²¹ God is your strength. As I close this chapter on thinking simply, I leave you with a simple story about a king and a painting contest.

The king was building a new palace, and he wanted the main entrance hall to be decorated with a large work of art. The king envisioned his kingdom as a peaceful land, so whoever's painting best symbolized peace would win a large cash prize.

Over the next few months, hundreds of paintings arrived at

You will keep in perfect peace all who trust in you, all whose thoughts are fixed on you! Trust in the LORD always, for the LORD GOD is the eternal Rock.

ISAIAH 26:3-4

the palace. The king decided on the top two. Before announcing a winner, he hung both paintings in the palace for public viewing.

The first painting was of a majestic lake, so tranquil and still that the lush hills behind it were perfectly mirrored in its reflection. The sky was a brilliant blue with soft, puffy clouds floating above. Wildflowers bursting with color outlined the lake, and a family of deer calmly grazed in a far meadow. All who saw it felt peace and happiness.

The second painting portrayed a tall mountain cliff, rugged and strong. A few small trees grew out of the cracks of the face of the cliff, with gnarled roots clinging for life. A foamy waterfall angrily crashed down the cliff and into the misty abyss. Above, ominous clouds loomed, and in the distance, lightning flashed. Halfway up the cliff grew a small bush. In its branches, a bird sat in a nest, apparently warming her eggs.

After several weeks, the king declared the second painting the winner. Confused, the people asked the king to explain his decision. He explained that peace is not the absence of conflict but rather a state of mind, and that those who experience peace have clarity and calm even when turmoil surrounds them.

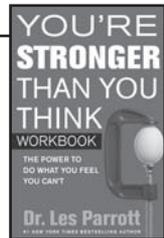
That's the point. You're stronger than you know because you can have peace of mind. That peace doesn't depend on the weather. It doesn't depend on anyone else. It doesn't depend on your income, your job, or the economy. It doesn't depend on everything going your way. It doesn't even depend on your health. Whatever your circumstances, you can make the way for a peace that transcends understanding—even in the midst of confusion and complexity—by clearing the proverbial chessboard of your mind to see how God wants to move in the big picture of your life.

FOR REFLECTION

1. Do you identify with the idea of sometimes overthinking your situation? When are you most prone to do that, and why?
2. Can you recall a time when you heard the still, small voice of God in the midst of your hurried life? If so, what were you doing, and what enabled you to hear it?
3. How do you feel about asking God for wisdom? Consider a specific time and place when you think you could do this. How might it help you clear your head?
4. What difference would it make in your life if you could experience deep peace in the midst of confusion and complication? In what area of your life would you like to experience that peace right now?

WORKBOOK EXERCISE 1

A Brief Note on the Workbook: If you are looking for a tool to help you personally apply what you are learning, the You're Stronger Than You Think Workbook contains a variety of exercises and self-tests for each chapter in this book. Having the workbook is not required. It is merely an option if you'd like to use it. The workbook is available separately at bookstores and online at www.LesandLeslie.com.



If you are using the workbook in conjunction with your reading, the first exercise will reveal what, in specific terms, tends to cloud your mind. It will help you pinpoint those situations in which you are most likely to overthink, and it will reveal what you can do, in personal terms, to curb this tendency. It will also help you locate the areas in your life where you will find the deepest benefits of tapping into your intuitive mind so that you can more clearly hear the sacred gift of God's whispers in your life.