

# THE SECRET BATTLE OF IDEAS ABOUT GOD

OVERCOMING THE OUTBREAK  
OF FIVE FATAL WORLDVIEWS

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## CHAPTER 1

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# INVISIBLE WARFARE

*The Hidden Forces That Shape Our Lives*

Deanna Williamson has said she never heard the explosion. She just saw paper floating through the air outside, like a ticker-tape parade.

A stockbroker from California, Deanna was in Manhattan attending a training conference for employees of the investment firm Morgan Stanley. As attendees gathered in the south tower of the World Trade Center, in a conference room on the sixty-first floor, Deanna slipped out to get a cup of coffee. That's when green paper fluttering down outside a window caught her attention.

Soon Deanna and her coworkers saw desks falling from upper stories of the other high-rise and balls of fire erupting. Later they saw people plummeting to their deaths from the north tower.

*This isn't happening.*

Several minutes passed as the Morgan Stanley employees stared in disbelief. At last, security guards rushed down the hallway and broke the spell, directing the group to the nearest exit. They

descended flight after flight of stairs. Deanna's anxiety grew when she started smelling smoke. *Is our building on fire too? Will we all die of suffocation before we reach the street?*

They were sixty floors from safety. With thousands of people being evacuated from the 110-story tower, progress was painfully slow. It was a New York pedestrian traffic jam on a relatively narrow stairwell. Shuffle. Wait. Repeat.

Deanna's thoughts turned to her husband, who just then was halfway around the world in Australia. She found herself longing for the family they hoped to have. And now it might never happen.

Suddenly the building lurched hard. It felt as though they were being shaken by a major earthquake, which Deanna had experienced in California. That's when she began talking to God.

*God, I want to thank you ...*

The lights went out, emergency lights went on, and searing heat engulfed the stairwell.

*... that this is happening to me and not to my family, my parents, my husband.*

As she prayed, her attention was drawn to a woman sitting on the stairs, crying. "I'm a single mom. I'll never see my baby again."

"It's okay," Deanna said, taking the woman's hand and pulling her up. "Let's get out of here."

As they descended seemingly endless flights of stairs, word came that their building had been hit by a jet. Unknowingly, the workers fleeing for their lives had become frontline troops in a secret battle. A catastrophic idea had been released in the world, and now it was spreading, virus-like, claiming victims without remorse.

This was the end, Deanna sensed. Then she realized she had left her purse—along with her ID card—in the conference room. *When they find my body, she realized, the searchers won't know who I am.*

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Rick Rescorla, Morgan Stanley's head of security, *had* heard the first explosion that came from the north tower. He knew instinctively it was the opening salvo of a new kind of war. A decorated military hero, Rick had spent the past few years studying ideas that were multiplying while remaining largely hidden. In many regions of the world, there was growing resentment toward the United States, he sensed, but Americans for the most part were oblivious to the danger.

Having heard the blast from the adjacent tower, Rick knew he needed to act. He picked up the phone and called the Port Authority office in Midtown Manhattan. He was told to stay calm and keep people in their offices. It's safer in the building, the official said. Slamming down the receiver, Rick pulled out his cell phone and dialed his best friend, Dan Hill, a war veteran like himself.

"You watching TV?"

"Yes," Dan said, instantly connecting the dots. *Rick was at the World Trade Center.*

Exploding in colorful language, Rick rumbled, "They told me not to evacuate. They said it's just Building One. I told them I'm getting my people out of here."<sup>1</sup>

Rick jabbed the "End" button and grabbed two pieces of equipment. A photo taken that day shows Rick as a heavyset man

holding a bullhorn in one hand and a walkie-talkie in the other, directing the evacuation of Morgan Stanley's World Trade Center employees.

The ideas that had shaped Rick's life came together that day. He became a hero, saving thousands of lives. The people he saved said he was singing the whole time. And in that seemingly random fact—that a hero acted quickly and with great foresight, while singing—we find a clue to how to win the battle that rages around us.

## WE'RE IN A SECRET BATTLE

We live in a time of war. There are no soldiers in this battle. There are no landing craft, no bombers flying in formation, no artillery emplacements. Yet attacks occur every minute of every day.

The battle we're in is a battle of ideas. Ideas are thoughts and suggestions about what we ought to do. Our ideas largely determine our understanding of life's meaning and guide us in the way we live. Everyone forms ideas about questions such as:

- **Am I loved?** If I were to disappear, would anyone miss me?
- **Why do I hurt?** Bad things have happened to me. Can I overcome them and find joy?
- **Does my life have meaning?** Is it possible for me to find direction in life?
- **Why can't we just get along?** What will it take for us to stop fighting and find harmony?

- **Is there any hope for the world?** So many things seem to be going wrong. Are we doomed?

The set of ideas that we form in answer to these questions is called a worldview. A worldview monitors the ideas we are exposed to and isolates the ones that appear to be destructive. But it's possible to have a worldview that is porous, letting through some of the most damaging ideas. Or a worldview might be skewed in some way, welcoming ideas bent on doing us harm.

The battle of ideas never lets up, so how can we remain standing against such an onslaught? We need a healthy worldview that accurately identifies the ideas that come at us from every direction. We catch ideas from church, from culture, from family, and from friends. Billboards, speeches, songs, video clips, memes, pictures, Facebook posts, and lines from movie dialogue all present us with fragments of ideas that assemble themselves in our minds. If we are to live whole, satisfying lives, we need to do two things. First, we have to catch good ideas, and second, we have to avoid catching bad ones.

Unfortunately, bad ideas are easy to catch because they share a distinguishing characteristic with one of the deadliest things in the physical world.

## **BAD IDEAS ARE LIKE VIRUSES**

The battles we face are more like germ warfare than like military warfare. That's because bad ideas are like viruses. A virus is genetic

material coated by protein. Genetic material is common and ordinarily not harmful. Proteins are necessary for the body to do its work. Separately they're harmless. When combined, however, they can be deadly.

Bad ideas can multiply out of control, like the spread of a virus that becomes a pandemic. And even though idea viruses cause mass destruction, the battle we face is a secret battle because it's hard to accurately identify bad ideas until after they have struck.<sup>2</sup>

Idea viruses hover around us like secret agents waiting to infiltrate. Is there anything we can do to prevent them from sickening our souls and ruining our lives? I believe there is. That's what *The Secret Battle of Ideas* is about. We'll learn how to identify the bad ideas that target us. We'll learn how to immunize ourselves with good ideas that assure us we are loved, enable us to be patient in suffering, help us find our callings, bring us into peaceful community with others, and replace despair with hope.

Yes, bad ideas are highly contagious. But they can be defeated if we keep one simple thing in mind.

## HOW BAD IDEAS ARE DEFEATED

The key to achieving victory in the battle of ideas is to develop a worldview we can affirm and embrace every day until it becomes a habit. As Aristotle said, habit is what brings virtue to completion.<sup>3</sup> We become the thoughts we habitually have chiseled into the granite of daily practice.



This is how Rick Rescorla became a hero. He cultivated a worldview of standing strong and never leaving anyone behind. “I don’t believe in being a soft man,” he said. “I believe in being a tough guy.”<sup>4</sup> This single idea formed a pattern that he consciously followed, whether as a unit commander in the Vietnam War or as head of security for a major investment firm.

Being tough is a virtue where Rick grew up in Cornwall, England, a rural county that, on a map, looks like a dragon’s tail jutting out into the Atlantic. Throngs of tourists visit the area each summer, and a few hardy ones straggle in to watch the winter waves batter the coast. But most Cornish people are there to work and work hard. They’re quarry workers, fishermen, and farmers—tough people who refuse to give in to difficulty.

Cornwallians express their worldview through songs such as this historic battle hymn:

Men of Cornwall, stop your dreaming;  
Can’t you see their spearpoints gleaming?  
See their warriors’ pennants streaming  
To this battlefield.

Men of Cornwall, stand ye steady;  
It cannot be ever said ye  
For the battle were not ready;  
Stand and never yield!<sup>5</sup>

Much of the Cornwallian worldview is wrapped up in this hymn. Bad people exist: stop pretending they don't. Get ready and never give in. Through song, Cornwallians express what is true about the world and give one another courage to face it.

Rick loved to sing songs such as this one. Often he would sneak a beer to a lonely blind resident at a nursing home, wrapping his arm around the frail man and belting out Cornish songs until tears streamed down both their faces. Rick's worldview told him that tough guys don't leave anyone behind.

Rick's valor saved many lives in Vietnam. When death seemed certain at Ia Drang, a horrifying military engagement later recounted in the book *We Were Soldiers Once ... and Young*,<sup>6</sup> Rick sang battle hymns to his fellow warriors as they repulsed multiple enemy attacks. Later, those men described Rick as a hero, a label he rejected. "The real heroes are dead," he said simply.<sup>7</sup> Rick's worldview said that tough guys just do what's right; they don't need credit.

But although Rick did not consider himself a hero, he never stopped protecting those under his care. Ultimately, he rose to become vice president of security for Morgan Stanley. His office was on the forty-fourth floor of the south tower of the World Trade Center. Rick implemented strict safety procedures after the company refused his recommendation to relocate its headquarters. He conducted surprise evacuation drills, timing them with a stopwatch and confronting senior executives who griped about the interruptions.

So when Mohamed Atta steered a hijacked 767 into the ninety-third to ninety-ninth floors of the neighboring tower on September 11, 2001, the Morgan Stanley employees knew what to do. Floor wardens organized their areas. Stronger employees assisted the disabled. As they moved down a dark and smoky stairwell, Rick serenaded them, just as he had done to his troops in Vietnam. “Men of Cornwall, stand ye steady,” he sang through his bullhorn. “Stand and never yield!”

The events of 9/11 made Rick a hero. All but six of Morgan Stanley’s nearly twenty-seven hundred employees based in the World Trade Center complex survived, including Deanna Williamson. And though she doesn’t know for certain, Deanna believes that the woman she assisted in descending the stairway also made it.

Once his evacuees were safe, Rick called his wife, Susan. “If something should happen to me, I want you to know I’ve never been happier. You made my life.”<sup>8</sup> Those were the final words he spoke to her. Rick was last seen in the tower’s stairwell at the tenth floor, heading back *up* to rescue more people. A few minutes after he was spotted climbing the stairs, the skyscraper collapsed. Rick’s body was never recovered.

Journalist Michael Grunwald described Rick’s death as “one of those inspirational hero-tales that have sprouted like wildflowers from the Twin Towers rubble.”<sup>9</sup> But this telling misses a crucial part of the story. Rick’s heroism was a lifetime in the making. The ideas he had cultivated his whole life had formed into habit. Lifesaving action became a reflex.

Like Rick, we can develop a worldview that gives us something to live by—and something to live for. A worldview also helps us ward off bad ideas that make us miserable. It functions like an immune system for ideas. This is important because bad viruses can't be conquered with good viruses. There is no "good" cold that combats the virus that causes a bad cold. Preachers and politicians and philosophers can't live out our worldviews for us. It's time for each of us to step up.

## **FIVE DECLARATIONS OF FREEDOM IN THE SECRET BATTLE OF IDEAS ABOUT GOD**

Through decades of military service and security work, Rick had learned to spot threats. When the first jet struck the north tower, many at first assumed it was the tragic result of mechanical or navigational failure. But Rick knew better. His worldview was straightforward. America's enemies wanted to destroy the World Trade Center, and now they had done it. This was the new normal. As a tough guy, Rick was determined to help as many people as possible survive the attack.

My life revolves around boosting the power of good ideas and blunting the effects of bad ones. Through a program called the Summit, I help prepare people of all ages to strengthen their Christian worldview and become leaders. Once my students tune in to the world of ideas, they can see the way bad ideas fill their hearts and minds with wrong answers to life's biggest questions. In the end, most of them learn to trust what God has revealed

about himself, the world, and humanity. I have seen it change thousands of lives.

As a graduate of the Summit myself, and now as its CEO, I have lived in the world of ideas, receiving bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees from leading universities. In decades of reading, studying, and interacting with others, some of the ideas to which I have been exposed are true. Some are counterfeit. I have studied secularism, Marxism, postmodernism, new spirituality, and Islam, among other worldviews. I learned that some idea viruses are crafted in primitive training camps. Others are assembled on prestigious college campuses, in distinguished-looking legislative chambers, in libraries, or even in buildings covered with religious symbols.

Knowing a little about how viruses work has helped me prepare students to develop a simple set of good ideas based on what Jesus taught and deftly counter the attacks of bad ideas. Long experience shows me that our deepest heart questions revolve around love, hurt, meaning, peace, and hope. Here's a simple set of "declarations of freedom"—five truths that release us from the grip of idea viruses that intend to do us harm. These declarations help us get a proper view *of* the world and *for* the world and resist the bad ideas trying to penetrate our defenses:

- **I am loved.** Deep, unconditional love exists, and I can have it.
- **My suffering will be overcome.** Hurt will not win. Indeed, it already has lost.

- **I have an incredible calling.** My life has meaning. I bear God's image.
- **I am meant for community.** I can overcome conflict and live at peace with those around me.
- **There is hope for the world.** I am not doomed. What is right and just and true will win.

In *The Secret Battle of Ideas*, we'll see that these declarations of freedom are not just positive self-talk. They have deep roots in the teachings of Jesus and his culture. Nor are they theological platitudes. They're very practical and livable. That's the good news.

But the bad news is that these declarations are under attack. Bad ideas flood our minds and hearts every day, trying to convince us that love isn't real, that suffering is meaningless, that our lives have no purpose, that we are all alone, and that despair is our lot. Bad ideas are on the attack. We need a strong worldview to keep them at bay.

Keeping viruses at bay is what researchers do at places such as the United States Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases (USAMRIID; pronounced u-SAM-rid) at Fort Detrick, near Frederick, Maryland. It was there on November 17, 1989, that two researchers working in a biohazard lab peered into a microscope. They stared at what could have been the worst disaster to ever land on American soil.

Curious about why so many monkeys had been dying at a nearby medical-research facility, the researchers had ground up

one of the deceased primates' spleens and let it sit over the week. This Friday before Thanksgiving, they couldn't resist coming in for a look before their break.

They instantly regretted their choice.

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## CHAPTER 2

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# STOPPING BAD IDEAS

*Four Things to Do When You're on the Brink of the Apocalypse*

Researchers at USAMRIID study every imaginable infectious disease. They thought they had seen it all, but never had they encountered anything like this. Looking through a microscope, they saw monkey cells collapsing. Melting, almost.

The cause was a killer virus: nearly all the monkeys that were exposed to it died.<sup>1</sup> What worried the researchers even more was that the deadly virus had spread through the air. Monkeys had been isolated from one another in separate cages and still contracted the deadly disease.

What if humans were susceptible?<sup>2</sup> The two researchers looked at each other. The virus, known as Ebola, could represent an apocalypse. And it wasn't half a world away in some remote region. The caged monkeys were warehoused in an office park in Reston, Virginia. That's thirty minutes outside Washington, DC.

## BAD IDEAS CAN KILL YOU

Viruses can kill on a mass scale. Take the horrific Spanish flu outbreak, for example. In 1918 and 1919, it killed an estimated fifty million people worldwide.<sup>3</sup> “In one year, the average life expectancy in the United States dropped by 12 years.”<sup>4</sup> And today, because of air travel and continued mass movements of people, researchers worry that a similar outbreak might encircle the globe in days rather than years.<sup>5</sup> That’s what happened in 2009 when swine flu was detected in Mexico. Within a week, it had spread to the United Kingdom.<sup>6</sup>

Ideas spread even faster. Through social media, they can travel the world in nanoseconds. At this moment, every “ism” from every part of the world—from communism to terrorism to materialism—is recruiting followers right here, among people who have backgrounds and outward lifestyles very similar to our own.

Think modern medicine will save you from killer viruses? Think again. Scientists do their best, of course, but effective vaccines can take from four months to fifteen years to develop. By then, a deadly contagion might have claimed millions of victims.

The twentieth century shows that ideas can be just as deadly. During two world wars, earth’s most powerful nations slaughtered one another. Most of those killed were noncombatants: tens of millions of civilians shot, gassed, bombed, or killed by war-related starvation and disease.

Both of those wars began as wars of ideas. Looking back on World War II, we can see how Nazism in Germany, fascism in Italy,

and imperialism in Japan were ideas that led nations to terrorize and kill millions. But the Russian Communists, who seemed cooperative with the other Allied powers, also were maneuvering behind the scenes to overthrow entire governments, economic structures, and cultures. Somewhere between 80 million and 100 million people have been killed by Communist governments, making it the most brutal form of government ever devised by humanity.<sup>7</sup>

The world took its stand against Nazism, fascism, and Japanese imperialism, but communism's death toll was perhaps ten times greater than that of Nazi Germany.

Whereas Nazism, fascism, and imperialism were based on an exaggerated sense of national pride, Marxism was an intellectual movement. It was modernism's first truly complete worldview, carefully crafted in a library by the unkempt social misfit Karl Marx. It gave an account of everything from psychology and sociology to politics and economics. For sixty-nine years after the publication of the *Communist Manifesto* in 1848, communism reproduced in fertile minds. Its first major outbreak, the October Revolution in Russia in 1917, forever reshaped the world.

Marxism isn't the only worldview reproducing itself in millions of minds, reshaping the world. In addition to Marxism, we'll look at five other worldviews in the chapters that follow.

When faced with potentially catastrophic viral outbreaks, scientists have learned not to sit back and hope for the best. Rather, they take decisive action, using four specific steps to curb a virus's growing impact. Will these same four steps help us counteract the bad ideas that threaten humanity?

## HOW TO STOP VIRUSES BEFORE THEY SPREAD OUT OF CONTROL

Fortunately for the USAMRIID researchers—and for America—the Reston Ebola virus of 1989 turned out not to be fatal to humans. But the scientists knew that America had come frighteningly close to a deadly outbreak.

Some African countries have not been so fortunate. In 2014, a ruinous Ebola outbreak occurred in the desperately poor African nation of Guinea. A critical-care physician named Rob Fowler traveled to Guinea to offer his help, knowing this could be a death sentence. He arrived at the Kipe Hospital in Conakry, where doctors and nurses—the frontline defense against the Ebola virus—had been infected with the disease they were trying to fight.

Fowler saw few others receiving care at the hospital. “Where are the patients?” he asked.

“They ran away,” he was told.<sup>8</sup>

A rumor had spread that people were dying because doctors were killing them. Fearful and feverish, the patients had returned home. In doing this, they signed their own death warrants and those of their family members. Some 3,800 people in Guinea came down with Ebola. More than 2,500 of them died.<sup>9</sup>

Viral outbreaks are frustratingly hard to stop. Viruses aren’t alive and thus can’t really die. And viruses are everywhere, with new ones being discovered all the time.<sup>10</sup> Not only that but they’re also incredibly compact, undetectable except through the

use of advanced microscopes. Some viruses, such as polio, are so tiny that millions of them could fit inside the period at the end of this sentence.<sup>11</sup>

Viruses enter the body through small cuts as well as through the eyes, nose, and mouth. Once in a person's system, they take cells hostage and reproduce rapidly. When a person has the flu, his or her cells might have churned out 100 trillion virus copies.<sup>12</sup> Fortunately, when alerted to their presence, the immune system goes into action isolating infected cells. The sick person gets better in a few days.

Viruses such as Ebola, however, are more difficult for the body to deal with because they shut off this alarm system and reproduce themselves without being detected. By the time it bursts into the bloodstream, Ebola is almost impossible to stop. The body responds by storming in with all its immune-system weapons blazing in what is called a cytokine storm.<sup>13</sup> This seriously undermines the virus's work, but it also causes collateral damage. Blood vessels begin leaking. Clotting agents try to stem the leakage, but this only prevents blood from reaching vital organs. Blood pressure drops. The body goes into shock. Death looms.

Stopping viruses such as Ebola seems impossible, but it's not. Learning from Ebola's first outbreaks in Africa, in which most of the victims died, the medical community has dramatically increased the survival rate. Thousands died in the most recent outbreak, but millions more might have if scientists had not responded so decisively with four steps:

- First, scientists *identified* the virus's characteristics.
- Second, scientists *isolated* the virus's impact by tracing where it had been and who was at risk.
- Third, scientists *informed* people of how to stop the virus.
- Fourth, scientists *invested* in those who were sick by helping their bodies survive and recover.<sup>14</sup>

Let's look at how these four steps—identify, isolate, inform, and invest—can help us arrest the influence of bad ideas just as they help curb the effect of deadly viruses before they do irreversible harm to us and those we love.

## FOUR STEPS TO ARRESTING THE INFLUENCE OF BAD IDEAS

Thinking of bad ideas as viruses can help us see how ideas work. It also can help us stop bad ideas from attacking us and those we love. Let's see if the four steps that stop viruses can help stop bad ideas from doing their miserable work.

### STEP 1: IDENTIFY

Doctors can identify viruses by the symptoms they cause: aches and pains, fever, and so forth. Among Christians, for example, a terrible “virus” is striking the young. They are walking away from

their faith. One measure of the virus's reach is how many drop out of church. Up to 75 percent of students who were significantly involved in church in high school are no longer even attending church as twentysomethings, and only 35 percent return and attend regularly (defined as at least twice a month).<sup>15</sup> Many think higher education is the problem. It's not. Those who don't attend college after high school are even *more* likely than college-goers to curb their church attendance.<sup>16</sup>

What kinds of bad ideas produce such casualties? Having worked with hundreds of thousands of young adults, I've come to believe they fall prey to one of five worldviews:

- **Secularism. Life is about control.** We can use our intelligence to harness evolution and make life turn out the way we want. I'll call this worldview *secularism*, from a Latin word meaning "life span." Secularists don't ask what God wants or what history requires of us but instead what we think best serves us during our lifetimes.
- **Marxism. Life is about capital.** As we saw earlier, Karl Marx in the mid-1800s proposed that the working class's wretched condition was due to exploitation by the rich. Whereas the Bible directs believers to work hard and share with those in need, *Marxism* demands a forcible overthrow of all existing social

structures: government, the economy, religion, and family.<sup>17</sup>

- **Postmodernism. Life is about context.** According to this worldview, “capital-*T*” truth cannot be known to exist; there are only “lowercase-*t*” truths that we create for ourselves. We need to be “post”-modern, this worldview argues, investing our time uncovering the ways religious and scientific people try to trick us into thinking they’re right. This is *postmodernism*.
- **New spirituality. Life is about consciousness.** With new spirituality, at the core of reality is a higher consciousness, a force some people call “god.” Spirituality isn’t just *a* thing; it is the *only* thing. Whereas King David in Psalm 119:48 wrote about meditating on God’s words, new spirituality recommends spiritual practices that make people feel at one with the universe.<sup>18</sup>
- **Islam. Life is about conquering.** A sixth-century nomad named Muhammad claimed that an angel revealed humanity’s need to unite around sincere worship of one God: *Allah*, in Arabic. Considering itself to be the one true religion, Islam teaches that we all are born Muslim (“those who submit”). Disbelief must be conquered through *jihad*.



Each of these worldviews—secularism, Marxism, postmodernism, new spirituality, and Islam—says something about God, existence, right versus wrong, life, the soul, society, governance, law, money, and history.<sup>19</sup> But how do these five worldviews fare in answering our deep heart questions about love, healing, meaning, peace, and hope?

How each worldview tries to answer life's most profound questions is what we will explore in *The Secret Battle of Ideas*. We'll also look at a sixth worldview, which I'll describe in a moment. Because ideas form into worldviews, we always have clues to where they've been and where they're going, like a jet's vapor trail across the sky.

## STEP 2: ISOLATE

After identifying bad ideas, we have to look at how they spread so we can stop them. Airline agents sometimes ask a passenger, "Has anyone you don't know given you anything to carry aboard this aircraft?" I always say no, but it doesn't occur to me that I could in fact be hosting millions of lethal pathogens. We need to look at patterns of how symptoms break out, not just individual cases, because many people carrying viruses don't display symptoms themselves. They're not sick in any noticeable way, but they can make others sick with every touch.

The same is true of the ways bad ideas are spread. They hitch rides on someone or something that otherwise seems completely harmless. Just as viruses trick the body because they're coated with

proteins, something the body finds beneficial, bad ideas attempt to make themselves believable by coating lies in bits of truth. For example:

- “The physical world is all we can see; therefore, anything spiritual is merely a creation of the human imagination.”
- “Some rich people are greedy; therefore, we are justified in confiscating wealth.”
- “Often religious people lie; therefore, no religious message should be believed.”
- “Forces are at work beyond what we can see; therefore, God must be a force, not a person.”
- “People rebel against God; therefore, they should be forced to submit.”

Bad ideas masquerade as something good—or at least harmless. Otherwise, they wouldn’t spread. You probably wouldn’t be tricked by an idea that explicitly promotes fear, disappointment, despair, or defeat.

Because they give *some* truth but not the *whole* truth, bad ideas are like counterfeits. Once when I was traveling in a large city overseas, a man sidled up to me and asked, “Hey, would you like a real fake Rolex?” I don’t think he understood the nuance. A *real* fake is fake—*fake* fake is a double negative, which means it is real. Plainly, his watches were not real; they were just very cleverly constructed counterfeits.

Counterfeit worldviews look and sound like the real thing. Their labels say they are genuine. But when you buy them, you don't get what you pay for.

### STEP 3: INFORM

William McGuire, a psychology professor in the 1950s, specialized in showing people how to resist bad ideas. He suggested that you don't just tell people the truth; you also inform them about the lies that would stand against the truth. You give them a little of the disease so they can build an immunity to it. It's called inoculation. Inoculation seemed to work against deadly viruses such as polio and smallpox. McGuire thought it might also help people resist bad ideas.<sup>20</sup>

To test his theory, McGuire prepared arguments in favor of widely rejected claims such as "Brushing your teeth is bad for you." He organized participants into groups. Members of the groups had the benefit of varying levels of preparation, from none at all to a complex mix of exposure, counterargument, and preparation to refute claims that would be made.<sup>21</sup>

As you might expect, better-prepared participants were less likely to be caught off guard. But one disturbing finding emerged: just reinforcing what people already knew seemed to make them *more* susceptible to bad ideas.

How can it be that reinforcing a person's preexisting opposition to a foreign idea is worse than doing nothing? Let's say that all your life you'd been told the story of Noah's ark. In Sunday school you

even colored an ark with crayons as you sang about animals going in two by two. But then you got to college and found your professors proposing foreign ideas about Noah's ark. "There is no evidence of a global flood," one might have said. "Can you imagine a God so heartless as to let innocent people drown?" another might have asked. Just by their skepticism you might have concluded that intelligent people see the story of Noah's ark as a crazy myth that only ancient people, who did not know any better, believed. If no one had ever prepared you to respond to such points but just told the Noah story over and over again, you might begin seeing your Sunday school teacher as holding childish beliefs that should be rejected.

The point is that we can't just pretend bad ideas don't exist and hope no one will believe them. It seems counterintuitive, but with so many bad ideas threatening to infect us, focusing on only what we know to be true doesn't build up the immunity we need. Even the strongest of us is vulnerable.

## STEP 4: INVEST

The final thing you can do to stop bad ideas is help people survive once they've been attacked. With Ebola, doctors treat patients through medication to combat infection and with massive doses of fluids and electrolytes to keep the body from going into shock.<sup>22</sup> Prompt intervention buys time for the body to fight for itself, increasing the chance of survival.

It's true with idea viruses too. You can't "uninfect" someone. But you can help him fight it off himself by saying things such as

“Would you be willing to tell me what you’re thinking?”

“I just want you to know I love you and am cheering for you.”

“Have you considered ...?”

“May I share something I’ve learned that has helped me a lot?”

Love. Encourage. Administer truth in doses appropriate to what the person can handle.

For the remainder of this book, we’ll *identify* and *isolate* how the five counterfeit worldviews attempt to answer deep heart questions such as Am I loved? Why do I hurt? Does my life have purpose? Why can’t we all get along? and Is there hope for the world? Then with each question, we’ll examine how a sixth worldview *informs* and *invests* in humanity to create health and wholeness.

## A SIXTH WORLDVIEW THAT PROVIDES THE CURE

The sixth worldview we’ll look at is the Christian worldview. It says that life is about Jesus Christ. This isn’t a religious claim; it’s about the simple premise that Jesus answers life’s toughest questions when other worldviews leave us unfulfilled.

According to the Christian worldview, the other five worldviews—secularism, Marxism, postmodernism, new spirituality, and Islam—offer interesting insights. However, the battle among competing worldviews is not like a sports league, in which theoretically

evenly matched teams compete for the championship. Rather, says the Christian worldview, there is *a* way, *a* truth, and *a* path to the good life. As respected theologian and Anglican priest John Stott said, “Christ is the centre of Christianity; all else is circumference.”<sup>23</sup>

Jesus claimed to be the way, truth, and life (see John 14:6). Often this has been understood as trusting Jesus to save us from hell. In this book, though, we’ll consider the possibility that Jesus doesn’t just offer the true way to avoid death; he offers a way to think as he thinks and feel what he feels about finding love, healing hurt, discovering meaning, pursuing peace, and living with hope.

The first of life’s big questions that we’ll explore is this: Am I really loved for who I am and not just what people want from me? As we search for love, idea viruses wait in the wings, promising love but delivering only selfishness, abuse, and even hate. Our need for love can make us susceptible to just about anything. As we will see in the next chapter, no one knows this more than those who recruit for the world’s worst terrorist organization.

# NOTES

## CHAPTER 1: INVISIBLE WARFARE

1. Michael Grunwald, “A Tower of Courage,” *Washington Post*, October 28, 2001, [www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/2001/10/28/a-tower-of-courage/c53e8244-3754-440f-84f8-51f841aff6c8/?utm\\_term=.87a8eb84810a](http://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/2001/10/28/a-tower-of-courage/c53e8244-3754-440f-84f8-51f841aff6c8/?utm_term=.87a8eb84810a).
2. Atheist author Richard Dawkins has written extensively about what he calls “mind viruses,” a metaphor that is closely related to his concept of the meme, a word he coined in his book *The Selfish Gene* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976, 2016). For more on these concepts, see Mark Jordan, “What’s in a Meme?,” Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason & Science, February 4, 2014, <https://richarddawkins.net/2014/02/whats-in-a-meme/>.
3. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. C. D. C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2014), 21.
4. Rick Rescorla, “Lt. Rick Rescorla, B Company, 2nd Battalion, 7th Calvary Air Mobile,” YouTube video, 8:02, “The Voice of the Prophet” interview on July 28, 1998, posted by “CVL23USSPRINCETON,” November 20, 2011, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=vGXjgMLQVs](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vGXjgMLQVs).
5. James B. Stewart, “The Real Heroes Are Dead: A Love Story,” *New Yorker*, February 11, 2002, [www.newyorker.com/magazine/2002/02/11/the-real-heroes-are-dead](http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2002/02/11/the-real-heroes-are-dead).
6. H. G. Moore and Joseph L. Galloway, *We Were Soldiers Once ... and Young: We Were Soldiers Once ... and Young: Ia Drang—The Battle That Changed the War in Vietnam* (New York: Presidio, 2004), 201.
7. Stewart, “Real Heroes.”
8. Stewart, “Real Heroes.”

9. Grunwald, “Tower of Courage.”

## CHAPTER 2: STOPPING BAD IDEAS

1. Ebola-Zaire is named after the Ebola River in the country that was called Zaire until a 1997 coup overthrew its dictator, Mobutu Sese Seko. The country is now named the Democratic Republic of Congo. The Ebola-Zaire virus killed nine out of ten of those infected during a 1976 outbreak.
2. Since 1940, researchers had identified nearly 250 viruses that had leaped from animals to humans; see Alok Jha, “A Deadly Disease Could Travel at Jet Speed around the World. How Do We Stop It in Time?,” *The Guardian*, November 12, 2013, [www.theguardian.com/science/2013/nov/12/deadly-disease-modern-global-epidemic](http://www.theguardian.com/science/2013/nov/12/deadly-disease-modern-global-epidemic). For example, the mosquito-borne Zika virus jumped from rhesus monkeys to humans; see Edward B. Hayes, “Zika Virus outside Africa,” *Emerging Infectious Diseases* 15, no. 9 (2009): 1347–50, [www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2819875/](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2819875/).
3. “The Deadly Virus: The Influenza Epidemic of 1918,” National Archives and Records Administration, [www.archives.gov/exhibits/influenza-epidemic/](http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/influenza-epidemic/).
4. “Deadly Virus.”
5. Richard Preston, “Crisis in the Hot Zone,” *New Yorker*, October 26, 1992, 62.
6. “Outbreak of Swine-Origin Influenza A (H1N1) Virus Infection—Mexico, March–April 2009,” *MMWR*, April 30, 2009, [www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm58d0430a2.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm58d0430a2.htm); Daniel Nasaw et al., “Europeans Urged to Avoid Mexico and US As Swine Flu Death Toll Rises,” *The Guardian*, April 27, 2009, [www.theguardian.com/world/2009/apr/27/swine-flu-mexico](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/apr/27/swine-flu-mexico).
7. R. J. Rummel demonstrated that more human beings in the twentieth century died at the hands of their governments committed to Marxist or fascist ideology than in all previous centuries combined. See *Death by Government* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1994).
8. Rob Fowler, “Fighting Ebola from Day One,” World Health Organization, January 2015, [www.who.int/features/2015/ebola-interview-fowler/en/](http://www.who.int/features/2015/ebola-interview-fowler/en/).
9. “2014 Ebola Outbreak in West Africa: Case Counts,” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, April 13, 2016, [www.cdc.gov/vhf/ebola/outbreaks/2014-west-africa/case-counts.html](http://www.cdc.gov/vhf/ebola/outbreaks/2014-west-africa/case-counts.html).
10. Jha, “Deadly Disease.”



11. This analogy comes from Richard Preston's stunning article "Crisis in the Hot Zone" (*New Yorker*, October 26, 1992), which led to the writing of a bestselling book and introduced the world to the Ebola crisis back in 1992. Preston not only describes how viruses like the Marburg virus and Ebola work but also describes in simple language how viruses themselves operate.
12. "An Infinity of Viruses," National Geographic, "Phenomena," February 20, 2013, <http://phenomena.nationalgeographic.com/2013/02/20/an-infinity-of-viruses/>.
13. Michaelen Doucleff, "How Ebola Kills You: It's Not the Virus," NPR, August 26, 2014, [www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2014/08/26/342451672/how-ebola-kills-you-its-not-the-virus](http://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2014/08/26/342451672/how-ebola-kills-you-its-not-the-virus).
14. For the purposes of this book, I've taken the liberty to restate the way Dr. Fowler and other medical professionals talk about these four steps. Here are the four terms Fowler uses: epidemiology, contact tracing, social mobilization, and infection prevention and control; see Rob Fowler, "Fighting Ebola from Day One," World Health Organization, January 2015, [www.who.int/features/2015/ebola-interview-fowler/en/](http://www.who.int/features/2015/ebola-interview-fowler/en/).
15. Admittedly, clear statistics are hard to come by. Here are some sources you can check out. Christian Smith, in *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005) believes that what passes for Christianity among young adults who grew up in the church is often actually "moralistic therapeutic deism," a term that has come to describe the way young adults believe that if they are good, God will love them and give them what they want. Gary Railsback's research is more well grounded but older. He found that between 30 and 50 percent of young adults who claim to be born-again Christians as college freshmen claim not to be born-again Christians when they graduate; see "Faith Commitment of Born-Again Students at Secular and Evangelical Colleges," *Journal of Research on Christian Education* 15, no. 1 (2006): 39–60. In addition, Scott McConnell reported that 75 percent of students who were significantly involved in church in high school are no longer even attending church as twenty-somethings in "LifeWay Research Finds Reasons 18- to 22-Year-Olds Drop Out of Church," LifeWay Articles, [www.lifeway.com/Article/LifeWay-Research-finds-reasons-18-to-22-year-olds-drop-out-of-church](http://www.lifeway.com/Article/LifeWay-Research-finds-reasons-18-to-22-year-olds-drop-out-of-church).
16. Mark D. Regnerus and Jeremy E. Uecker, "How Corrosive Is College to Religious Faith and Practice?," Social Science Research Council, February 5, 2007, [http://religion.ssrc.org/reform/Regnerus\\_Uecker.pdf](http://religion.ssrc.org/reform/Regnerus_Uecker.pdf).

17. For biblical passages about working and sharing, see Psalm 112:9; Isaiah 58:7; 2 Corinthians 8:14; Ephesians 4:28; 1 Timothy 6:18; Hebrews 13:16; 1 Peter 4:9. As opposed to these passages, Marxism demands that wealth be redistributed by force and that private property be abolished.
18. There are many differences among religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, Shintoism, and Confucianism (and Western religions such as new-age thought, Wicca, neo-paganism, and scientology), so grouping them together seems a little unfair. But each view is pantheistic, which comes from two Greek words, *pan*, which means “all,” and *theos*, which means “god.” All is god. Everything that exists is one thing.
19. For a thorough, documented approach to these six worldviews, see Jeff Myers and David A. Noebel, *Understanding the Times: A Survey of Competing Worldviews* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2015).
20. See, for example, William J. McGuire and Demetrios Papageorgis, “The Relative Efficacy of Various Types of Prior Belief-Defense in Producing Immunity against Persuasion,” *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 62, (1961): 327–37
21. Em Griffin, *The Mind Changers: The Art of Christian Persuasion* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1976), 172–76.
22. Robert A. Fowler et al., “Caring for Critically Ill Patients with Ebola Virus Disease: Perspectives from West Africa,” *American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine* 190, no. 7 (October 2014): 733–37, [www.atsjournals.org/doi/pdf/10.1164/rccm.201408-1514CP](http://www.atsjournals.org/doi/pdf/10.1164/rccm.201408-1514CP); T. E. West and A. von Saint André-von Arnim, “Clinical Presentation and Management of Severe Ebola Virus Disease,” *Annals of the American Thoracic Society* 11, no. 9 (November 2014): 1341–50, [www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/25369317](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/25369317).
23. John R. W. Stott, *Basic Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1971), 21.